CBTS 2020

Sustainability: Does the consumer understand what this might be in tourism?

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Background of the Study

sustainable tourism well- researched concept worldwide

- term "sustainable tourism" is **frequently used** in research / studies / publications

- focus of research is mostly on the **supply side**

published empirical studies suppose **consumers' understanding**

- consumers have an implicit and common understanding of **what sustainable tourism** is

- therefore, researchers make use of the terms "**sustainable, sustainability**" in empirical studies or tourism marketers use them frequently for advertising / communication

https://www.phocuswire.com/Booking-Sustainable-Tourism

Guo, Y., Jiang, J., & Li, S. (2019). A Sustainable Tourism Policy Research Review. Sustainability, 11(11), 3187. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11113187

Niñerola, A., Sánchez-Rebull, M.-V., & Hernández-Lara, A.-B. (2019). Tourism Research on Sustainability: A Bibliometric Analysis. Sustainability, 11(5), 1377. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11051377

Bramwell, B., Higham, J., Lane, B., & Miller, G. (2017). Twenty-five years of sustainable tourism and the Journal of Sustainable Tourism: Looking back and moving forward. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 25(1), 1–9. doi:10.1080/09669582.2017.1251689

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Background of the Study

surprisingly, only few research papers were found covering the understanding of **sustainable tourism** from point of view of the consumer / traveller.

Methodological problem: to analyze the understanding of sustainable tourism most authors use **explanations of the term / items they derived as experts**

BUT: only François-Lecompte et al. (2011) used an **open question approach**. Even though the study presents a well justified typology, it did **not consider** the case that people have a very personal or just **no idea what sustainable tourism** is

López-Sánchez, Y., & Pulido-Fernández, J. I. (2016). In search of the pro-sustainable tourist: A segmentation based on the tourist "sustainable intelligence". *Tourism Management Perspectives*, *17*, 59–71. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2015.12.003

Russo, V., Re, A., Angelini, A., & Jabes, D. (2016). An Analysis and Comparison of Expectations and Perceptions on Sustainable Tourism among Italian and German Tourists. *Journal of Tourism and Leisure Studies*, *1*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.18848/2470-9336/CGP/v01i01/1-11

Wehrli, R., Lutzenberger, M., Stettler, J., Egli, H., & Pfister, D. (2012). Tourist's Understanding of Sustainable Tourism An analysis in eight countries. *Journal on Business Review*, *2*(2). https://doi.org/10.5176/2010-4804_2.2.206

François-Lecompte, A., & Prim-Allaz, I. (2011). Les français et le tourisme durable. Étude des représentations. *French people and sustainable tourism: a study of their representations.*, *64*, 47–58.

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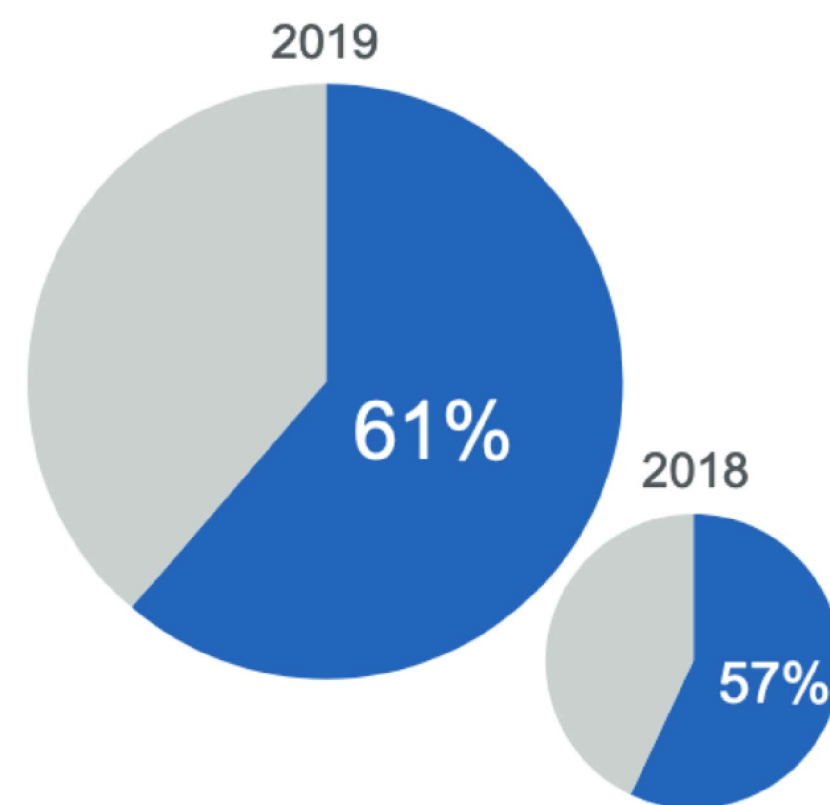# Background of the Study

