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Gen Zers' Behaviour Towards Sustainability in a Mature Coastal Destination

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ABSTRACT

This study provides insights into the attitudes, knowledge, behaviour and commitment of Gen Z tourists toward sustainability. The research was conducted on 1188 participants in the Western Costa del Sol (Andalusia, Spain), a well-established coastal destination. The study also estimated, through a chi-squared test and the Mann–Whitney *U* model, the premium price that Gen Z tourists are willing to pay for visiting a more sustainable destination. The results indicate that Gen Z has a good understanding and a high level of commitment towards sustainable tourism. However, only 10% of Gen Z tourists were willing to pay more for a sustainable destination. The study analyses the reasons behind this finding. Finally, the research suggests recommendations for understanding the consumption behaviours and practises of young travellers.

1 | Introduction

Generation Z (or Gen Zers for short) refers to individuals born between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s, also known as ‘post-millennials’, ‘iGens’ or ‘centennials’ (Seemiller and Grace 2018). Gen Zers' behaviour is regarded as differing from that of previous generations, leading to changes in consumer behaviour (Bloomberg 2018; Dabija, Bejan, and Dinu 2019). This generation is environmentally conscious, socially responsible, globally focused and open-minded (Turner 2015; Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya, and Solnet 2021; Walters 2021). With a special focus on the conditional effects of age, there is a considerable amount of scientific literature suggesting that environmental concerns, future green estimation and green perceived quality are determinants of Generation Z's consumption (Gomes, Lopes, and Nogueira 2023). Gen Zers are aware of ethical issues prevalent in society and are doing what they can at this life stage to make a positive impact (Djafarova and Fouts 2022). Digitally native and with a perception of sustainability that is assumed to be proactive (Duffett 2020), this generation presents very different

patterns of behaviour depending on the destinations they visit and the types of tourism they consume, giving great importance to experiential tourism (Corbisiero, Monaco, and Ruspini 2022).

Gen Z is regarded as the world's largest consumer market. This cohort was estimated to generate more than €400 billion in 2020 (Deloitte 2020), making it an important segment for destinations worldwide. The growth and behaviour of this economically significant market will have enormous implications for the future development of the tourism industry and destinations and its long-term sustainability. Previous research on sustainable tourism has mainly focused on investigating the pro-environmental behaviour of tourists, without considering that different generations may hold different environmental values that can affect their beliefs and perceptions while travelling (Salinero et al. 2022). Generational change has become increasingly important in influencing consumer behaviour, making it both a blessing and a curse for tourism destinations (Robinson and Schänzel 2019). An important gap in the literature is a scarcity of empirical studies on this generation in the sustainable tourism literature, which stands

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in marked contrast with other market segments (i.e., seniors' tourism) or Generation Y (Millennials) (Seyfi et al., 2023).

The market is now catering to a new group of customers known as Generation Z. As with any new phenomenon, the research community needs to investigate and gain a better understanding of its characteristics and its emergence. Analysis of tourist behaviour in tourist destinations is a useful tool for both tourism managers and private companies. The literature includes a large number of papers covering this subject (Passafaro 2020), and there is a need to expand knowledge about the behaviour, perceptions and willingness to pay for a more sustainable destination among members of Gen Zers, a demand segment that has not yet been widely addressed in tourism research.

The aim of this research is twofold. First, to gain a better understanding of attitudes, knowledge, behaviour and commitment of Gen Z tourists towards sustainability and compare their findings with other tourists. Second, to determine the extra amount of money that Gen Z tourists are willing to pay for visiting a more sustainable destination and the reasons behind their willingness (or unwillingness). To meet this goal, this exploratory research adopted qualitative methods using structured interviews (Data S1) with a selected sample of 1188 participants in the Western Costa del Sol (Andalusia, Spain), a well-established coastal destination.

Additionally, this study offers destination managers and marketers useful information to better understand Gen Zers tourists and help them develop better strategies for promoting sustainable tourism practises and consumption.

2 | Literature Review

2.1 | Tourist Profiles and Sustainable Tourism

Tourism is a dynamic industry that constantly changes. To manage it effectively, it is important to continuously observe and understand the changing motivations and expectations of tourists. Market segmentation in tourism is a strategic tool to account for heterogeneity among tourists by grouping them into market segments which include members similar to each other and dissimilar to members of other segments (Dolnicar 2022). Apart from being sufficiently heterogeneous from each other, the segments need to be suited to the values of the destination (Neuts et al. 2016).

The sustainability of tourist destinations has been a topic of discussion for several decades (Butler 2020). To address this challenge, it is crucial to study the behaviour of tourists while planning and carrying out their trips. This will help in effectively managing tourism destinations and ensuring their long-term sustainability (Ajzen and Driver 1992; Ruhanen, Moyle, and Moyle 2019; Butler 2020; Streimikiene et al. 2021). The rapid evolution of tourism over the last three decades requires a continuous effort to understand the mentality of tourists and the way they act in the destinations they visit, as well as their contribution to the conservation of resources and improving the quality of life of the local population (Dias et al. 2021). However, there seems to be particular interest in understanding the tourist segments that consume types of tourism already geared in some way towards

sustainability, either nature tourism or any of its more specific variants (Passafaro 2020). In recent decades, a significant number of studies have been published that attempt to measure the potential demand for more sustainable tourism (Adlwarth 2010; Needham 2011; Wehrli et al. 2011, 2013; among others). Several researchers have tried to understand tourists' commitment and behaviour to sustainability by segmenting. However, one of the major challenges in studying this topic is the range of variables that can be considered, which varies depending on the researcher's definition of sustainability. Reviewing the literature, it is observed that many definitions have been developed around the term 'sustainable tourist' (Fennell 2021; MacInnes, Grün, and Dolnicar 2022) such as 'green tourist' (Hedlund 2013; Hou, Zhang, and Sun 2023), 'ethical tourist' (Weeden 2013), 'pro-sustainable tourist' (López-Sánchez and Pulido-Fernández 2016) or 'smart tourist' (Gajdošik 2020), among others.

