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Critical review papers

## Cruise tourism destinations: Practices, consequences and the road to sustainability

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## ABSTRACT

This narrative review article contributes to the discussion on destination sustainability by focusing on cruise tourism practices. Cruise tourism is a complex industry, particularly from a destination perspective. There have been many calls for cruise tourism to become more sustainable for destinations but little consensus about what this means, or how it could be achieved. The aim of this article is to review the literature on cruise tourism destinations and to unpack the ways in which sustainability issues are framed at destination level. We have reviewed 98 peer-reviewed empirical journal articles (2015–2022). The article shows how the research literature on cruise tourism and sustainability issues has evolved over 7 years, which aspects of sustainability are considered to be most important and/or problematic and what solutions are suggested to improve the sustainability of cruise tourism. We develop three critical avenues towards sustainable cruise destinations: 1) from specific outcomes to the interconnectedness of desired practices, 2) alternatives to the growth paradigm, and 3) governing for coexistence and the commons. These critical avenues are based on the discussion of what sustainability means for cruise destinations, and translates these into pathways of future research.

## 1. Introduction

Cruise tourism is often a double-edged phenomenon for local destinations (Papathanassis, 2023; Ren et al., 2021). On one hand, cruise ships bring large numbers of tourists to these destinations; thus, they are viewed as an attractive economic stimulus. On the other hand, cruise activities' negative externalities – e.g., water and air pollution, overcrowding and increased stress on local communities and ecosystems – have led to questions about cruise industry practices at destinations. Thus, the development of cruise tourism has been understood widely as posing serious challenges to cruise destinations' sustainability, even though the meaning of sustainability in relation to tourism remains very much contested (MacKenzie & Gannon, 2019). For example, the United Nations Environment Programme & World Trade Organisation (UNEP-WTO) 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' (UNEP-WTO, 2005, pp. 11–12). In practice, cruise tourism sustainability typically is considered in relation to social,

economic and environmental impacts (James et al., 2020).

Tourism destinations have been investigated for nearly five decades, and this research has accumulated a wealth of findings, themes and rationale. Examples include tourism as an economic driver for a region (Dana et al., 2014) or as a contributor to local residents' happiness (Wang et al., 2021). In this paper, we follow a holistic understanding of tourism destination as a physical and conceptual place and space where social, environmental and economic practices related to tourism are intertwined and in combination cocreate the destination's nature and characteristics. Thus, cultures, economies, communities' social life and nature are all embedded in a destination (Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011). A recent bibliometric analysis of destination review articles offers an understanding of the evolution of destination studies from 2000 to 2020 and concluded that some topics in these studies remain understudied and that valuable topics, e.g., sustainable or smart destinations, deserve more attention (Ivanka et al., 2023). With this narrative review article, we contribute to the discourse on destination sustainability by focusing on cruise tourism practices to examine cruise destinations' sustainability.

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As Papathanassis (2023) noted, much of the current media debate on cruise tourism ‘implicitly limits the scope of cruise tourism activity and accountability within the physical and organisational boundaries of cruise vessels’. However, cruise tourism sustainability is linked intrinsically to onshore activities and practices (Ren et al., 2021). Local cruise destinations are time-spaces where cruise vessels, their passengers, local people and businesses, and the natural environment intersect. A destination’s natural and cultural resources are the main reasons why cruise passengers disembark, and for vulnerable destinations, environmental management is crucial for business sustainability (Papathanassis, 2017). Ren et al. (2021) called for an emphasis on practices when researching opportunities and sustainability challenges that arise at cruise tourism destinations because this can help us engage with cruise tourism’s complexities and overcome overly simplified accounts of progress and despair of cruise tourism (Ren et al., 2021).

Cruise tourism at a local destination typically comprises three main types of practices: hosting; servicing and managing (Ren et al., 2021). *Hosting* involves practices in which the host community and cruise ship intersect. These practices often are aimed at professionalising accommodations for cruise ships locally to stand out as an attractive destination. Cruise and onshore experiences are intertwined for cruise passengers; therefore, Whyte et al. (2018) argued for coordinating on-board and onshore aspects of cruises, thereby viewing them as co-destinations. *Servicing* often is discussed in relation to providing cruise ships with services, e.g., logistics and supplies (Lasso & Dahles, 2018), and often is addressed as a value-creation possibility for the local community. For example, a port’s qualities are recognised as an important competitive advantage for the destination. *Managing* refers to local strategies for managing cruise tourism, addressing its direct economic value and determining how this can be achieved, assessed and measured (Chen et al., 2019; Domenech & Gutiérrez, 2020; Gouveia & Eusébio, 2019; Lopes & Dredge, 2018; Marksel et al., 2017; Pino & Tovar, 2019).

Cruise tourism destinations are extremely diverse, ranging from large cities (e.g., Barcelona, Venice) to tiny rural communities (e.g., many Arctic destinations), i.e., they face different issues in relation to sustainability. Furthermore, cruise tourism’s onshore impacts affect not only ports, but also other communities inland, e.g., those that are day tour destinations that cruise tourists visit (Esteve-Perez & Garcia-Sanchez, 2015). This article reviews the literature on cruise tourism destinations and unpacks how sustainability issues are framed at the destination level.