In general

most empirical research about sustainable tourism (supply side or consumers) uses in surveys either the terms sustainability / sustainable themselves or conceptualizes the term by items and scales derived from expert perspective "**what sustainability should be for consumers**"
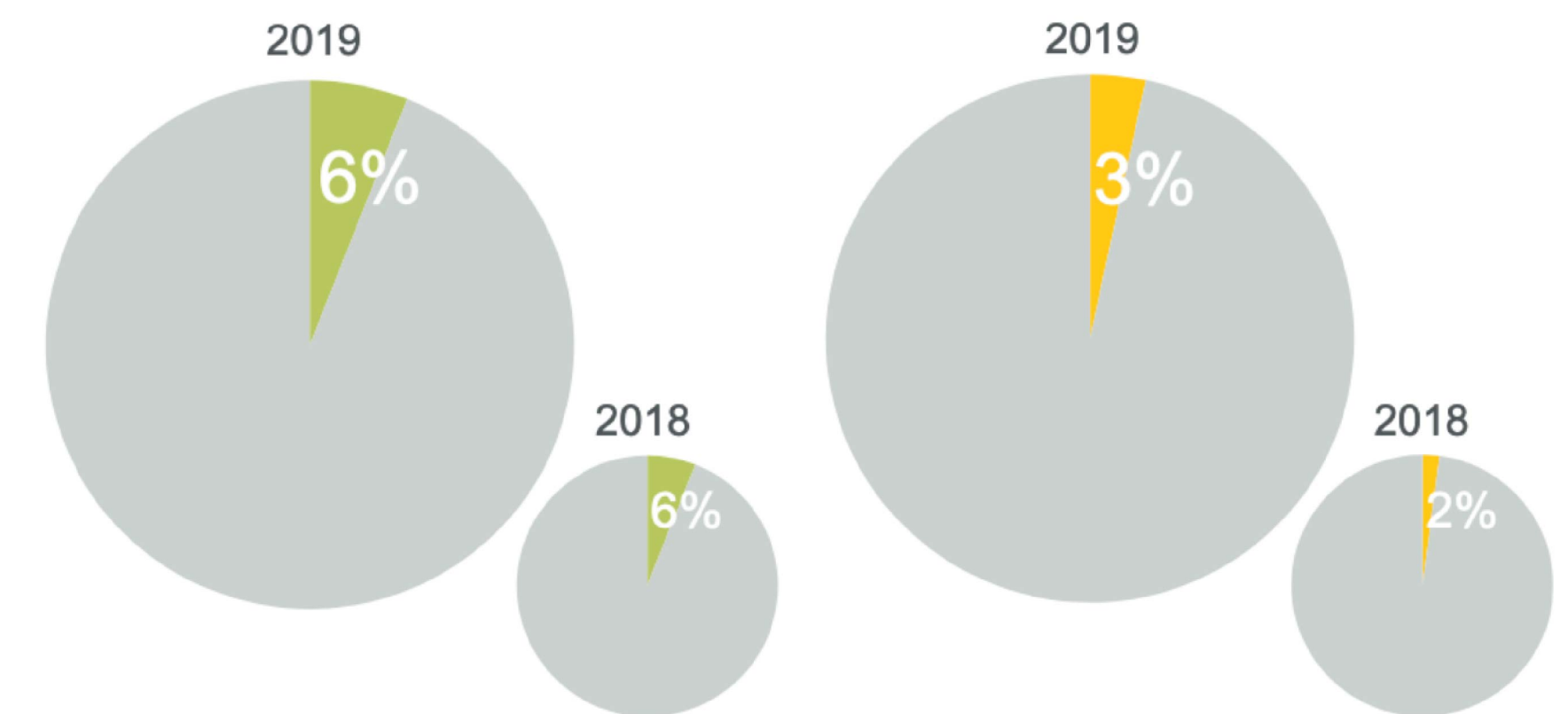
EXAMPLE: German Travel Analysis

RA ReiseAnalyse
2020

Sustainability in holiday travel 2018 and 2019

ATTITUDE*   BEHAVIOUR**

2019   2018   2019   2018   2019   2018

61%   57%   6%   6%   3%   2%

My holiday should be as socially compatible, resource-saving and/or environmentally friendly as possible.

special sustainability label of the accommodation or the tour operator

Carbon offsetting for transport or stay

Basis: * holiday travelers resp. ** holiday trips (5+ days) of the German-speaking population aged 14 or over
Source: RA 2019, RA 2020, *Module Sustainable Travel*

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Background of the Study

Research on understanding of "**sustainability**" as frequently used term in media / advertising

In total, few papers (<10) were found covering the understanding of sustainability from point of view of the consumer **using an open qualitative approach**

FURTHER due to **thematic focus** and **cultural / spatial** reference **generalization** of results **doubtful**

=> need for further research

Barone, B., Rodrigues, H., Nogueira, R. M., Guimarães, K. R. L. S. L. de Q., & Behrens, J. H. (2020). What about sustainability? Understanding consumers' conceptual representations through free word association. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *44*(1), 44–52.