In conclusion, understanding the different tourist profiles is essential for the management and marketing of a destination. Most tourism segmentation studies have used demographic, behavioural, psychographic and geographic segmentation bases (Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele, and Beaumont 2009; Dolnicar 2022). In this sense, *understanding generations allows us to gain insights into one of the many demographic variables of human beings. Each generation has unique expectations, experiences, generational history, lifestyles, values and demographics that influence their purchasing behaviours. Both tourism practitioners and academics have acknowledged the validity of using generational analysis to study generations' travel behaviour* (Li, Li, and Hudson 2013). *Decisions regarding tourism consumption are highly influenced by cohort effects. Consequently, many destinations are trying to understand and capture the attention of these generations that value a commitment to sustainability, such as Generation Z.*

2.2 | Generation Z and Sustainable Tourism

Gen Zers represent a fast-growing consumer cohort worldwide with far-reaching implications in the influence and spending power in tourism, recreation and hospitality (Seyfi et al., 2023). The role of Gen Zers in tourism is now becoming relevant and their participation in the tourism market is latent (Robinson and Schänzel 2019). It is only recently that Generation Z literature has begun to appear in tourism academic journals (Corbisiero and Ruspini 2018; Robinson and Schänzel 2019; Seyfi, Hall, and Strzelecka 2023). However, there is a lack of literature that examines the commitment of Generation Z tourists towards sustainable tourism. Recently Seyfi et al. (2023) published the first book to provide a comprehensive account of Generation Z about sustainable consumption practises and travel cultures. Reviewing the most significant literature in this area, it is undeniable that the debate on whether younger travellers adopt a pro-sustainable attitude when travelling can be intense and even controversial, but in any case, under-explored.

They have been characterised as digital natives and have very similar characteristics to Millennials, their closest generation (Duffett 2020; Munsch 2021). As Haddouche and Salomone (2018) *outlined young tourists representing Generation Z are cultivated, difficult to retain and expect a great deal from their travel.* Georgescu and Herman (2020) argue that Gen Zers' sustainable

consumption habits are better at home than when they travel elsewhere. Despite this, Gen Z tourists are frequently depicted as socially and environmentally conscious tourists (Francis and Hoefel 2018; Walters 2021). According to the above, Robinson and Schänzel (2019) defend that given both their concern for the environment and the use of social media, Gen Z tourists can contribute meaningfully to transforming tourism destinations by showing preferences for more sustainable tourism options.

To attract this generation, the emphasis is on promoting destinations through applications and new technologies, as well as creating packages and offers that are truly attractive, although links with local culture and values related to specific lifestyles appear to be determining factors for Gen Zers (Dimitriou and AbouElgheit 2019). They are referred as 'digital natives' who have grown with witnessing advancements in technology and access a large portion of information through social media which affects their decision-making (Djafarova and Bowes 2021). Sometimes the information captured by Gen Zers is based on posts published by influential people who manage to attract them to certain tourist destinations, often leading to the risk of overcrowding (Beall et al. 2021). In line with that, Szromek, Hysa, and Karasek (2019) stated that younger generations appear to be indifferent to some of the negative impacts of tourism in many territories, such as overtourism.

In terms of sustainability, some studies about Gen Zers tourists raise divergences in the scientific literature. As stated by Haddouche and Salomone (2018) tourists in this generation plan their trips modestly and, although they are aware of it, sustainability is not yet part of their mentality. Moreover, although this generation has adopted behaviours that are beneficial to the environment, they always expect an economic benefit from their actions (Dębski and Borkowska-Niszczota 2020), which is an indicator of the importance they attach to the economic component of their travels. For example, members of this generation are major users of public transport, but for Lakatos et al. (2018) this is mainly due to the financial problems mentioned previously and not to a mentality linked to a sustainable consumption pattern.

This generation makes up a new profile of workers, consumers and citizens. Understanding what concerns them and how they position themselves about sustainability is the pending issue for destinations that want to attract them. This study aims to contribute to the growing field of knowledge concerning the analysis of Gen Z tourists' attitudes, knowledge, behaviour and commitment towards sustainability, including the analysis of the willingness to pay (and the reasons for their decision) for a more sustainable destination.

3 | Methodological Framework

3.1 | Case Study

This study was conducted in the western part of the Costa del Sol (Málaga, Spain), a mature tourist destination with sustainability problems (Bramwell 2004; Agarwal and Shaw 2007; Navarro et al. 2012), although it is still very well positioned at the international level. The province of Malaga has the largest number of hotel establishments in Andalusia (hotels, apartment

hotels, guest houses and B&Bs), with an average of more than 600 openings during 2019 out of a total of 2300 in the region as a whole. In addition, in that year, 5,821,358 people visited the province, accounting for a total of 20,373,670 overnight stays, 37.14% of those registered in Andalusia.

Towns in the west of the Costa del Sol are characterised by their diversity and the way they have adapted to the process of fleeting development that tourism provided (Royo 2013). Their economy is based on tourism and complementary services, the real estate sector and construction as a result of the proliferation of second homes (Barke and Towner 2004). In particular, these towns are Manilva, Casares, Estepona, Marbella, Mijas, Fuengirola, Benalmadena and Torremolinos. Since the 1950s, tourism, promoted by economic and political factors, has become the main contributing factor to the economic growth of these towns, displacing the population from the interior of the province to the coastal zones. This has translated into the construction of hotels, second homes and new infrastructures that result in complex processes of urban development.

In 2019, the Costa del Sol received around 13 million tourists, with an economic impact of 14.442 million euros (applying the Input-Output methodology). This was one of the highest figures ever achieved in this destination since records began, but because of the pandemic caused by COVID-19, the 2020 data showed a decline of more than 9.4 million tourists, around 71%. In 2021, 5.5 million tourists have been recovered but another 3.9 million are missing to reach the data for 2019. Regarding the economic impact, for 2021 it was estimated at €11,811.4 million. The latest available statistics indicate that 2022 marked an extraordinary recovery for tourism activity in this territory. The number of tourist arrivals was very close to those obtained in 2019, with a total of 12.8 million tourists.

This internationally renowned tourist destination has worked to restructure and improve its tourism supply, through the *Plan Qualifica* (with a public investment of more than 100 million euros), focusing only on supply and ignoring demand, a fact that highlights some of the management gaps that need to be filled if the destination is going to commit to sustainability, since it is the behaviour of tourists that will influence the impacts on the tourist destination. These facts and figures justify the use of the Western Costa del Sol as a case study since this area accounts for almost 50% of all hotel places in Andalusia, where 62.89% of international tourists stayed in 2019.