Prior literature on cruise tourism has created in-depth and complex destination knowledge from different perspectives, but lacks connections on a higher level of understanding destinations (Ivanka et al., 2023). A literature review can grasp the entirety of cruise tourism destination research and comprehensively survey the research field. We focussed on the practices that cruise tourism destinations have developed when receiving cruise guests, the issues they experience and the practices they have developed to mitigate cruise tourism visits’ negative effects. As such, this article contributes to the literature on cruise tourism and sustainability by providing a narrative review of recent research on cruise tourism, with an emphasis on practices in cruise communities. An increasing body of literature has investigated the sustainability of different aspects of cruise tourism at coastal destinations empirically. However, individual case studies typically examine a distinct set of aspects and elements. This narrative review aims to synthesise recent research findings to gain a more holistic picture of cruise tourism sustainability from the perspective of destinations. Therefore, we reviewed empirical studies on cruise tourism published between 2015 and 2022, with an emphasis on cruise tourism’s consequences at destinations and on how cruise tourism can be made more sustainable. The article demonstrates a) how the research literature on cruise tourism and sustainability issues has evolved over the past seven years, b) which aspects of sustainability are viewed as the most important and/or problematic, and c) what solutions are suggested to improve cruise

tourism sustainability.

Section 2 explains the methodology used to select and review the literature included in the review. Section 3 presents a synthesis of the literature, organised based on cruise tourism’s impacts on economic, social and environmental sustainability. It also discusses solutions to sustainability challenges that are proposed in the literature and identifies the main trends in the evolution of debates about sustainability and cruise destinations. Section 4 discusses the review’s main findings, and Section 5 lays out the main conclusions and proposes directions for future research.

## 2. Methodology

Our narrative review aimed to advance understanding of cruise tourism in coastal destinations, discuss practices that enhance cruise operations’ sustainability in coastal destinations and provide an outlook on future research directions. We employed qualitative analytical methods while focusing on a limited time frame and extant studies (Grant & Booth, 2009; Webster & Watson, 2002).

The review procedure comprised several steps (Ford et al., 2011): (1) a Boolean search with predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria; (2) selection of the empirical articles that are relevant for cruise practices at the destination and (3) an analysis of selected articles.

We applied systematic search methods using fixed inclusion/exclusion criteria. The research question and objective guided how studies were selected for inclusion in this review. Given that this paper focused on destinations that host cruise ships, it was decided to include only articles that focussed on cruises and their relation with the local community and economy, or cruise vessels and their passengers’ impacts on cruise destinations. We included only empirical studies (qualitative and quantitative) in our search, as we wanted to understand how sustainability has been studied empirically at cruise tourism destinations. Furthermore, we chose to include literature from the time frame between January 2015 and January 2022. These dates were chosen to set finite boundaries for the review, with the starting date of 2015 representing the adoption of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We limited inclusion to literature written in English, but had an open geographical scope, i.e., encompassing studies from different parts of the world.

During the first step, we conducted a scoping review in the Scopus database by using the following Boolean search, i.e., a keyword-searching syntax: ‘(TITLE-ABS-KEY (cruise AND ship) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (cruise AND tourism) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (destination) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (community) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (port) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (harbor) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (land)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, ‘ar’)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, ‘English’)) AND (EXCLUDE (SUBJAREA, ‘ENGI’) OR EXCLUDE (SUBJAREA, ‘MEDI’)) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2022) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2015)) AND (EXCLUDE (SUBJAREA, ‘ENER’)) February 24, 2022’.

The scoping search was first conducted in October 2020, then updated in January 2022, yielding 335 documents. During the first screening step, we decided which articles were relevant for our objective and research question. The first three authors screened the same 30 articles and coded them as 0 = not relevant, 1 = relevant and 2 = maybe relevant. The authors discussed their decisions and came to a consensus regarding the inclusion and exclusion criteria, dividing the remaining articles between each other. This screening process relied primarily on abstracts, supplemented by reviews of full articles if abstracts were ambiguous. During this manual screening, irrelevant articles were deselected, e.g., reviews and conceptual articles, or articles that did not address any sustainability dimensions and/or cruise tourism. During this process, we only selected articles published in the journals included in Norway’s register of approved publication channels list (Hkdir.no,

2022). After this screening process and internal reliability check, 98 articles were retained for further analysis.

Once studies were selected for inclusion, we started the process of data extraction, which can be described as ‘the process of capturing key characteristics of reviewed studies in structured and standardised form’ (Schmidt et al., 2020). Decisions about which data should be extracted from the empirical studies were guided by the review question outlined at the beginning of this paper (Popay et al., 2006). Ren et al. (2021) proposed emphasising relations between practices and the relations between opportunities and challenges that arise in cruise tourism communities. Therefore, we focussed on practices described in the literature as ways of dealing with opportunities and challenges faced at destinations. We created an Excel spreadsheet to manage the data extraction process and sort the data. The full spreadsheet comprises the predefined categories *purpose of the study, main theory, methods, geographical region, empirical setting, type of cruise tourism, subject of study, cruise practices, cruise problems, cruise advantages, type of sustainability addressed in the paper and ideas/suggestions/solutions offered by the paper*. The first three authors were involved in the data extraction process, and refinements to the data chosen for our database were made until a consensus was reached. In the next stage of our analysis, we conducted a qualitative synthesis of the extracted data. (Mair et al., 2016; Popay et al., 2006). This allowed for sharing, examining and comparing the data based on our predefined and emergent categories. Our abductive approach allowed for consistency, but multiple researchers might derive a slightly different conclusions. Therefore, we double-coded a selection of the articles and discussed our data extraction at regular meetings during the coding process. Based on the triple-bottom-line approach to sustainability, we categorised cruise tourism’s negative consequences on destinations into economic, social and environmental issues. These categories were translated into the next section’s structure. Our next step was to examine the relationships between the issues described in different studies and distil the practices developed at the destinations to deal with the problems. As a result, five bundles of practices were identified that can improve cruise tourism sustainability at destinations: empowering; controlling; balancing and mitigating; communicating and innovating.

