



# Muslim-Friendly Tourism as Sustainable Tourism: A Multidimensional Evaluation Framework for Tourists and Destinations

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**Abstract.** Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) is increasingly growing in the global tourism industry. Muslim Travellers (MT) have specific cultural practices, faith traditions and sensitivities to be understood and respected, to create an inclusive environment. Integrating Muslim practices into tourism means the enhancement of the experience of Muslim travellers, also contributing to a broader form of sustainable tourism, promoting cultural diversity, environmental respect and social inclusion, as well as new opportunities for local development. This integration implies an effort both by the destinations, to understand and respect Muslim culture and by MT, to adopt responsible and sustainable behaviour towards the host communities. In this framework, the implementation of the circular economy model in the tourism sector can represent a strategy to successfully implement MFT sustainably and thus consider its impacts in a multidimensional perspective (i.e. its contribution to the reduction of environmental impacts, to the enhancement of social inclusion and intercultural promotion, to conservation and respect of tangible and intangible values). This research proposes two evaluation frameworks to orient MFT towards the achievement of SDGs from a human-centred perspective. The evaluation frameworks address two stakeholder groups: the Muslim Travellers (MT) and the Tourist Facilities and Services (TFS). They consist of two main matrices: the Muslim Travellers Matrix (MTM), to assess the circularity of the MT behaviours and to orient them in a more sustainable perspective, and the Tourist Facilities and Services Matrix (TFSM), to assess the circularity of the tourist Facilities and Services, in terms of cultural inclusiveness, i.e. the capacity to meet the needs of MT. The findings highlight the potential of MFT in contributing to the achievement of SDGs, both from the demand side (MT) and from the offer side (TFS). These evaluation frameworks represent a tool to assess and monitor the impact of MFT and also support in decision-making to orient choices in development strategies.

**Keywords:** Muslim-Friendly Tourism · Sustainable Tourism · Circular Economy · Multidimensional Indicators

## 1 Introduction

In the global tourism scenario, there is a noticeable increase in awareness and respect for diverse cultures and traditions. This trend has given rise to a movement that actively embraces diversity in all its manifestations. In this context, Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) emerges as a rapidly expanding phenomenon, responding to the growing demand for an inclusive travel experience that respects the practices and values of the Muslim community.

According to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2023 [1], by 2022, international Muslim arrivals had already reached 68% of pre-pandemic levels and significant growth is expected of 230 million Muslim arrivals and \$225 billion in spending by 2028.

With the restarting (after the COVID-19 pandemic) of international tourism, some destinations have seized this opportunity by improving connectivity, implementing effective marketing campaigns, creating an atmosphere and improving facilities to meet the needs of Muslim Travellers (MT). Indonesia and Malaysia share the top position, followed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Qatar [1]. France and Germany are among the European countries that have invested the most in MFT while Italy, despite having all the prerequisites such as a very long history, culture, art, and monuments, is still poorly structured to attract this elite tourism [2, 3].

Adopting the approach and methodology used by the authors in previous researches on the tourism sector, this contribution aims to provide evaluation frameworks that can be considered also as operational guidelines, addressed to two stakeholder groups: the Muslim Travellers (MT) and the Tourist Facilities and Services (TFS). The aim is to support both tourists and destinations in adopting appropriate behaviour and measures for an effective contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

In Sect. 2 an overview of the existing scientific literature on Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) is presented, also focusing on the importance of its contribution to sustainable tourism through the implementation of circular economy strategies. In Sect. 3, the methodology adopted in this research is presented and two evaluation frameworks are proposed integrating the results of previous studies of the authors on sustainable tourism and the main trends and issues emerging from Global Muslim Travel Index 2023. In Sect. 4, the two evaluation frameworks are in-depth presented and described, highlighting the role of MFT in contributing to sustainable tourism from a human-centred perspective. Limitations of the proposal and further research steps are addressed in Sect. 5.