Thus, Western Costa del Sol is an appropriate tourism destination to conduct this research, whose objective is to first analyse the role of young tourists (Gen Zers) in the management of a tourism destination that seeks to focus on sustainability and, second, to determine whether Gen Zers travellers are genuine pro-sustainable tourists for this type of destination to whom sustainability policies can be oriented or, conversely, to whom it is necessary, as Miller et al. (2010) stated, to change the demand.

3.2 | Data Collection and Methodology

To verify these assumptions, a survey was conducted using the Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) methodology,

although in this case, the electronic device used was a Tablet. The survey was conducted between June and September 2022. It should be noted that not all the municipalities analysed are coastal, some are inland. In these territories, the surveys were conducted at both tourist accommodations and key tourist points such as tourism offices, museums, etc. On the other hand, in the coastal municipalities, the survey was done at the entrances to tourist accommodation, access to the beach, the seafront and the beach bars.

A sample size of 1188 tourists was finally reached. To do this, given the impossibility of identifying the object of study (all tourists who visit the Western Costa del Sol), a probability sampling approach is proposed in which the only selection criterion was that the participant had spent at least one night in the destination surveyed. The sampling process has been approached through a Time Location Sampling (TLS) design, as in De Cantis and Ferrante (2011). With this sample size, the maximum sampling error for a 95% confidence level and the worst-case scenario ($p = q = 0.50$) is $\pm 2.8\%$.

In May 2022, the first version of the survey was validated by four experts in the field of analysis applied in this research, to improve, complete and corroborate the final content of the survey. Once the results were analysed, the final questionnaire was developed, providing the basis for the present study. Subsequently, the first 100 tourists were interviewed by way of a pretest.

The survey contained four major sections (Data S1). The first included questions aimed at characterising tourists, asking about socio-demographic information and aspects related to the

reservation and characteristics of the trip. In the second section, respondents were asked about their concept of a sustainable tourist destination, the importance of working towards sustainability, the aspects they consider key when travelling and choosing a destination, and the activities they carry out during the trip. The third section sought to ascertain the perception of these tourists regarding the sustainability of the destination, investigating the changes (for better or worse) observed in the destination, as well as the expectations and perceptions of tourists. Finally, section four asked the respondents about their willingness to pay for a more sustainable destination, including questions about the cost of travel and the extra cost they would be willing to pay for the fact that the destination opted for improved sustainability.

Subjects belonging to Gen Zers were identified by age, specifically those between 18 and 24 years old (both inclusive) at the time of the survey (2022). The differences between this group and other tourists were analysed using chi-squared tests in the case of qualitative variables, with Pearson's chi-squared statistic if less than 20% of the cells in the contingency table had expected frequencies less than 5. When this condition was not satisfied, the Likelihood ratio was used instead. For quantitative or quasi-quantitative variables, Mann-Whitney *U* tests were used for the comparison of medians, given the nature of the variables and/or provided that the distribution was not normal, according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. In the case of the Mann-Whitney *U* tests, two-tailed tests were complemented with one-tailed tests (left-tailed and right-tailed), to decide, where appropriate, which of the populations had the highest median. The analyses were carried out in *IBM SPSS v.24* and *StatGraphics v.19*.

TABLE 1 | Differences between Gen Zers and other tourists regarding the meaning of 'sustainable tourist destination'.

Variable for a destination to be sustainable means that	Category	All other tourists		Gen Zers		<i>p</i>
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
The environment is respected	Yes	886	96.3	255	95.1	0.393 ^a
	No	34	3.7	13	4.9	
Local businesses benefit from tourism	Yes	665	72.3	175	65.3	0.027 ^a
	No	255	27.7	93	34.7	
Allows an increase in the number of tourists every year	Yes	467	50.8	120	44.8	0.085 ^a
	No	453	49.2	148	55.2	
Tourism improves the living standards of those who live here	Yes	576	62.6	150	56	0.050 ^a
	No	344	37.4	118	44	
The destination may continue to grow (companies, hotels, restaurants)	Yes	460	50	137	51.1	0.747 ^a
	No	460	50	131	48.9	
Destination residents can decide on tourism growth	Yes	417	45.3	131	48.9	0.304 ^a
	No	503	54.7	137	51.1	
The destination can satisfy any need of the tourist	Yes	523	56.8	155	57.8	0.774 ^a
	No	397	43.2	113	42.2	

^aChi-squared.
Source: Authors' own.

4 | Results

To examine the relationship between Generation Z and the sustainability of tourism destinations, it is essential to first outline the primary socio-demographic traits of the surveyed population, which were determined based on the questions in the initial part of the survey (see Data S1 for details). Generation Z respondents accounted for 22.5% (268 out of 1188). In terms of gender, 43.2% of the Gen Z were women. A significant percentage of Generation Z prefer to travel with their partners (35%), followed by 26.8% who travel with family, and 24.9% who prefer to travel with friends. Travelling alone is not as common, with only 13.3% of Gen Z opting to do so.

It is clear that for Gen Z, the main factor in selecting accommodation is the cost, with an average budget of €574.15. The most popular types of accommodation among the respondents were

one- or two-star hotels, hostels/pensions (24%), and staying with friends or relatives (18.6%), which together make up 42.6% of the total. Three-star hotels were chosen by 18.6% of the respondents, while 20.4% preferred four-star hotels. It is worth noting that only 4.4% of the respondents reported staying in a five-star hotel, and a mere 2.9% owned a house or apartment. Out of the respondents analysed, 27% of respondents were on their first or second day at the destination. However, a significant percentage of the Gen Z segment (38%) had been in one of the municipalities included in the analysis for between 5 days to a week. Additionally, 12% had been in the destination for more than a week at the time of being surveyed. This indicates that a high percentage of respondents had ample knowledge of the destination, enabling them to evaluate it with relevant criteria. This statement is further supported by the fact that 45.5% of respondents mentioned that they have visited the destination before. As for the frequency of visits, it ranges from several times a year (5.6%) to

TABLE 2 | Differences between Gen Zers and the other tourists regarding their assessment of the importance of working towards the sustainability of tourist destinations.