Despite its advantages, the narrative literature review has some limitations connected to both the preparation stage (e.g., keyword selection), the actual search (e.g., limitations connected to the Scopus database) and analysis (e.g., grouping and categorising). Keyword selection is both language- and concept-sensitive. A more detailed search that unpacks all sustainability dimensions (economic, sociocultural and environmental) can result in a broader selection of articles. The database limitation is related to a lack of inclusion of other relevant studies, e.g., book chapters, scientific reports and conference papers (Olsen, 2020). Thus, our analysis was based entirely on scientific journal articles. The final limitation comes with the selection of the categories for qualitative analyses that the first three authors developed inductively. By applying internal reliability checks and discussions of the categories, we tried to overcome this limitation.

### 3. Findings

In the following section, we discuss the findings from our thematic analysis in three parts: 1) cruise tourism’s consequences on coastal destinations; 2) suggested solutions for sustainable cruise destinations and 3) the evolution of the debate on cruise destinations.

#### 3.1. Consequences from cruises on coastal destinations

**Economic:** Cruise tourism can contribute to regional economic development and generate income for supporting industries (Sun et al., 2019). Extant studies that have examined cruise development’s economic aspects usually point to local value creation in the form of tourists’ expenditures at the destination and the distribution of income

among local, national and international stakeholders.

Cruise passengers’ expenditures at destinations is an important source of income for the local population, businesses (Artal-Tur et al., 2020; Gargano & Grasso, 2016; James et al., 2020; Nikčević, 2019) and municipalities, providing different types of services (e.g., harbor facilities, transportation), experiences and products (Hung et al., 2019; Paananen & Minoia, 2019). Simultaneously, cruise income at the destination is sensitive to several factors, e.g., seasonality (Skrede & Tveteraas, 2019), a destination’s attributes (Ozturk & Gogtas, 2016), types of activities available at the destination and length of stay (Domenech & Gutiérrez, 2020).

The last factor has received significant attention in the literature, particularly its relation to passengers’ expenditures. Several studies have suggested that length of stay at the destination has a positive correlation with cruise passengers’ expenditure levels (Domenech & Gutiérrez, 2020). However, expenditure levels also depend on passengers’ socioeconomic characteristics (e.g., age, employment, country of origin) and satisfaction level (Gargano & Grasso, 2016).

Despite the aforementioned economic benefits that come with cruise development, cruise communities have cited cruise tourism costs as an economic problem, mainly that the cruise industry, particularly mass-excursionist tourism, does not benefit them sufficiently. Specifically, these local communities incur investment costs from developing harbor facilities (Huijbens, 2015) and have reported low return on investment and/or uneven cost burdens (McCarthy, 2018a). Another problem is cruise tourists’ lackluster expenditures at destinations (Domenech & Gutiérrez, 2020), reaping too few benefits for local communities. One reason for the lack of local value creation is the ‘all inclusive’ model of cruise tourism, combined with short periods at destinations (Gouveia & Eusébio, 2019). This leads to the problem of cruise tourists not patronising local providers of services, products and experiences enough, i.e., the community cannot profit from cruise tourism. Local value creation is challenged further by the uneven distribution of cruise tourists in time and space (Perea-Medina et al., 2019).

The literature also relates the management of cruise guests in time and space to satisfaction (Yin et al., 2020), as they have more time in a less-crowded destination. Another factor that affects guests’ satisfaction is the quality of the experiences on shore. More satisfied guests generate a solid reputation for the destination (Cetkovic et al., 2019). When the destination is attractive enough, and when cruise tourists have positive experiences, they will return to the destination or speak warmly about it to others (Larsen & Wolff, 2016). Thus, there has been an assumption that cruise tourism can contribute to growth in other types of tourism that might provide income for the destination in the future, but to deliver high-quality products and satisfy guests, local providers should be paid a decent wage. Pricing strategies from the cruise industry pressure local providers into offering low-quality experiences (Lopes & Dredge, 2018). Accepting lower prices can be linked to a fear of missing out on cruise guests, thereby reducing income that is vital for these marginalised tourism businesses’ survival. Thus, dependence on cruise tourism, and how this can affect local communities’ economic robustness, has been identified as another economic problem for cruise communities (Lasso & Dahles, 2018), particularly in rural, developing areas with few other economic opportunities to balance out the tourism industry.