## 2 The Muslim-Friendly Tourism

Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) is a field of study that is still at an early stage, although it is a growing phenomenon [1, 4–6] and that has become an attractive sector also for non-Muslim tourists [7–9].

Many researchers have approached this topic from different points of view, which can be summarised in these four main categories: marketing strategy [10–13], customer

behaviour [14, 15], halal<sup>1</sup> tourism products and services [16, 17] and business processes [18, 19].

One of the most common marketing strategies is the offer of tourist packages tailored to the needs of MT [20] in which tourist agencies and tour operators play an important role in developing a tourist offer suitable for MT [21, 22]. As some studies show [23, 24], the quality of the Muslim experience boosts MFT destinations' behavioural intention. In particular, prayer facilities, halal food, Islamic dress code and general Islamic morality are the four main attributes that have significant relationships with customer satisfaction [25]. These aspects are crucial, especially for halal tourism products and services, among which the main categories involved are accommodations, restaurants and social spaces, as they determine the success of the tourist experience for MT.

To welcome MT and to avoid unrespecting their religion, facilities and services need to be familiar with their culture and rules of behaviour [26]. Facilities and services have to also include halal food on their menus, provide prayer mats in the rooms, have separate rooms for men and women, not equip mini bars with alcohol, provide arrows or compasses to indicate the direction of Mecca, employ staff who can speak Arabic [27], offering food that is not pork-based, [26]. In addition, the services offered have to also guarantee impeccable standards of hygiene [28].

In general, integrating Muslim practices into tourism can not only enhance the experience of the MT but can also contribute to a broader form of sustainable tourism, promoting cultural diversity, environmental respect and social inclusion, as well as new opportunities for local development [29]. This integration implies an effort by the destination's side to understand and respect Muslim culture and, at the same time, it also requires an effort by MT to adopt responsible and sustainable behaviour towards the host communities. Only through this dual involvement, MFT can truly contribute to sustainable tourism, providing services, culturally sensitive environments and facilities that respect Islamic practices [30].

In this framework, the implementation of the circular economy model in the tourism sector can represent a strategy to successfully implement MFT in a sustainable way [31]. This model, based on the concept that waste from a process can become a nutrient for another process [32], can be adopted to produce multidimensional impacts, referring not only to the reduction of environmental costs (energy consumption, waste production, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, etc.) but also to the enhancement of social inclusion and intercultural promotion, through dialogue and cultural exchange, cooperation actions between people belonging to different cultures, conservation and respect of tangible and intangible values [31, 33].

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'halal' means everything that is permitted or allowed under Islamic law, determining rules of behaviour that affect every aspect of Muslim social life.

### 3 Research Methodology

The methodology adopted in this research is divided into three phases:

1. A desk research to analyse the current state of the MFT sector in terms of market development, travellers' needs, and TFS, through the main international strategic policy documents focused on this sector.
2. An analysis of existing frameworks on the evaluation of MFT implementation and to orient strategies and policies (Sect. 4).
3. The elaboration of two evaluation frameworks for two stakeholder groups, the Muslim Travellers Matrix and the Tourism Facilities and Services Matrix, to orient MFT towards the achievement of SDGs from a human-centred perspective.

The aforementioned matrices have been elaborated starting from studies previously developed by the authors on the topic of multidimensional evaluation tools for circular tourism [31, 34] and the GMTI Report 2023 [1].

In the previous studies of Bosone and Nocca [31] and of Nocca *et al.* [34], Human Circular Tourism (HCT) is proposed as a strategy to operationalize the principles of sustainable tourism in the circular economy perspective, thus reducing the negative impacts produced by tourism on different dimensions (environmental, economic, social, cultural).