Variable	Category	All other tourists		Gen Zers		p^1	p^2	p^3
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%			
Considers it important to work towards the sustainability of tourist destinations	Yes	874	95	210	78.4	<0.001 ^a		
	No	46	5	58	21.6			
Reasons why tourists consider it important to work for the sustainability of destinations								
To keep growing and create jobs in those destinations	Mean (SD)	5.56 (1.46)		5.43 (1.81)		0.886 ^b	0.443 ^b	0.557 ^b
	Median (IQR)	6 (2)		6 (2)				
So that my children can continue to go to these holiday destinations (<i>N</i> = 1084) ^c	Mean (SD)	5.52 (1.29)		4.51 (1.62)		<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
	Median (IQR)	6 (2)		4.5 (2)				
Citizens who have been born and/or live in these destinations have the right to enjoy quality of life (<i>N</i> = 1084) ^c	Mean (SD)	5.93 (1.15)		5.77 (1.56)		0.887 ^b	0.443 ^b	0.557 ^b
	Median (IQR)	6 (2)		6 (2)				
Most traditional tourist destinations are under serious threat (<i>N</i> = 1084) ^c	Mean (SD)	5.02 (1.51)		4.74 (1.71)		0.055 ^b	0.973 ^b	0.027 ^b
	Median (IQR)	5 (2)		5 (2)				
Reasons why tourists do not consider it important to work for the sustainability of destinations								
I do not believe in the whole issue of the 'sustainability' of destinations, I think it's just a marketing concept (<i>N</i> = 104) ^c	Mean (SD)	4.8 (1.54)		5 (1.62)		0.344 ^b	0.172 ^b	0.828 ^b
	Median (IQR)	5 (2)		5 (2)				
I believe that the non-sustainability of tourist destinations has no solution, it cannot be controlled (<i>N</i> = 104) ^c	Mean (SD)	4.63 (1.57)		4.88 (1.53)		0.411 ^b	0.206 ^b	0.794 ^b
	Median (IQR)	5 (2)		5 (2)				
It seems to me that this destination is fine and that it does not need any kind of improvement (<i>N</i> = 104) ^c	Mean (SD)	3.89 (1.79)		3.67 (1.82)		0.744 ^b	0.628 ^b	0.372 ^b
	Median (IQR)	4 (2)		4 (3)				

Note: ¹two-tailed *p*-value; ²one-tailed *p*-value (left); ³one-tailed *p*-value (right).

Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation; IQR, interquartile range.

^aChi-squared.

^bMann-Whitney *U*.

^cScale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important).

Source: Authors' own.

tourists who return every summer (12.7%). Additionally, 18.4% of respondents mentioned that they visit the Western Costa del Sol as a vacation destination, although not every year. Finally, 21.5% of respondents mentioned that they visit the destination from time to time.

It should be noted that a large majority (48.22%) of visitors will stay for around 1 week. Another significant group (31.39%) will extend their vacation by 8–15 days. It is worth noting that the main reason for the visit is the tourists' enjoyment of their leisure time (71%). Generation Z tourists book their vacations in advance, mainly online (96%). Regarding the educational level, considering the age group that was evaluated, 70% of the respondents have completed either secondary education (23%) or high school (47%). Additionally, 16% of the participants have a university education. According to the above data, a high percentage are currently students (88%), of which 24% combine their studies with employment.

4.1 | Characterisation of Gen Zers Tourists in Terms of Sustainability

Question 17 of the survey (see Data S1) provides information on what it means for tourists when a destination is considered sustainable. In this case, there is little significant difference between Generation Z and other tourists (Table 1). The interpretation of sustainability for both analysed segments aligns with the main options chosen, albeit in slightly different percentages. A significant percentage of younger tourists associate sustainability with environmental care (95.1%), followed by a lower percentage connecting it with the support of local businesses (65.3%), meeting the needs of any tourist (56%) and enhancing the quality of life for residents (56%).

According to the Table 2 respondents were then asked to evaluate the importance of working towards the sustainability of tourist destinations (question 18 of the survey). Members of Generation Z did not regard this issue as important as other generations (78.4% vs. 95%). The main reason why 21.6% of Generation Z does not consider working towards sustainability important (compared to 5% of the remaining surveyed tourists) is that they 'do not believe in the entire concept of destination sustainability' and think of it merely as a marketing concept.

Regarding the responsibility of the different stakeholders in terms of sustainability, Generation Z consistently rates all possible responses above 5 on the Likert scale (ranging from 1—'not at all important' to 7—'very important'). The public administration receives the highest score, 5.76, as the entity responsible for promoting sustainability in destinations. Conversely, tourists receive a lower score of 5.27, and day-trippers the lowest with a score of 5.11, in terms of responsibility for sustainability in the destination (Table 3).

The Table 4 analyses the aspects that are most important to tourists when travelling (behaviour). A noteworthy finding is that Generation Z places greater importance on 'choosing the cheapest option' compared to the rest of the surveyed tourists (5.38 vs. 4.7, respectively). Despite receiving slightly lower ratings than the other respondents, Generation Z demonstrates interest in

TABLE 3 | Differences between Gen Zers and other tourists regarding the responsibility of stakeholders in the sustainability of the destination.

Variable ^b for sustainability	Category	All other tourists		Gen Zers		p ¹	p ²	p ³
		Mean (SD)	Median (IQR)	Mean (SD)	Median (IQR)			
The intervention of public institutions is important	Mean (SD)	6.23 (1.11)		5.76 (1.42)		<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	7 (2)		6 (2)				
The intervention of the private sector is important	Mean (SD)	6.12 (1.27)		5.5 (1.69)		<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	7 (2)		6 (3)				
The intervention of the resident population is important	Mean (SD)	5.59 (1.53)		5.62 (1.48)		0.911 ^a	0.456 ^a	0.544 ^a
	Median (IQR)	6 (2)		6 (2)				
The intervention of tourists is important	Mean (SD)	5.47 (1.77)		5.27 (1.79)		0.089 ^a	0.956 ^a	0.044 ^a
	Median (IQR)	6 (2)		5 (3)				
The intervention of day-trippers is important	Mean (SD)	5.32 (1.9)		5.11 (1.99)		0.186 ^a	0.907 ^a	0.093 ^a
	Median (IQR)	6 (3)		5.5 (3)				

Note: ¹Two-tailed p-value; ²one-tailed p-value (left); ³one-tailed p-value (right).

Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation; IQR, interquartile range.

^aMann-Whitney U.

^bScale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important).

Source: Authors' own.

TABLE 4 | Differences between Gen Zers and other generations in the important aspects when travelling.