**Social consequences.** The economic contribution is not necessarily the key benefit from cruise tourism, as development of vibrant communities, enrichment of local cultures and community vitality are viewed as important social contributions to destinations (Chen et al., 2019). In a study on perceptions of tourism impacts in the Norwegian Arctic, Chen et al. (2021) argued that in addition to the economic contribution, tourism offers several advantages, e.g., cultural proliferation, community vitality and personal enhancement. Another positive effect from hosting cruise passengers is that destinations are livelier, more dynamic and are exposed to different cultures, while contributing to social cohesion (McCaughy et al., 2018). Moreover, cruise development can

lead to development of new infrastructure, leisure facilities and other services that local communities can use (Gutberlet, 2019). For example, Lau and Yip's (2020) examination of port completeness indicated that more cruises may lead to port improvements that benefit the local community and play an important role in experiences at the destination.

However, cruise tourism's unwanted social effects and challenges for destination communities are well-documented as well, e.g., tourist bubbles, overcrowding, infrastructure congestion and loss of local charm and identity (Gutberlet, 2019). Tourist overcrowding at a destination is related to social responsibility (Sanz-Blas et al., 2019a,b) and is connected to spatial-geographical studies (De Cantis et al., 2016; Domenech & Gutiérrez, 2020). Overcrowding leads to other issues, e.g., bad tourism experiences, stress among residents (Jordan et al., 2015; Jordan & Vogt, 2017) and harbor inefficiencies (when disembarking) (Ros Chaos et al., 2018). Thus, a cruise destination community's local identity is jeopardised when a tourist bubble is created (Gutberlet, 2019).

*Environmental:* Lasso and Dahles (2018) examined a community's transformation through tourism development and argued that tourism has the potential to reduce local pressure on natural resources when it replaces traditional economic activities, e.g., mining or industrial production. However, less bad does not necessarily equal good, and several concepts are used to describe cruise tourism's negative effects on the environment, e.g., externalities, carrying capacity and resilience (Stewart et al., 2015).

Cruise activities' environmental impacts often are related to cruise ships' lack of waste or emission control (Paiano et al., 2020). Atmospheric emissions are amongst the most discussed environmental impacts from cruise activities, occurring when the cruise ship is waiting in the harbor, with direct negative effects on the local community's air quality (Mjelde et al., 2019; Murena et al., 2018; Ruiz-Guerra et al., 2019). Extant studies also have examined ship emissions at ports and at sea that affect water quality negatively (Simonsen et al., 2019). Unregulated water use also is viewed as a problem, particularly at arid or warm destinations (Ruiz-Guerra et al., 2019). Aside from air and water pollution, some studies have examined cruise visits' impacts on cruise communities' flora and fauna (Blundell & Pendleton, 2015; Jansen et al., 2015). Cruise ships' access to vulnerable ecosystems has been identified as a problem when they are at sea, as well as when docked (Nyseth & Viken, 2016), e.g., sailing through glacial fjords is a cruise practice that exerts negative effects on local marine ecosystems. Biological and ecological studies have revealed how cruise activities affect wildlife (e.g., seals). Many studies have focused on one aspect of such disturbances, for example behavioral change of seals, and the cruise industry's environmental footprint remains an underexamined topic. Cruise activities' environmental impacts also incur direct and indirect economic costs. When the environment is treated as an externality, a destination's unique environmental and natural attributes get lost, rendering the destination less interesting for tourism. It is in both the local community and cruise industry's interests to take care of the environment; therefore, collaboration among stakeholders to address environmental problems is essential (Van Bets et al., 2017).

### 3.2. Suggestions to improve sustainability at cruise destinations

Local cruise stakeholders describe a mix between powerlessness and hopefulness regarding cruise tourism (Kerswill & Mair, 2015). Hopefulness because cruise tourism can exert positive effects on marginalised communities that have few other possibilities for development. However, when the cruise industry overwhelms these destinations, presses prices and sets conditions for local development without local residents' participation, they are left feeling powerless. Strong discourse in the literature calls for addressing unwanted economic, social and environmental impacts on local communities from cruise tourism (Huijbens, 2015; Nyseth & Viken, 2016; Stewart et al., 2015) and for providing knowledge for policymakers on how to maximise benefits while

minimising negative impacts on local communities (McCarthy, 2018b). Below, we examine practices suggested in the literature as ways to approach cruise tourism's positive and/or negative effects on destination communities.

*Empowering* is examined in studies that focus on local public organisations' role in cruise development (Madsen et al., 2018; Nikčević, 2019). To benefit from cruise tourists, the local community needs to be involved in cruise tourism development (MacNeill & Wozniak, 2018). Such involvement can be practised in different ways. Pesce et al. (2018) suggested involving local communities by implementing a collective decision-making tool for selecting sites of interest for visitors so that wear and tear on the most popular attractions can be prevented. Furthermore, empowering the local community by promoting collective self-governance also has been mentioned as a way to deal with negative externalities from the cruise industry (Van Bets et al., 2017). Empowerment of communities also can be practised by facilitating knowledge exchange and learning, e.g., appointing a cruise tourism community liaison has been proposed as a way to offer practical assistance to cruise communities and establish a unified approach to resolve existing issues in marketing, personnel recruiting, information, training and service standards (McCaughy et al., 2018). Nyseth and Viken (2016) provided an example of knowledge exchange when discussing a network of cruise tourism actors' involvement in the environmental management of the Svalbard Archipelago.