Bruttel, O. (2014). Nachhaltigkeit als Kriterium für Konsumentscheidungen. *Ökologisches Wirtschaften - Fachzeitschrift*, *29*(1), 41–45.

Campbell, B., Khachatryan, H., Behe, B., Dennis, J., & Hall, C. (2015). Consumer Perceptions of Eco-friendly and Sustainable Terms. *Agricultural and Resource Economics Review*, *44*(1), 21–34.

Catlin, J. R., Luchs, M. G., & Phipps, M. (2017). Consumer Perceptions of the Social vs. Environmental Dimensions of Sustainability. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, *40*(3), 245–277.

Hanss, D., & Böhm, G. (2012). Sustainability seen from the perspective of consumers. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *36*(6), 678–687.

Joerß, T., Akbar, P., Mai, R., & Hoffmann, S. (2017). Conceptualizing sustainability from a consumer perspective. Uwf UmweltWirtschaftsForum, 25(1), 15–23. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00550-017-0452-9

Sattari, S., Peighambari, K., & Kordestani, A. (2018). Understanding Consumers' Perception of Sustainable Consumption: A ZMET Approach. In N. Krey & P. Rossi (Eds.), *Back to the Future: Using Marketing Basics to Provide Customer Value* (pp. 531–538). Springer International Publishing.

Simpson, BonnieJ. K., & Radford, ScottK. (2012). Consumer Perceptions of Sustainability: A Free Elicitation Study. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, *24*(4), 272–291. https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2012.733654
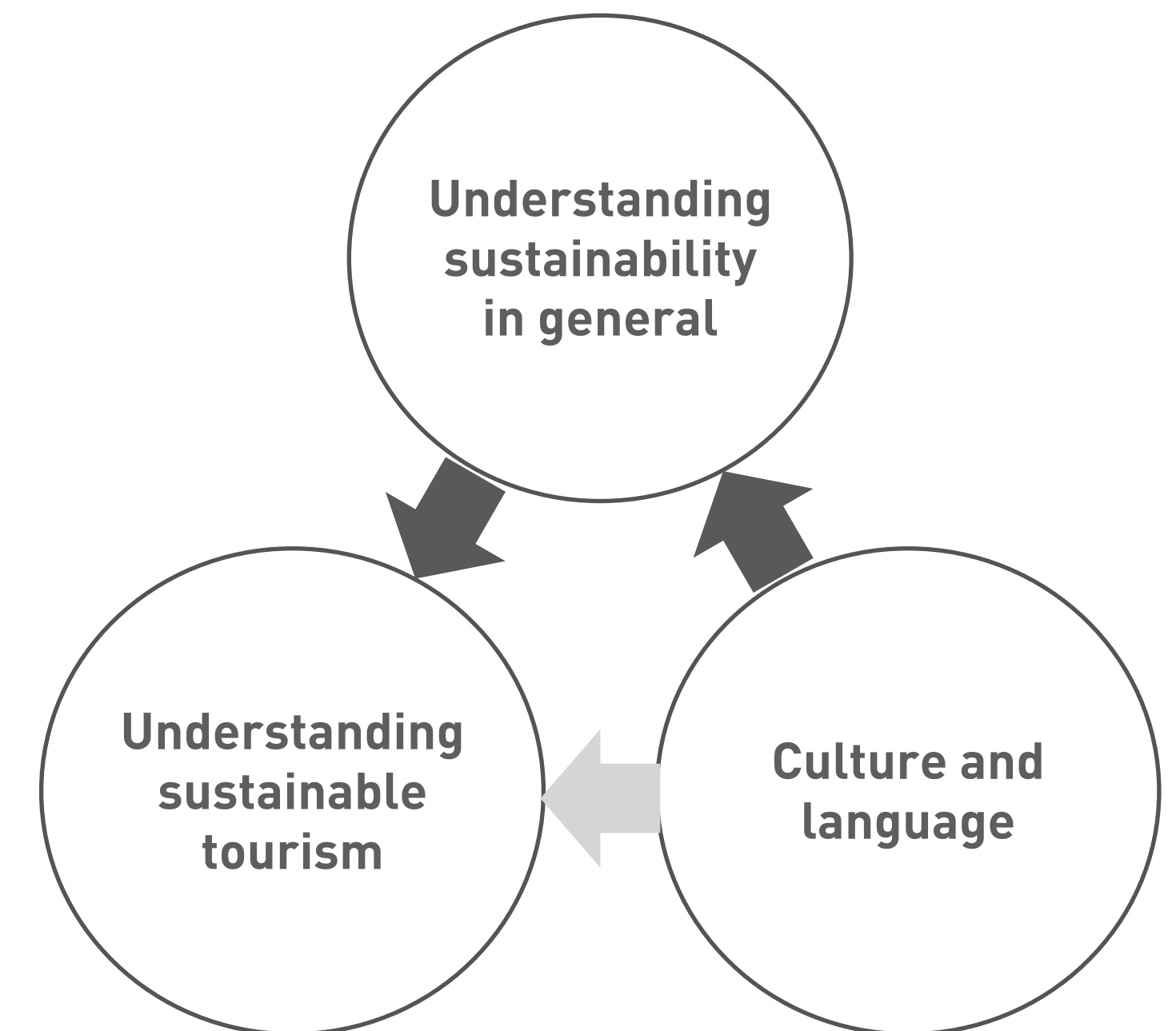
Research Questions and Methodology