Importance of this aspect when traveling ^a	All other tourists		Gen Zers		
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	<i>p</i> ¹	<i>p</i> ²	<i>p</i> ³
	Median (IQR)	Median (IQR)			
Learn about the destination	5.54 (1.17) 6 (1)	5.09 (1.36) 5 (2)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
Choose the cheapest option	4.7 (1.52) 5 (2)	5.38 (1.57) 6 (2)	<0.001 ^b	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b
Adapt to the norms and respecting the customs of the destination	5.92 (1.01) 6 (2)	5.67 (1.21) 6 (2)	0.005 ^b	0.998 ^b	0.002 ^b
Buy in large shopping areas	4.03 (1.44) 4 (2)	4.04 (1.57) 4 (2)	0.896 ^b	0.552 ^b	0.448 ^b
Book all activities before travelling	3.48 (1.84) 4 (3)	3.32 (1.64) 3 (3)	0.314 ^b	0.843 ^b	0.157 ^b
Know the local culture	5.23 (1.08) 5 (1)	4.92 (1.4) 5 (2)	0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
Respect to the maximum local heritage during my visit	5.97 (1.16) 6 (2)	5.46 (1.48) 6 (3)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
Use the services managed by the local people	5.23 (1.01) 5 (1)	5.07 (1.15) 5 (2)	0.029 ^b	0.986 ^b	0.014 ^b
Consume typical food	5.55 (1.25) 6 (1.5)	4.88 (1.43) 5 (2)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b

Note: ¹two-tailed *p*-value; ²one-tailed *p*-value (left); ³one-tailed *p*-value (right).

Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation; IQR, interquartile range.

^aScale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important).

^bMann-Whitney *U*.

Source: Authors' own.

aspects closely linked to sustainability, such as 'adapting to the norms and respecting the customs of the destination', 'learning about the destination', and 'fully respecting local heritage'.

Another key issue is understanding the significance they place on certain aspects when choosing their holiday destination. In comparison to other tourists, Generation Z assigns slightly less importance to almost all included aspects (Table 5), except for the availability of an urban transportation system (4.9). It is worth noting that various aspects directly associated with sustainable policies at the destination are not particularly appreciated by young tourists, as none of these factors scores a mean of 6 or higher.

4.2 | Differences Between Gen Zers and Other Tourists in Their Expectations and Perceptions Regarding Sustainability

The second set of questionnaire questions aimed to understand respondents' expectations of the destination's sustainability and link it with their perceptions. Gen Zers generally displayed worse expectations and perceptions than the other tourists in almost all aspects they were asked about (Table 6). The largest gap between expectations and perceptions for

Generation Z is related to price/quality. Regarding issues closely linked to sustainability, such as the absence of overcrowding, quality of the natural environment or availability of local products and services, the expectations expressed by Generation Z were lower than those of the other respondents. Similarly, members of Generation Z expressed a less favourable perception of these aspects.

4.3 | Differences Between Generation Z and Other Tourists Regarding Their Willingness to Pay for a More Sustainable Destination

Finally, tourists were asked about their willingness to pay for the Western Costa del Sol to become a more sustainable destination. In this regard, it is important to note that a commitment to sustainability does not necessarily imply that the destination should be more expensive; rather, it can be part of a pricing strategy. Therefore, it is interesting to explore willingness to pay as an economic instrument for sustainable tourism management, identifying (a) which tourists are willing to pay more for sustainable destinations and (b) whether pro-sustainable tourists spend more than their less-sustainable counterparts (Nickerson, Jorgenson, and Boley 2016). The difference in the cost of the trip between Generation Z and other generations is

TABLE 5 | Differences between Gen Zers and other tourists concerning important aspects when choosing a destination.

Importance of this aspect when choosing a destination ^a	All other tourists		Gen Zers			
	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)			
	Median (IQR)		Median (IQR)	<i>p</i> ¹	<i>p</i> ²	<i>p</i> ³
Quality of the urban environment (cleanliness, traffic, noise, etc.)	5.49 (1.04) 5 (1)		5.14 (1.1) 5 (1)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
Internet access	5.28 (1.08) 5 (1)		4.82 (1.13) 5 (2)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
Quality of the natural environment	5.13 (1.06) 5 (1)		4.71 (1.18) 5 (1)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
Availability of local products and services	5.08 (0.99) 5 (1)		4.7 (1.19) 5 (1)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
Availability of a cultural program	3.4 (1.33) 4 (2)		3.76 (1.36) 4 (2)	0.014 ^b	0.993 ^b	0.007 ^b
Good customer service and attention	5.8 (0.97) 6 (1)		5.6 (1.13) 6 (1)	0.010 ^b	0.995 ^b	0.005 ^b
Public safety	5.77 (1.05) 6 (2)		5.37 (1.4) 6 (2)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
No overcrowding of the destination	4.45 (1.08) 5 (1)		4.06 (1.23) 4 (2)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
Positive residents' attitude to tourists and tourism	5.04 (1.01) 5 (2)		4.66 (1.29) 5 (1)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
Availability of an urban transport system	4.69 (1.22) 5 (2)		4.91 (1.11) 5 (2)	0.028 ^b	0.014 ^b	0.986 ^b
Adequate price/service ratio	5.61 (1.08) 6 (1)		5.37 (1.27) 6 (1.5)	0.010 ^b	0.995 ^b	0.005 ^b
Adequate tourist information and signage	4.71 (0.97) 5 (1)		4.3 (1.23) 4 (1)	<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b

Note: ¹two-tailed *p*-value; ²one-tailed *p*-value (left); ³one-tailed *p*-value (right).

^aScale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important).

^bMann-Whitney *U*.

Source: Authors' own.

striking (Table 7). On average, Gen Zers spent around 574 euros (SD = 664.15 euros). However, 50% of them spent 350 euros or less (IQR = 550 euros), while the other tourists spent, on average, more than 1120 euros (SD = 967.05 euros), with a median of 900 euros (IQR = 100).

Additionally, Generation Z shows a lower willingness to pay more for a sustainable destination (10.1% vs. 25.7%). Among the reasons for their reluctance, they often express that they 'don't believe in that kind of contribution; in the end, everything stays the same' or that 'it is the companies that generate the greatest impacts, so they should be the ones covering these costs,' among others (Table 7). It is noteworthy that 45.1% of individuals from other generations feel they lack sufficient information to comment on this matter. In contrast, only 17.3% of Gen Zers stated they would need more information to make a decision.