Collaboration has been discussed in relation to governance, in which relationships between the community and port (McCarthy, 2018a), community and cruise industry (Thurau et al., 2015), and different community stakeholders are addressed, e.g., to develop cruise tourism, collaboration between local entrepreneurs is vital (Bardi et al., 2019).

Cetkovic et al. (2019) suggested promoting education in hospitality and tourism, including development of skills among local tourism and hospitality workers, to improve cruise tourism products' quality. Whyte (2018) proposed examining perceptions of cruises in terms of onshore experiences and destinations to find ways to both improve offerings and market destinations. Services related to the cruise ship are another important practice that has been debated in the literature, e.g., creating resilient supply chains and waste handling (e.g., (Hung et al., 2019; Rodrigue & Wang, 2022; Simonsen et al., 2019).

*Controlling* is another practice that has been discussed in the literature as a way to bring power back to the local community, e.g., by trying to influence cruise guests' practices in time and space (Shoval et al., 2020). Another suggestion was to monitor return on investment for cruise communities, in which destination managers and port authorities remain vigilant about how much value cruise tourism generates for their communities (Lopes & Dredge, 2018). McCarthy (2018a, 2018b) investigated how and to what extent a cruise community can maximise outcomes in relation to social and economic benefits, balanced against costs to local communities, via appropriate policy and practice. In these processes, ports play an important role as a determinant of cruise destinations' socioeconomic sustainability (da Luz et al., 2022), as they can function as brokers between the cruise industry and local communities, thereby making destinations more attractive by designing terminals and offering regional experiences (Santos et al., 2019). Another role of the port is to coordinate the supply chain of cruise companies, for which a well-functioning network of involved parties is required (Rodrigue & Wang, 2022). Furthermore, port state control has been proposed as a practice through which port state authorities inspect equipment, engines and hygiene conditions for crews and passengers of foreign vessels in its ports. Failed inspections can result in detention until problems are remedied. Standard regulations for cruise vessels, as well as publicly available information about all ship inspections, have been proposed as a governing tool for local authorities (Swanson et al., 2015). Collaborating practices between destinations and cruise industries, as well as between other relevant stakeholders, emphasise interdependencies and the ability to address impacts. The literature has suggested that destinations and the cruise industry itself can implement institutional



arrangements to mitigate impacts on the natural environment. Sun et al. (2019) argued that cruise lines and destinations should collaborate to invest in and safeguard existing resources used for shore excursions (see also (Gouveia & Eusebio, 2019). Collaboration is also important for managing cruise calls (James et al., 2020), in adaptive port planning (Eskafi et al., 2020), in destination service provision and for destination development (Dimitrovski et al., 2021). Furthermore, local and regional collaboration can help spread tourist flow from overcrowded places and create a joint identity for the region (Santos et al., 2019).

**Balancing and mitigating.** To ensure citizen well-being in coastal communities, studies have examined how social and natural environments must be safeguarded (Blundell & Pendleton, 2015; Tampakis et al., 2018). For example, the environment should be incorporated further within transnational cruise networks to avoid it being treated as an externality, which results in the loss of unique environmental attributes that attract cruise tourism (Van Bets et al., 2017). These types of studies have proposed technical solutions to cruise problems, e.g., Alternative Marine Power (AMP) or shore power, to reduce cruise ship emissions. However, to mitigate unwanted effects with technology, direct and indirect costs of hosting cruise ships must be measured and calculated (Jansen et al., 2015; Lester et al., 2016). For example, Garcia et al. (2020) proposed creating a water withdrawal indicator per passenger per night to establish a maximum freshwater volume that can serve as a resource efficiency indicator.

While technology has been proposed as the answer to environmental problems from cruise activity, logistics and management also have been proposed to address social issues such as overcrowding and uneven distribution of income from cruise tourism. For example, redistribution of cruise flow practices entails providing information about alternative tourism attractions, extending sightseeing time (Sun et al., 2019), reducing driving time (Gutberlet, 2019), expanding regionalisation in overcrowded cities (Navarro-Ruiz et al., 2020) and making changes in transport options (Casado-Díaz et al., 2021; Mangano & Ugolini, 2020). Local tourism authorities should develop cruise tourism crowd management strategies, while the cruise industry can contribute by considering cruise traffic in itinerary planning (Sanz-Blas et al., 2019a,b). Thus, overcrowding often is viewed as a quantitative logistics problem that can be managed with technology and mobility planning (Ros Chaos et al., 2018). Gutberlet (2019) described a supplementary practice that emphasises a need to 'slow down' the stay at the destination to experience local culture and nature. With this line of thinking, the use of bikes is suggested as a low-carbon transportation solution and as an integral part of the tourism experience (Bardi et al., 2019; Perea-Medina et al., 2019). Thus, the local community must have well-functioning institutions in place to minimise negative externalities and control cruise tourism growth (Nikčević, 2019). By implementing precautionary and 'polluter pays' principles, e.g., port fees and incentives (Mjelde et al., 2019; Nyseth & Viken, 2016; Ruiz-Guerra et al., 2019), emissions in ports can be mitigated, and the extra income can elicit social benefits. However, cruise vessels may reconsider their stops if such taxes and docking costs are increased (Fridriksson et al., 2020).