RQ1: Do consumers know what sustainability is?

RQ2: Do consumers know, what sustainable tourism at destination level is?

RQ3: Do consumers from different countries and cultures have a common understanding of the meaning of sustainability respectively sustainable tourism?

- qualitative study: open questions with text box
- destination-based: South Tyrol, IT
- December 2019
- representative online panel for Germany and Italy
- recruitment through professional market research company, money incentive to participate
- 87 participants from Germany, 69 participants from Italy
- preselection: active travellers, with holiday trips made in previous five years also to the Alps and intention to visit South Tyrol

Understanding sustainability in general

Understanding sustainable tourism

Culture and language

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Analysis of Open Ended Answers

Grounded Theory Approach for qualitative tasks

→ coding of texts carried out independently by two researchers and discussed over multiple cycles

→ a trained linguist analysed the texts and posts considering language specific and intercultural aspects

→ final German and Italian codes were compared and merged to one code list in English language and translated back, supported by a native English speaker and expert from sustainable tourism research

→ final codes were analysed in regard to the content and using descriptive statistics SPSS25 to support the differences found by the researchers or to illustrate findings

- 156 participants provided an answer (87 German, 69 Italian)
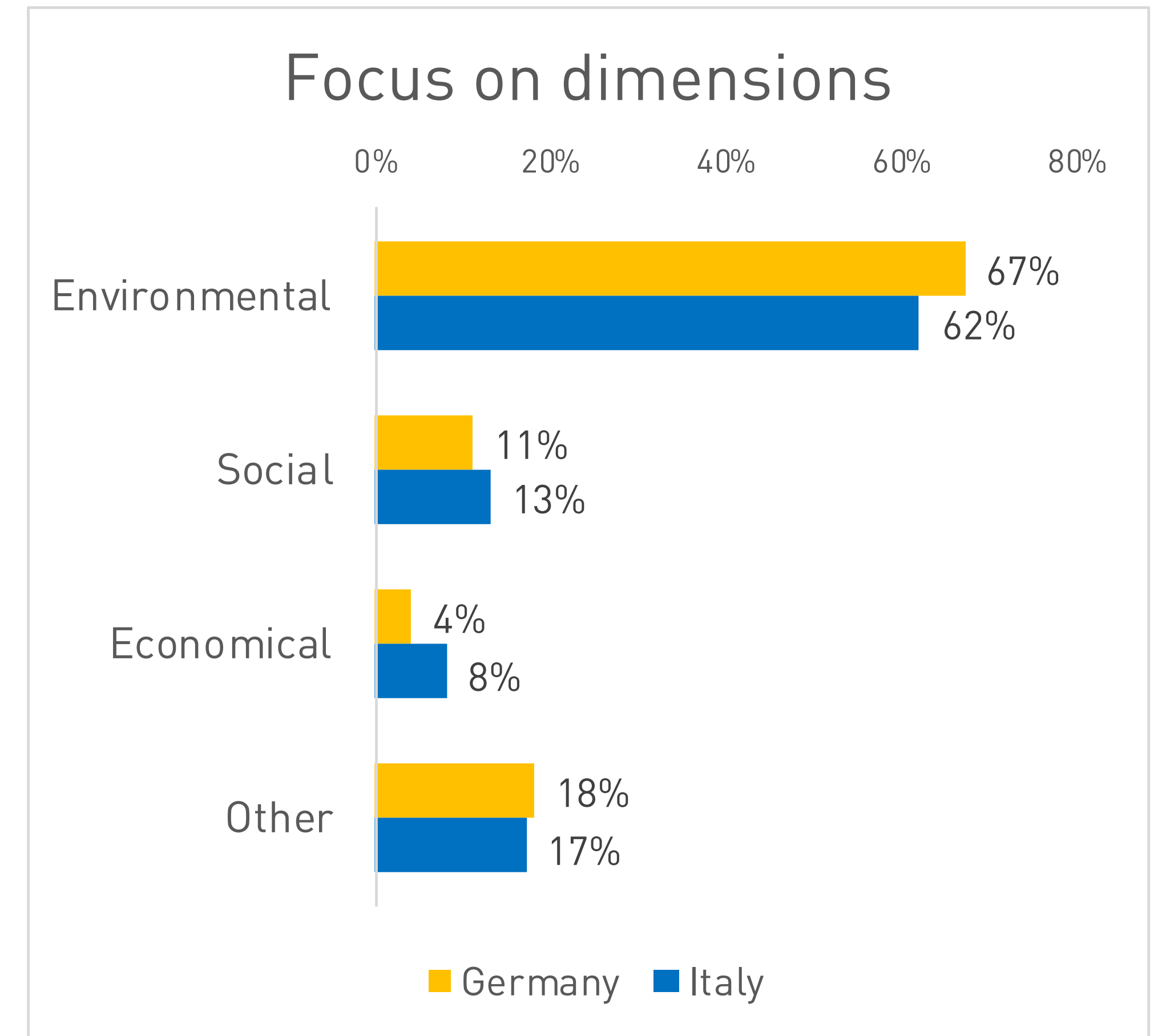- On average 30 words used to define sustainability