In quantifying the additional cost, they would be willing to pay for sustainability, a more varied distribution was observed

among Gen Zers. The majority (70.4%) would pay 10% more, but almost 26% were willing to pay double or any requested amount. For other generations, the percentage willing to pay 10% is lower at 55.5%, with another group of tourists open to paying between 20% and 75% more. Consistent with the aforementioned, a smaller percentage of Gen Z members would be willing to pay more, even if the company assured them that this amount would be dedicated to sustainability (4.5% vs. 19.8%), and even if it were tax-deductible (4.1% vs. 17.9%).

Finally, when asked about their response to a proposed tax that all tourists would pay to fund sustainability improvement projects, a lower percentage of Gen Z members expressed willingness to pay (7.4% vs. 24.6%). Most indicated that they would no longer spend their holidays at this destination (37.7% vs. 23.6%), or that they wouldn't pay it because it would only fill the coffers of the Local Council, which would spend the money on whatever it wanted, and that the destination would remain the same or worsen (36.9% vs. 21.5%). Once again, regarding this last point, the proportion of Gen Z members who believe they lack

TABLE 6 | Gen Zers and other tourists' expectations and perceptions regarding the sustainability of the destination and general satisfaction.

Variable ^b	Category	All other tourists	Gen Zers	<i>p</i> ¹	<i>p</i> ²	<i>p</i> ³
Expectation: quality of the urban environment	Mean (SD)	5.05 (0.86)	4.66 (1.04)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (1)			
Perception: quality of the urban environment	Mean (SD)	5.1 (0.99)	4.76 (1.02)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (1)			
Expectation: accessibility	Mean (SD)	5.1 (1)	4.43 (1.29)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (1)			
Perception: accessibility	Mean (SD)	5.04 (1.07)	4.48 (1.24)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (1)			
Expectation: quality of the natural environment	Mean (SD)	4.9 (0.91)	4.87 (0.99)	0.474 ^a	0.763 ^a	0.237 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (0)	5 (1)			
Perception: quality of the natural environment	Mean (SD)	4.8 (1.08)	4.56 (1.12)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (1)			
Expectation: availability of local products and services	Mean (SD)	5.15 (0.84)	4.81 (0.96)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (1)			
Perception: availability of local products and services	Mean (SD)	5.12 (1.01)	4.89 (1.08)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (1.5)			
Expectation: availability of a programme of cultural activities	Mean (SD)	4.03 (1.18)	4.06 (1.01)	0.901 ^a	0.550 ^a	0.450 ^a
	Median (IQR)	4 (2)	4 (1)			
Perception: availability of a programme of cultural activities	Mean (SD)	3.99 (1.21)	4.06 (1.11)	0.805 ^a	0.402 ^a	0.598 ^a
	Median (IQR)	4 (2)	4 (1)			
Expectation: good customer service and care	Mean (SD)	5.33 (0.99)	4.85 (1.29)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (2)			
Perception: good customer service and care	Mean (SD)	5.5 (1.11)	5.04 (1.43)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	6 (1)	5 (2)			
Expectation: public safety	Mean (SD)	5.31 (1.02)	4.9 (1.42)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (2)			
Perception: public safety	Mean (SD)	5.4 (1.09)	5.09 (1.42)	0.002 ^a	0.999 ^a	0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (2)			
Expectation: no overcrowding in the destination	Mean (SD)	4.46 (1.02)	4.22 (1.16)	0.007 ^a	0.997 ^a	0.003 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	4 (1)			
Perception: no overcrowding in the destination	Mean (SD)	4.52 (1.21)	4.04 (1.48)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	4 (2)			
Expectation: good relationship and attitude of residents towards tourism ^b	Mean (SD)	5.06 (1.02)	4.57 (1.3)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (1)			
Perception: good relationship and attitude of residents towards tourism ^b	Mean (SD)	5.28 (1.08)	4.82 (1.45)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (2)			
Expectation: availability of an urban transport system ^b	Mean (SD)	4.82 (1.09)	4.81 (1.01)	0.814 ^a	0.593 ^a	0.407 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (2)	5 (2)			
Perception: availability of an urban transport system ^b	Mean (SD)	4.79 (1.12)	4.61 (1.03)	0.011 ^a	0.995 ^a	0.005 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (1)			
Expectation: adequate price/quality ratio ^b	Mean (SD)	5.21 (0.85)	5.03 (1.1)	0.024 ^a	0.988 ^a	0.012 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (1)	5 (2)			

(Continues)

TABLE 6 | (Continued)

Variable ^b	Category	All other tourists	Gen Zers	p ¹	p ²	p ³
Perception: adequate price/ quality ratio ^b	Mean (SD)	4.87 (1.21)	4.29 (1.67)	<0.001 ^a	>0.999 ^a	<0.001 ^a
	Median (IQR)	5 (2)	5 (3)			
Enjoyed the trip ^c	Mean (SD)	6.18 (0.97)	6.08 (1.27)	0.473 ^a	0.237 ^a	0.763 ^a
	Median (IQR)	6 (1)	7 (2)			

Note: ¹two-tailed *p*-value; ²one-tailed *p*-value (left); ³one-tailed *p*-value (right).

Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation; IQR, interquartile range.

^aMann-Whitney *U*.

^bScale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 7 (very satisfied).

^cScale from 1 (minimum) to 7 (maximum).

Source: Authors' own.

information to make such a decision is significantly lower than that of other respondents (15.7% vs. 29.5%).

5 | Discussion

The majority of studies on the pro-sustainable behaviours of tourists (López-Sánchez and Pulido-Fernández 2016; Landon, Woosnam, and Boley 2018; Wu, Font, and Liu 2021; Loureiro, Guerreiro, and Han 2022) do not identify differences in tourist behaviours based on the generational cohort. Recent studies analyse Gen Zers' pro-environmental travel behaviour (Ribeiro et al., 2023). The novelty of this study is that it provides insights into the attitudes, knowledge, behaviour and commitment of Gen Z tourists towards sustainability, encompassing all its aspects: economic, social and environmental.