The cruise tourism literature addresses the distribution of cruise guests in time and space, as well as the time frame for onshore experiences (e.g., De Cantis et al., 2016; Navarro-Ruiz et al., 2020; Paananen & Minoia, 2019; Perea-Medina et al., 2019). Sanz-Blas et al. (2019a,b) discussed whether local tourism authorities should be responsible for distributing tourist flows at the destination, but also noted that the cruise industry also can help reduce overcrowding in ports of call by considering cruise traffic when planning itineraries. Another way to deal with overcrowding is regionalisation, i.e., expanding cruise tourism's impact from the destination to the region (Perea-Medina et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2019). Gutberlet (2019) and Chen et al. (2019) addressed the role of time in planning and organising cruises, arguing that slow, authentic tourism experiences add value to cruise tourism in local communities.

**Communicating:** Communication practices refer to the nature of the

communication channels and responsibility for information sharing and distribution in terms of destination, cruise and regional/national stakeholders. In the context of COVID-19 impacts on cruise businesses, Bruzzi and Benevolo (2022) argued that partnerships between destinations and the cruise industry can facilitate win-win territorial marketing strategies in which destinations create more spending opportunities for cruise tourists, while cruises can serve as showcases for destinations. Generally, communication campaigns and pre-cruise marketing based on such partnerships need to be developed (Domenech et al., 2020). Furthermore, knowledge about visitor profiles, various groups' motivating factors for taking cruises and their behaviour at destinations can help in formulating marketing strategies and improve destination management (Navarro-Ruiz et al., 2020; Papadopoulou, 2020; Shoval et al., 2020). For example, López-Marfil et al. (2021) suggested that ports of call also can develop advertising strategies for senior tourists, who also have more knowledge about information technologies and social media. At the destination, governments and destination companies should establish communication channels and secure honest and detailed communication, focusing on both positive and negative impacts from cruises (Kim et al., 2021). The communication channels also should be designed to provide information to cruise passengers about secondary and tertiary tourism attractions to redistribute tourism flows (Casado-Díaz et al., 2021).

Strategies to improve the experience at the destination, e.g., by making tourists familiar with the destination upon their arrival (Sanz-Blas et al., 2019a,b), can help increase value. Marketing, branding and an attractive destination can lead to cruise repeaters and intentions to revisit the port of call (Larsen & Wolff, 2016; Lemmetyinen et al., 2016; Ozturk & Gogtas, 2016; Toudert & Bringas-Rábago, 2016). An attractive local community and city are a prerequisite to attract more cruises and pay for local investments in infrastructure, e.g., a new terminal.

**Innovating:** Andrade et al. (2021) suggested five strategies for sustainable cruise tourism management that allows for a fruitful coexistence between inhabitants and visitors: 1) understanding cruise passenger behaviour and movements; 2) enhancing local identity and protecting cultural heritage; 3) regionalising the cruise business; 4) dispersing visitors into different areas of the destination and (5) increasing the port's value. Cruise destinations must innovate to implement these strategies, keep up with cruise industry demands and become more sustainable. This means continuously developing tourism offerings, integrated services, collaboration among actors responsible for cruise tourism development, promotional activities, level of professionalism, regulation of tourist offerings, endorsement of ethical principles by local firms and the local community as a whole, and preserving the local natural environment, cultural attractions and overall identity (Pino & Peluso, 2018). There is also a need to improve terminal services (Sun et al., 2019), coordinate tourism services, improve information about the destination and ensure tourism offerings' quality (Sanz-Blas et al., 2019a,b). Cetkovic et al. (2019) suggested that promoting education and skills development for local tourism workers is essential for upgrading service quality (see also Rosa-Jiménez et al., 2018). When high-quality offerings are cultivated, the destination should consider offering shore excursions to visiting cruise guests because excursions arranged by local tour operators are more satisfying than those that cruise operators provide (Buzova et al., 2019), and they ensure that more value is created for the local community (Lopes & Dredge, 2018). To relieve the pressure in time and space caused by receiving too many cruise visitors in a short period of time, measures oriented towards prolonging stays, providing more diversified excursions and increasing passenger satisfaction can reap economic and social benefits (Chen et al., 2019; Domenech & Gutiérrez, 2020; Pino & Tovar, 2019).

The practice of investing refers to developing, maintaining and restoring infrastructure, as well as increasing local resources in the community, e.g., innovation capabilities and training. Getting ready for cruise tourism requires making the destination more efficient and attractive to both cruise guests and inhabitants. Examples of practices

discussed in the literature include transportation practices, e.g., novel practices involving e-bikes or local transportation (Rosa-Jiménez et al., 2018), as well as managing capacity based on intangible assets, e.g., certification practices (Mangano & Ugolini, 2020).

### 3.3. The evolution of the debate on cruise destinations' sustainability

This review detected a shift in how sustainability is understood in cruise communities, from a technocratic and economic understanding to a more holistic one. Cruise tourism's economic effects long have been the central focus of research and policymaking, thereby representing the most important measure of cruise tourism activities' success or failure. Within this paradigm, suggestions for more sustainability are focussed on making the local community more attractive, increasing competitive advantage and trying to increase expenditures and satisfaction so that cruise guests return to the destination. There has been a strong emphasis on the use of marketing and management as tools to increase cruise tourism's economic benefits. Social sustainability often is addressed in quantitative studies of local populations' attitudes and perceptions towards cruise tourism. Environmental sustainability mainly is addressed in studies outside of the tourism field, focusing on water, air and noise pollution, as well as waste.