Post in original language	Translation	Codes assigned
P155, DE: Wenn all meine Handlungen die Natur, die Wirtschaft und das Zusammenleben mit meinen Mitmenschen nicht oder so wenig wie möglich schädigen.	When all my actions do not damage nature, the economy and the living together with my fellow human beings, do not damage them or damage them as little as possible.	three pillar model, avoiding negative impacts, individual responsibility

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *The discovery of grounded theory* (3. paperback print.). Aldine.

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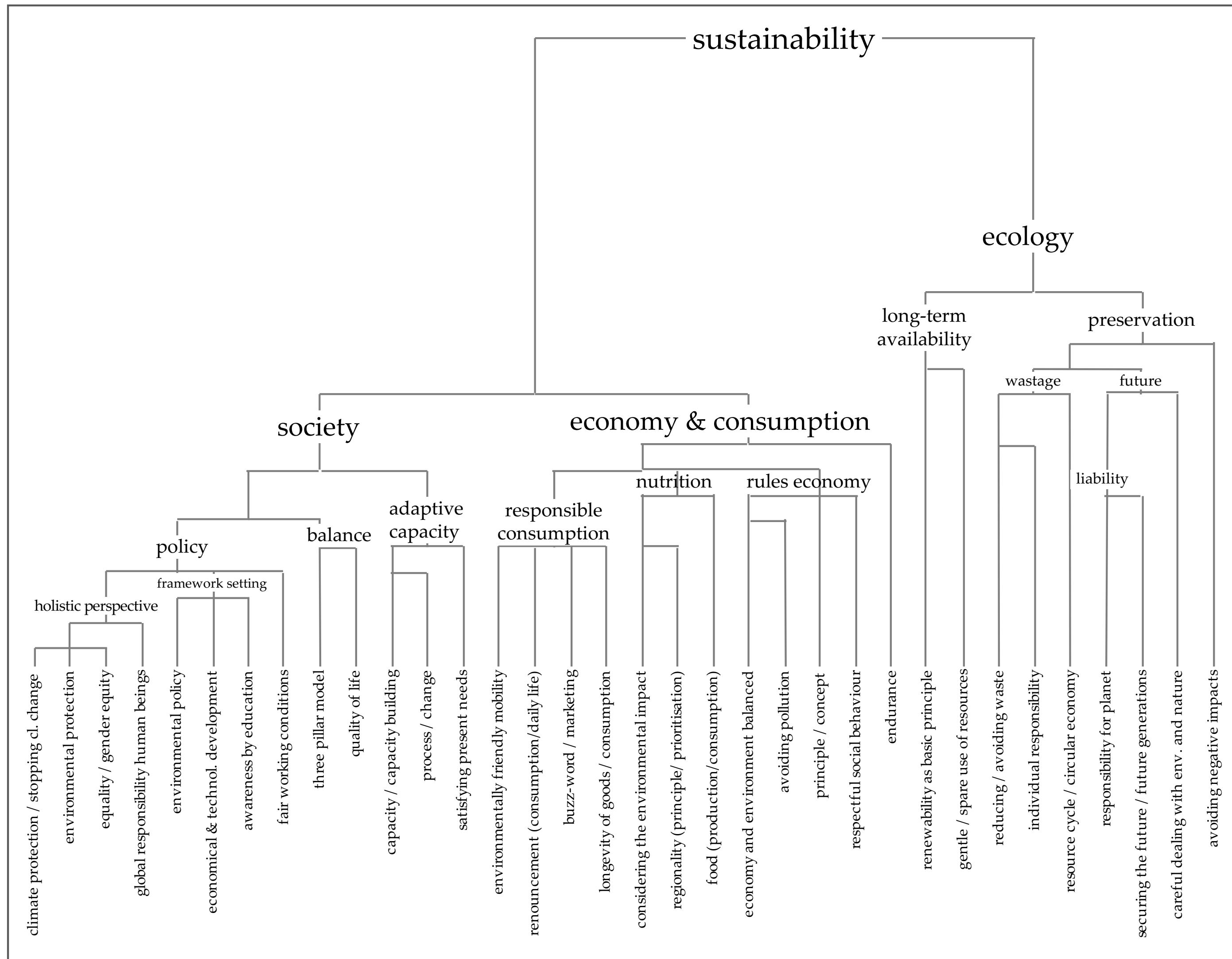
Results: Definition Sustainability