Sustainable tourism is characterised by its long-term ecological sustainability, economic viability and ethical and social equity for local communities. However, even though Generation Z values important aspects of sustainability, the full definition of the concept of sustainability in tourism (or sustainable tourism) is not widely known to them. This research explores, among other issues, how Gen Zers apprehend the concept of sustainable tourism. The results show that for Generation Z there is a strong link between sustainability and environmental responsibility, reducing the importance of other aspects linked to social or economic issues. These results are consistent with more recent studies that also demonstrated Gen Zers' increased concern about environmental issues compared to previous generations (Prayag et al., 2022). Analysing the tourism sector specifically, Seyfi, Hall, and Strzelecka (2023) argue that Gen Zers' environmental concern is reflected in their travel habits.

The results show that over half of the young tourists (56%) link sustainability to the destination's capacity to fulfil all their needs. Other studies indicate that for Gen Zers, egoistic motives prevail over altruistic ones (Vehapi and Mitic 2021). In other words, egoistic values significantly determine Zers' purchase intention (Dimitrova and Ilieva 2023). But, according to Riveiro et al. (2023), egoistic values can positively influence Gen Zers' environmental concerns.

Although according to Georgescu and Herman (2020), Generation Z's sustainable consumption habits are more prominent at home than when they travel elsewhere.

Some studies demonstrate that the vast majority (73%) of Gen Z is more willing to pay more for sustainability (First Insight 2020). However, the approach of generic consumers cannot be directly transferred to behaviour as tourist consumers. Some studies analyse the willingness of Generation Z to pay for more sustainable products, referred to as ethical, responsible or 'green' items (Dabija, Bejan, and Dinu 2019; Su et al. 2019; Anh, Huang, and Oanh 2020; Gomes, Lopes, and Nogueira 2023). However, there is limited research on their willingness to pay for sustainable tourism consumption. In this research, Gen Zers would be less willing to pay more for a more sustainable destination than other tourists (10.1% vs. 25.7%). When quantifying, within that limited 10% willing to pay, the additional costs they would be willing to assume to enhance the sustainability of the destination, the majority (70.4%) expressed a willingness to pay only an additional 10%, compared to other tourists, where the percentage willing to pay this amount increases to 55.5%.

According to Georgescu and Herman (2020), Generation Z's sustainable consumption habits are more prominent at home than when they travel elsewhere. The unwillingness to pay more for sustainability by Gen Z should not be misinterpreted. It should be emphasised that, although certain tourists are not economically involved in issues related to sustainability, this does not mean that they do not value it. In that case, the younger tourists offered a wide range of explanations justifying why they were willing/unwilling to pay for sustainable tourism and why they had one specific behaviour. The main reasons given for refusing to pay more are the following: (i) the government should be the entity that assumes these investments; (ii) companies generate the greatest impacts, so they must assume these costs and (iii) a sustainable destination does not have to be more expensive but should be more efficient at using its resources (Table 7). What is certain is the price is one of the variables that can most affect decision-making among tourists, although their values will interfere with this process (Yan and Chai 2021), and some studies established that demand is seen to be inelastic in the face of a moderate increase in prices at the destination (Durán-Román, Cárdenas-García, and Pulido-Fernández 2021).

Another factor influencing their reluctance to pay for sustainability is their limited travel budget compared to other tourists (574€ vs. 1120€), making them one of the most budget-conscious generations. According to a recent study revealing generational travel trends (Expedia 2023), nearly 80% stated that budget was a primary factor when researching and booking their last trip. Some

TABLE 7 | Differences between Gen Zers and other generations tourist willingness to pay for a more sustainable destination.

Variable	Category	All other tourists		Gen Zers		p^1	p^2	p^3
		Mean (SD)	Median (IQR)	<i>n</i>	%			
Cost of the trip (Euros)	Mean (SD)	1121.85 (967.05)		574.15 (664.15)		<0.001 ^b	>0.999 ^b	<0.001 ^b
	Median (IQR)	900 (100)		350 (550)				
Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%			
Would be willing to pay more for a sustainable destination	Yes	236	25.7	27	10.1	<0.001 ^a		
	No	684	74.3	241	89.9			
Reasons why they are not willing to pay more								
I am not interested in these issues (<i>N</i> =925)	Yes	350	51.2	75	31.1	<0.001 ^a		
	No	334	48.8	166	68.9			
I prefer to spend my money on social aspects (<i>N</i> =425)	Yes	18	5.1	10	13.3	0.009 ^a		
	No	332	94.9	65	86.7			
I don't live here, I'm just a tourist here, and this is a problem for the people here, not for me (<i>N</i> =425)	Yes	19	5.4	13	17.3	<0.001 ^a		
	No	331	94.6	62	82.7			
I do not believe in this kind of contribution; in the end, nothing will change (<i>N</i> =425)	Yes	179	51.1	55	73.3	<0.001 ^a		
	No	171	48.9	20	26.7			
I would like to, but at the moment I can't afford it (<i>N</i> =425)	Yes	52	14.9	17	22.7	0.096 ^a		
	No	298	85.1	58	77.3			
I contribute through my taxes; the government should be making these investments (<i>N</i> =425)	Yes	120	34.3	28	37.3	0.615 ^a		
	No	230	65.7	47	62.7			
companies generate the biggest impacts, so they should be covering these costs (<i>N</i> =425)	Yes	56	16	34	45.3	<0.001 ^a		
	No	294	84	41	54.7			
I do not think that a sustainable destination has to be more expensive, just more efficient in the use of its resources (<i>N</i> =425)	Yes	180	51.4	40	53.3	0.764 ^a		
	No	170	48.6	35	46.7			
I don't have enough information to make a decision (<i>N</i> =425)	Yes	158	45.1	13	17.3	<0.001 ^a		
	No	192	54.9	62	82.7			
Variable	Category	All other tourists		Gen Zers		p^1	p^2	p^3
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%			
How much more would you be willing to pay for a sustainable destination? (<i>N</i> =263)	10%	131	55.5	19	70.4	0.010 ^c		
	20%	10	4.2	1	3.7			
	30%	3	1.3	0	0			
	40%	2	0.8	0	0			
	50%	5	2.1	0	0			
	75%	1	0.4	0	0			
	Double	7	3	5	18.5			
	Any amount	77	32.6	2	7.4			

(Continues)

TABLE 7 | (Continued)