Recently, there has been a shift towards a wider, more inclusive understanding of sustainability in cruise tourism research. For example, Andrade et al. (2021) suggested that sustainability should cover every aspect of the local tourism industry, and that a holistic view that considers local identity, heritage and behaviour is crucial. McCarthy (2018a, 2018b) argued that for cruise tourism to be sustainable in a community, the advantages and disadvantages that follow should be distributed evenly by regionalising cruise business so that both positive and negative effects are dispersed more widely in time and space. Along this line of thinking, Dimitrovski et al. (2021) presented a holistic understanding of coastal, marine and cruise tourism sustainability, suggesting that communities need to strive towards a consensus among all stakeholders involved to decide what sustainability is. Collaboration is necessary to make the destination more competitive and attractive, decide on the direction of development and address social sustainability and acceptance of cruise practices. This has been referred to in the tourism literature as destination stewardship (Hartman, 2023). Another idea that has been evolving and gaining more momentum in the literature is that tourism destinations should be designed not only to meet tourists' demands and desires, but also to be places that accommodate local people and their practices – actors and activities that do not necessarily match with destination development, tourism activities and tourist behaviour (Hartman, 2023).

## 4. Discussion

Our review indicates that the discourse on sustainability and its dimensions is somewhat dynamic and dispersed in prior studies. Nevertheless, there has been a transition from a narrow, economic understanding of sustainability to a more holistic one that requires change in how destinations approach cruise tourism and the intertwined social, environmental and economic aspects of a sustainable destination. Building on the review's findings, we develop three critical avenues towards sustainable cruise destinations: 1) from specific outcomes to the interconnectedness of desired practices; 2) alternatives to the growth paradigm and 3) governing for coexistence and the commons. These critical avenues build on a discussion of the findings on what sustainability means for cruise destinations and translate these into pathways for future research.

### 4.1. Critical avenue 1: From specific outcomes to desired practices' interconnectedness

In understanding the issues of value creation and capture (e.g.,

social, environmental and economic value), cruise practices' local impacts and potential measurements for improved sustainability are important. However, understanding how these individual aspects are interconnected and inform each other requires a shift from a perspective of outcomes in the form of issues and measurements towards an emphasis on the interconnectedness of cruise practices and those affecting the cruise destination community's daily life, businesses and environment. For example, we need to know more about what practices are required to implement measurements and how they interact with other practices.

Most cruise tourism literature is based on studies of past and present cruise activities, so there has been a strong emphasis on past cruise practices, while destination stakeholders' perspectives and their views about the future of cruise tourism have received little attention. Simultaneously, sustainability often is understood as a process towards a vision for a better world (Ruggerio, 2021). Local dialogue about the kind of community that residents want to live in and leave to the next generation opens the possibility of positioning tourism activities as interventions that develop the capacities of places, communities and their guests to operate in harmony with interconnected socioecological systems (Bellato et al., 2022). Thus, sustainable development approaches in tourism that focus on doing no harm and mitigating negative effects should be taken a step further to regenerate local communities by practising (cruise) tourism.

Sustainable local cruise practices make optimal use of local resources, respect host destinations' sociocultural and ecological authenticity, and ensure that socioeconomic benefits accrue to local stakeholders. Lack of stakeholder involvement has been identified as a challenge in developing more sustainable local cruise practices (Wang et al., 2016). Long-term sustainability can be driven by communities, nongovernmental organisations and environmental groups; therefore, they should be included in the decision-making process (Font et al., 2016). Thus, tourism development encompasses the entire local community, not just stakeholders directly involved with tourism. Dimitrovski et al. (2021) and Papathanassis (2020) emphasised multi-stakeholder engagement's significance in the management of coastal and marine areas, and novel cruise tourism destinations to develop long-term economic, environmental and community health in the host destination. This means rethinking boundaries between practices at destinations by understanding interconnectedness instead of focusing on the different roles that stakeholders are assigned.

### 4.2. Critical avenue 2: Alternatives to growth paradigm

Balancing tourism's socioeconomic interests with the planet's finite ecological systems is a fundamental goal of sustainability (Boluk et al., 2019). The UN's SDGs have been criticised for their neoliberal and anthropocentric focus, allowing for little more than business as usual (Kline et al., 2022). How sustainability is addressed in the cruise tourism literature reflects neoliberalism's premise, and few studies have expressed concerns regarding cruise tourism development. Boluk et al. (2019) offered tools for critically thinking through SDGs' potential to help shape the cruise tourism industry to ensure more sustainable, equitable and just futures. The themes they propose are critical tourism scholarship, gender in the sustainable development agenda, engaging with indigenous perspectives and other paradigms, degrowth and the circular economy, governance and planning, and ethical consumption. Few of these themes can be found in the cruise tourism literature since the publication of the SDGs. Degrowth is an exception and is addressed in relation to overtourism.