"What is sustainability? How would you explain it to a friend or neighbour in a simple way?"

- 34 codes (47.5% environmental, 22.5% socio-cultural, 12.5% economical and 17.5% other)

- vague and incomplete understanding of sustainability – very individual and heterogenous definitions

- environmental issues dominate

- especially striking: very few described sustainability considering all three dimensions of the concept

- climate protection not connected to sustainability

- men tend to address technical issues: waste, resource efficiency, closed cycles

- women tend to choose rather ethical aspects: preserve, next generation, nature as a value

Focus on dimensions

Environmental	67% (Germany) / 62% (Italy)
Social	11% (Germany) / 13% (Italy)
Economical	4% (Germany) / 8% (Italy)
Other	18% (Germany) / 17% (Italy)

Legend: Germany, Italy

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Results: Definition Sustainability

Cluster analysis for codes

- to identify codes with high proximity, which means that they were frequently used together

- hierarchical clustering with squared Euclidean distance and Ward-algorithm

- the three largest clusters are in line with the triple bottom line concept

- the cluster of ecological issues is relatively heterogenous

No substantial differences in understanding of sustainability could be found
But: Differences in **code frequencies** and **cognitive style** could be identified

	German definitions of **sustainability**	Italian definitions of **sustainability**
Codes mentioned	• Sustainability mostly associated with resources and their economical use • Seen as individual responsibility that secures the future also for next generations • To be achieved through avoidance / reduction of waste; however, this requires that people renounce to certain things	• Emphasis on regeneration and the reduction of problematic impacts • Sustainability considered an individual responsibility, being responsible for the planet also by avoiding pollution
Cognitive style	• Definitions based on concrete examples: more analytical cognitive style	• More abstract and holistic definitions: more intuitive cognitive style

Allinson, C.W., Hayes, J. (2000). **Cross-national differences in cognitive style: implications for management.** The International Journal of Human Resource Management 11(1), 161-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/095851900340042

Hall, E.T.; Hall, M.R. (1990). **Understanding cultural differences. Key to success in West Germany, France, and the United States.** Yarmouth: Intercultural Press.

Schroll-Machl, Sylvia (2011). **Doing Business with Germans. Their Perception, Our Perception.** Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Definition Sustainability: Intercultural Differences

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Additional qualitative study with N=120 participants, representative for the US concerning age, gender, education level, size of households, political orientation, income.

How would you explain to a relative or a friend what the term means?
And how would you explain to a relative or good friend what sustainable tourism is?

Field phase: 3rd – 14th December 2020   -   first impressions from **scan of results**

Obviously new and different aspects compared to Germany and Italy

Sustainability Explanation	Sustainable Tourism Explanation
ID 33 "having income after all bills and necessities are paid"	ID 143 "If you could afford the trip you want to go on, spending money, spend money in the economy"
ID 350 "to be able to have a power unit at your house that is off the grid"	ID 15 "to keep a business going from year to year"
ID 293 "The ability to survive in emergency. To live with no help from government. To have money in the bank and food in the cupboards."	ID 163 "That you have a routine of every year going on vacation"
	ID 132 "It will last for many days, it has been coming to me for a long time"

Corona-impact?

both frequently something personal, economic, current situation and related routines
which was found rarely in DE/IT-study

Does sustainable tourism exist? What does it look like? What is your opinion on it?