Variable	Category	All other tourists		Gen Zers		p^1	p^2	p^3
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%			
If the company informs you that, on a voluntary basis, it allocates part of the profits from the sale of its products to projects to improve the sustainability of this destination, do you recognise that this is responsible behaviour?	Yes	862	93.7	228	85.1	<0.001 ^a		
	No	58	6.3	40	14.9			
If the company proposes that you pay an additional amount to the cost of your trip, assuring you through a contract that it will match that amount and that all that money will be spent on projects to improve the sustainability of this destination, would you contribute that extra amount?	Yes	182	19.8	12	4.5	<0.001 ^a		
	No	738	80.2	256	95.5			
Additional amount you would contribute in the previous situation (Euros) (<i>N</i> = 194)	Mean (SD)	37.69 (62.47)		28.42 (63.75)		0.852 ^b	0.574 ^b	0.426 ^b
	Median (IQR)	10 (47)		10 (5)				
If the company proposes that you pay an additional amount to the cost of your trip, assuring you that you will be able to deduct this amount from your income tax, or company tax, for the following year, would you contribute that additional amount?	Yes	165	17.9	11	4.1	<0.001 ^a		
	No	755	82.1	257	95.9			
Additional amount you would contribute in the previous situation (Euros) (<i>N</i> = 176)	Mean (SD)	54.06 (53.53)		145.55		0.242 ^b	0.879 ^b	0.121 ^b
	Median (IQR)	40 (65)		(355.8) 20 (55)				

Variable	Category	All other tourists		Gen Zers		p^1
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
How would you react if a tax were established that all tourists paid to fund projects to improve the sustainability of this destination?	I would stop spending my holiday at this destination and look for another cheaper one	217	23.6	101	37.7	<0.001 ^a
	I have my second home here, if it's only charged to tourists that would be perfect because they would stop coming and it would be quieter here.	7	0.8	6	2.2	
	I would pay it, provided I am certain that it is really going to be used to improve the sustainability of the destination	189	20.5	17	6.3	
	I would not pay for it. A tax would only fill the coffers of the Local Council, which would spend the money on whatever it wanted and the destination would stay the same or get worse	198	21.5	99	36.9	
	I would pay the tax because it would make this destination more expensive and fewer people would come, making it a more select destination	38	4.1	3	1.1	
	I don't have enough information to make a decision	271	29.5	42	15.7	

Note: ¹two-tailed *p*-value; ²one-tailed *p*-value (left); ³one-tailed *p*-value (right).

Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation; IQR, interquartile range.

^aChi-squared.

^bMann-Whitney *U*.

^cLikelihood ratio.

Source: Authors' own.

studies indicate that the average spending of Generation Z during the summer is 580 euros. These travellers primarily book their vacations online-barely resorting to traditional travel agencies and prioritise price in 71% of cases (IAB, 2023). These findings align with the results from this research, where the average tourist expenditure was 574.15 euros, and economic considerations were identified as one of the key factors in their travel preferences (Table 4). Considered budget-conscious, the youngest cohorts of global travellers are frequently neglected by destination authorities and tourism suppliers. However, Generation Z plays a key role in shaping consumer demand, and in acting as an agent of change in destinations (European Travel Commission 2020).

6 | Conclusions

Diverse generational cohorts exhibit disparate attitudes toward travel, particularly among younger segments. These differences manifest in distinct priorities, values and an overall unique perspective on their travel objectives. According to Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2019), future tourism demand is projected to be driven by demographics and future travel patterns that are unique to different generations.

With new generations come new values and ideals—Gen Z is no different. Value-based decisions are a defining attribute of this generation, guiding its travel choices. Based on the results obtained, Gen Z has a good understanding and a high level of commitment towards sustainable tourism. The results reveal that Gen Z emphasises working towards the sustainability of tourist destinations (78.4%), highlighting a robust connection between sustainability and environmental responsibility. In comparison with the rest of the tourists, Gen Zers prioritise choosing the most economical option. But this is logical considering their limited budget for travelling (574€).

Considering the contributions of this study to understanding tourist behaviour regarding destination sustainability, pricing strategies (upwards) are not recommended as a differentiation strategy if the goal is to capture the attention of younger tourists. First and foremost, this segment must understand what sustainability means for the destination and convey the importance of sustainability as its core value. They should be participants, not spectators. As the first fully digitally-native generation, Gen Zers are highly skilled at using tech to satisfy their needs at all stages of their journey, requiring destinations to adapt their approach to marketing and product development, particularly through using highly engaging content across multiple platforms.

For Generation Z, social media is key to getting information before travelling, such as choosing a destination. Young users trust the opinions of their community to influence their travel decisions greatly, so destinations must be present on their social media platforms and must be able to effectively communicate why they are sustainable and how Gen Zers can be part of the transition to more sustainable tourism. For example, developing a loyalty program and making discounts available on certain social media activities would be attractive to them. Sweepstakes always have an exciting effect on members of a generation. Generation Z exhibits a strong inclination towards

information technology and diverse communication channels. Therefore, it is recommended to leverage these platforms to engage with members of this generation. For instance, capitalise on Instagram's evolving functionalities to offer interactive references and web-based information using QR codes or local apps.

Concerning the limitations of this study, it is important to note that, given Generation Z is still evolving and being observed in real time, awaiting the consolidation of current data is necessary. This would facilitate a comparative study to juxtapose their behaviour and usage against other generations, distinguishing aspects specific to their age and generational differences. The question arises: will distinct behaviours persist as they mature, or will they adopt habits akin to millennials and preceding generations?

Another aspect to consider is that in the tourism sector, treating Generation Z as a homogeneous entity is not viable. The disparities are strong between young people born in 1990 or soon after and the youngest ones. Teenagers have little influence on destination choices, and have a very basic knowledge of the places visited.

This research introduces new avenues for future investigations. While the study is concentrated on comprehending the sustainable behaviour of Gen Zers, exploring the segmentation of other tourists into distinct generations would be compelling for subsequent research. This approach would facilitate comparative analysis across various generations, including the silent generation, baby boomers, generation X and millennials.

Additionally, it is proposed as a future line of research to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the data, such as examining potential differences among various groups of Gen Z respondents (e.g., employed vs. unemployed, first-time visitors vs. repeat visitors). Finally, it is proposed to obtain data on the behaviour of Gen Z tourists in different destinations (cultural, sun and beach, etc.) to discern whether the destination is a determining variable in the sustainable behaviour of Generation Z.

Data Availability Statement

Research data are not shared.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.