Therefore, cruise tourism's underlying growth imperative reinforces negative socioecological impacts and should be discussed. Local communities should be aware of their dependencies on cruise tourism, and how they can be resilient to shocks such as economic crises and pandemics. Local communities' dependence can be addressed by viewing cruise tourism as just part of the community's tourism portfolio. As Cave

and Dredge (2020) have stated: Regenerative tourism needs diverse economic practice, and in relation to other industries and incomes for the local community. In the context of destination development, the focus needs to be shifted from solely economic aspects to include considerations of quality of life, social well-being and resilience. Sustainable development initiatives should avoid an exclusive emphasis on economic expansion that mature destinations have pursued in the past. Instead, the emphasis has shifted towards what makes local residents happy and investments in local infrastructure that can affect both residents and tourists' well-being and quality of life positively (Reinhold et al., 2023).

#### 4.3. Critical avenue 3: Governing for coexistence and the commons

Touristification has been recognised as a problem for local communities, and cruise tourism often has been spotlighted in the media as a negative phenomenon that local communities protest against. Therefore, local communities must deal with anti-tourism and anti-cruise sentiments in society, as well as identify what they want from cruise tourism development while maintaining their integrity. Ren et al. (2021) referred to this as staying with the trouble of cruise tourism. What are the protests about, and how can local communities find a balance between the ever-growing stream of tourists, negative sentiments and the possibilities that they bring? Unbalanced social and economic power amongst stakeholders in the cruise tourism industry has been recognised as a factor that inhibits development of sustainable cruise practices. In a post COVID-19 pandemic scenario for cruise tourism, stakeholder equality, various stakeholders' involvement, local community involvement, protection of the environment, balanced interests (cruise and land-based tourism), assessment of stakeholder attitudes towards cruises, persuasive communication, objective measurement of cost and benefits, and subjective measurement of perceptions are necessary for communities to co-exist with cruise tourism in a sustainable and resilient way (da Luz et al., 2022; Lasso & Dahles, 2018; Pivčević et al., 2018).

Along these lines, we call for a research approach of staying with the trouble, anchored in the ethics of care, in which cruise activities are viewed as intertwined with local stakeholders' fate. To do so, we advocate for research that embraces local stakeholders' voices and their individual perspectives on the local cruise phenomenon within the plural agency of governing the commons of cruise tourism. For example, extant research has focussed on collective practices to build sustainable cruise tourism – e.g., through co-existence or degrowth practices – and how these practices transition to individual activities. These studies have examined intertwined practices' complexity among individual stakeholders and collective practices in the cruise community. Furthermore, we call for research that engages and embraces the troubles of sustainable cruise tourism through rich understandings of the conventional practices that define cruise tourism in cruise communities. Finally, we encourage researchers to continue caring about cruise tourism in coastal destinations to create the knowledge needed to enable cruise communities to move towards a sustainable future. We support Bichler's (2021) call for more research on opportunities for local resident participation in destination development. Future research should enable residents to understand how their practices are intertwined with tourism development, to have ideas about the type of development that they desire in their communities, and to be able to participate in the design of cruise tourism destinations (Bichler, 2021).

Our three critical avenues have resulted from our methodological approach, our understanding of the cruise literature and the concept of sustainability. Thus, the critical avenues do not provide a complete research agenda, but instead are inspirations for future research that our findings suggest is critical for cultivating sustainable cruise destinations. Aside from possible incompleteness, our research also comes with limitations regarding subjectivity and pre-assumptions. Our subjectivity, formed by our knowledge and values, and pre-assumptions based on our past research and experiences inform how we understand and select

issues, including both negative and positive aspects regarding our understanding of sustainability. Similarly, this also applies to the suggested solutions for which we have coded. Simultaneously, this research is a collective effort by researchers from different disciplines, which adds more generalizability to our rather subjective approach to this thematic literature review and the proposed critical avenues.

## 5. Conclusion

This narrative review provides a way of understanding how practices in coastal communities have evolved around cruise tourism. Our thematic analysis of the literature on cruise tourism at local destinations indicates that sustainability's flexibility is included more often in the cruise research. We observe that research conducted between 2015 and 2022 addresses a distinct aspect of sustainability to a large extent, e.g., economic aspects or environmental challenges. More recent research increasingly addresses the complexities of sustainability dimensions' interrelatedness. The critical avenues presented here can help destinations advance on the path to sustainability, but tourism's impact ultimately depends on key stakeholders' willingness to collaborate to build a common envisioned future of sustainable and responsible cruise tourism, as well as concrete, long-term action plans and transparent and informed decision-making and governance. This requires reducing the power imbalance, which comes not only with benefits, but also costs for cruise operators. To improve the cruise industry's sustainability, operators need to invest in cleaner ways of sailing, work with codes of conduct for their passengers and address local destinations' needs. Moreover, national and international regulations should develop towards and enforce zero-pollution standards for the cruise industry. We hope that this paper can add to academic discourse on cruise tourism and spark research into the topic of sustainability issues at destinations that host cruise guests, as well as help develop practices that ensure a sustainable co-existence between local communities and the global cruise industry.

## Credit author statements

HHH, KW and JO: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, resources, validation, data-curation, analysis, writing initial draft, HHH, KW, JO and LJ: Writing – Review & Editing, HHH and KW: Funding acquisition, HHH: Project administration.

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