- 116 participants provided an answer (58 German and 58 Italian)

- Control of codes from sustainability definition: no additional aspects in tourism context => same coding

- Broad variety of answers (length / content / examples vs. abstract)

- The definition found in literature / research was hardly used to explain sustainable tourism

Environmentally friendly mobility	60	56.1%
Individual responsibility	58	54.2%
Renouncement (consumption/daily life)	30	28.0%
Buzz-word / marketing	26	24.3%
Food (way of production/consumption)	21	19.6%
Regionality (principle/priorization)	19	17.8%
Avoiding / reducing waste	13	12.1%
Considering the environmental impact	12	11.2%
Avoidance of negative impacts	12	11.2%
Responsibility towards other people	9	8.4%
Three Pillar Model	8	7.5%
Securing the future / future generations	8	7.5%
Gentle / spare use of resources	7	6.5%
Avoiding pollution	7	6.5%
Careful dealing with env. and nature	6	5.6%
Economy and environment balanced	6	5.6%
Resource cycle / circular economy	6	5.6%

Satisfying present needs	5	4.7%
Awareness by education	5	4.7%
Climate protection / stopping cl. change	4	3.7%
Quality of life	3	2.8%
Renewability as basic principle	3	2.8%
Responsibility for planet	3	2.8%
Principle / Concept	2	1.9%
Process / change	2	1.9%
Fair working conditions	1	0.9%
Global responsibility human beings	1	0.9%
Endurance	0	0.0%
Capacity / capacity building	0	0.0%
Equality / gender equity	0	0.0%
Longevity of goods / consumption	0	0.0%
Environmental policy	0	0.0%
Environmental protection	0	0.0%
Economical & techn. development	0	0.0%

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Results: Sustainable TOURISM Definition

Differences of codes used to define sustainability vs. to describe sustainable tourism

+48.4%	Environmentally friendly mobility
+34.5%	Individual responsibility
+21.2%	Renouncement
+19.2%	Buzz-word / marketing
+12.7%	Regionality (principle, priorization)
+8.5%	Food
-8.7%	Securing future / future generations
-11.1%	Endurance
-14.3%	Reducing / avoiding waste
-16.6%	Careful dealing with environment and nature
-17.0%	Renewability as basic principle and avoidance of negative impacts
-27.7%	Gentle / spare use of resources
-28.6%	Resource cycle/circular economy

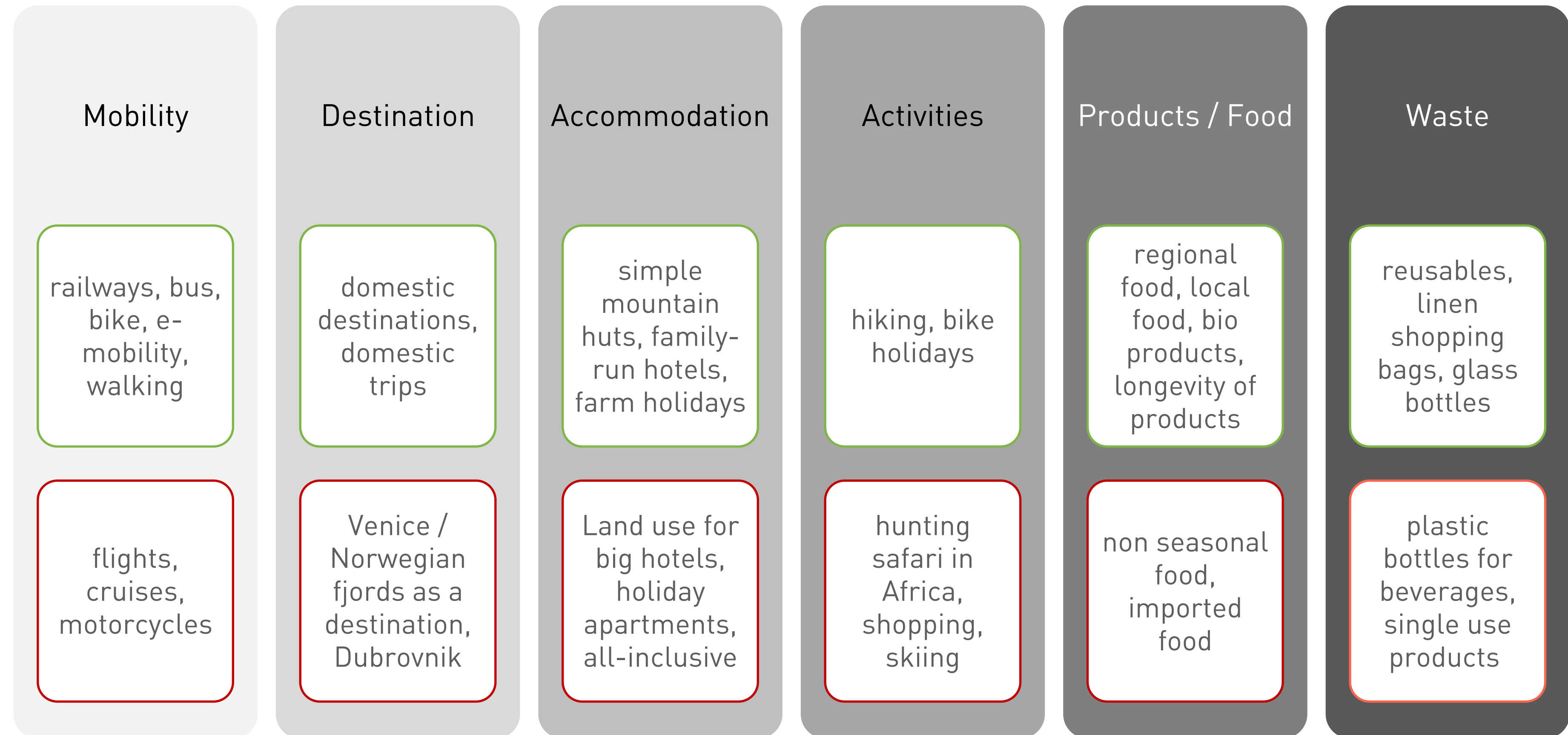Many associated sustainability in tourism with

- environmentally friendly mobility

- responsibility of tourists (renouncing activities/consumption)

- local food and regionality of products important components

Comparison definition sustainability and sustainable tourism

- major differences between definition and tourism context

- 53% of participants have completely differing code-sets
  => understanding differs in tourism context from definition

- from 116 cases for not one single case with identical code-set for definition and sustainable tourism

- Moving away from long-term and abstract issues to concrete elements of the tourism service chain (present problems)

Sustainable Tourism: Symbols

The contributions for the forum thread are often quite short. When concretizing, the participants often picked out concrete elements that are symbolic for (un)sustainability, describing sustainability or unsustainability in an easy, straightforward way.

Mobility	Destination	Accommodation	Activities	Products / Food	Waste
railways, bus, bike, e-mobility, walking	domestic destinations, domestic trips	simple mountain huts, family-run hotels, farm holidays	hiking, bike holidays	regional food, local food, bio products, longevity of products	reusables, linen shopping bags, glass bottles
flights, cruises, motorcycles	Venice / Norwegian fjords as a destination, Dubrovnik	Land use for big hotels, holiday apartments, all-inclusive	hunting safari in Africa, shopping, skiing	non seasonal food, imported food	plastic bottles for beverages, single use products

The most prominent symbols for sustainability and unsustainability in tourism are mobility related: bus, train, and bike and flights and cruise

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Definition Sustainable TOURISM: Intercultural Differences

Generally similar understanding of sustainable tourism
BUT: Differences in cognitive style, beliefs about existence of sustainable tourism and use of symbols

	German definitions of **sustainable tourism**	Italian definitions of **sustainable tourism**
Cognitive style	• Mostly concrete, example-based definitions of sustainability and sustainable tourism	• Mostly abstract and holistic definitions of sustainability and sustainable tourism
Discussion context	• Sustainable tourism described in the context of international travel	• Sustainable tourism described in the context of Italian destinations
Beliefs about sustainable tourism	• More sceptical about existence of sustainable tourism	• More confident about existence of sustainable tourism
Codes mentioned	• No mention of convenience aspect	• Sustainable tourism means loss of convenience
Use of symbols for sustainable tourism	• Railway and bus frequently mentioned as sustainable transportation options	• Railway and bus rarely mentioned as sustainable transportation options

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Conclusions

- **Consumers' understanding of sustainability and sustainable tourism so far unclear**

   → results from most studies with empirical part need verification
   → need for a valid and reliable method to conceptualize and measure sustainable tourism

- **Consumers** have a **simplified** but **individually varying perspective** when
  defining and describing sustainability and sustainable tourism ("**sustainability image**")

   → experts must consider that their understanding differs from most consumers and tourists

- Consumers' perception is based on **few highly symbolic elements** from tourism service chain

   → destination specific services, which fit into varying picture of sustainability of tourists,
      should be used in communication instead of abstract terms sustainability / sustainable tourism

- **Findings suggest that understanding and perception of communication interculturally differ**

   → Intercultural findings can help design culture-specific marketing and communication
      strategies about sustainability and sustainable tourism

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Outlook further research

- Qualitative study **Norway** field phase 7th – 15th December 2020

- **Analysis** posts from **USA / NOR** to derive further codes
  => **completing a code-set** covering South – Central – Northern Europe and USA

- **Quantitative study DE / CH / IT / NOR** (N=250) / **USA** (N=500) February/March 2021

- **Intercultural study** as as basis for further discussion how to develop a
  concept for **future research on sustainable tourism**

- **Proposal:** CBTS2021 methodological workshop on design of
  valid and **reliable** sustainable tourism research

THANKS FOR LISTENING

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Network analysis (Fruchterman-Gold 2 algorithm) confirms the heterogenous structure of codes in answers of participants.

Factor analysis not applicable as many codes were only used by a few participants. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin criterium 0.531 which is insufficient