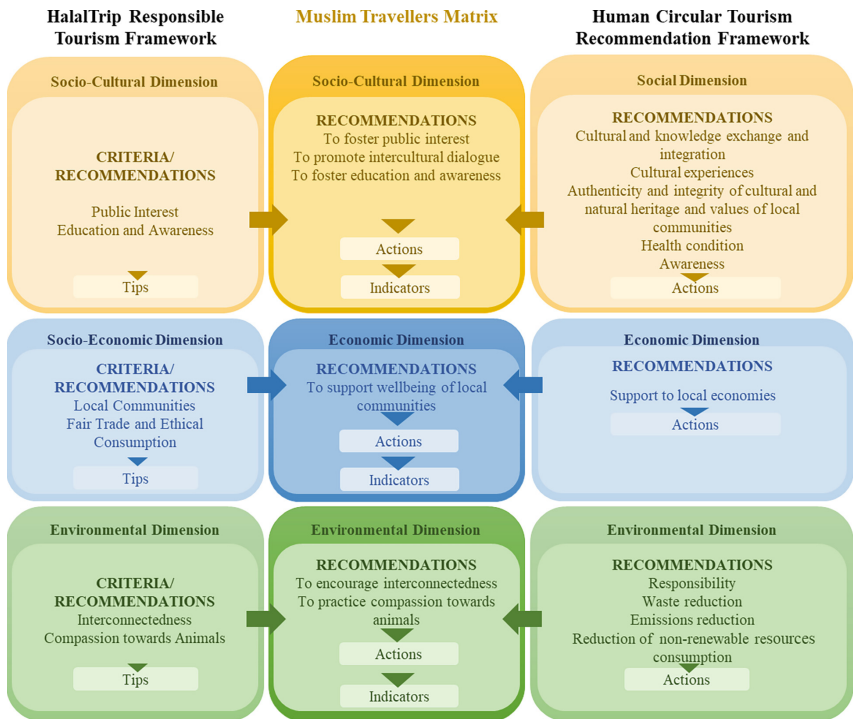
However, to achieve sustainability goals from a circular economy perspective, a solid cultural base is needed from all actors and stakeholders involved in the tourism experience. This cultural base, which influences people's behaviour, can be addressed and strengthened through appropriate policies and strategies implemented by governments. The behaviour of tourists is crucial in the transition of tourism towards the circular economy model, as their choices and actions can contribute to the success (or failure) of the implementation of circular strategies. To this aim, Bosone and Nocca [31] developed a questionnaire focused on understanding travellers' point of view on sustainable and circular tourism, their awareness, and their actual behaviour in the circular economy perspective [31]. Starting from the questionnaire results, a framework based on Recommendations, Actions and multidimensional Indicators (i.e. cultural, social, economic and environmental) was developed to operationalise the HCT model and support the various stakeholders in the tourism sector in identifying efficient policies and strategies [34].

In the GMTI Report 2023, two evaluation frameworks are presented, respectively related to Muslim Travellers (MTRTF - Muslim Traveller Responsible Tourism Framework) and to Facilities and Services in a destination (ACES Framework - Access, Communication, Environment and Services).

The MTRTF is a pioneering initiative designed by Halal Trip, a global travel platform for MT, to analyse the values and expectations of Muslim travellers in the broader context of sustainable and responsible tourism.

The ACES Framework aims to assess how MT consider inclusive and supportive TFS in a destination. The assessment proposed by this framework is based on four key areas: ease of access to the destination, communication, internal and external, by the destination, environment at the destination, and services provided by the destination.

In order to elaborate the Muslim Travellers Matrix (MTM) the MTRTF and the HCTF were taken as a reference: in particular, Dimensions, Criteria and Practical Tips of MTRTF and Dimensions, Recommendations and Actions of HCTF were considered as a basis for the formulation respectively of Dimensions, Recommendations and Actions for MTM (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Methodological framework for the development of Muslim Travellers Matrix

In order to elaborate the Tourist Facilities and Services Matrix (TFSM) the GMTI ACES 3.0 Framework was taken as a reference: in particular, criteria and sub-criteria were considered as a basis for the formulation respectively of recommendations and actions (Fig. 2).

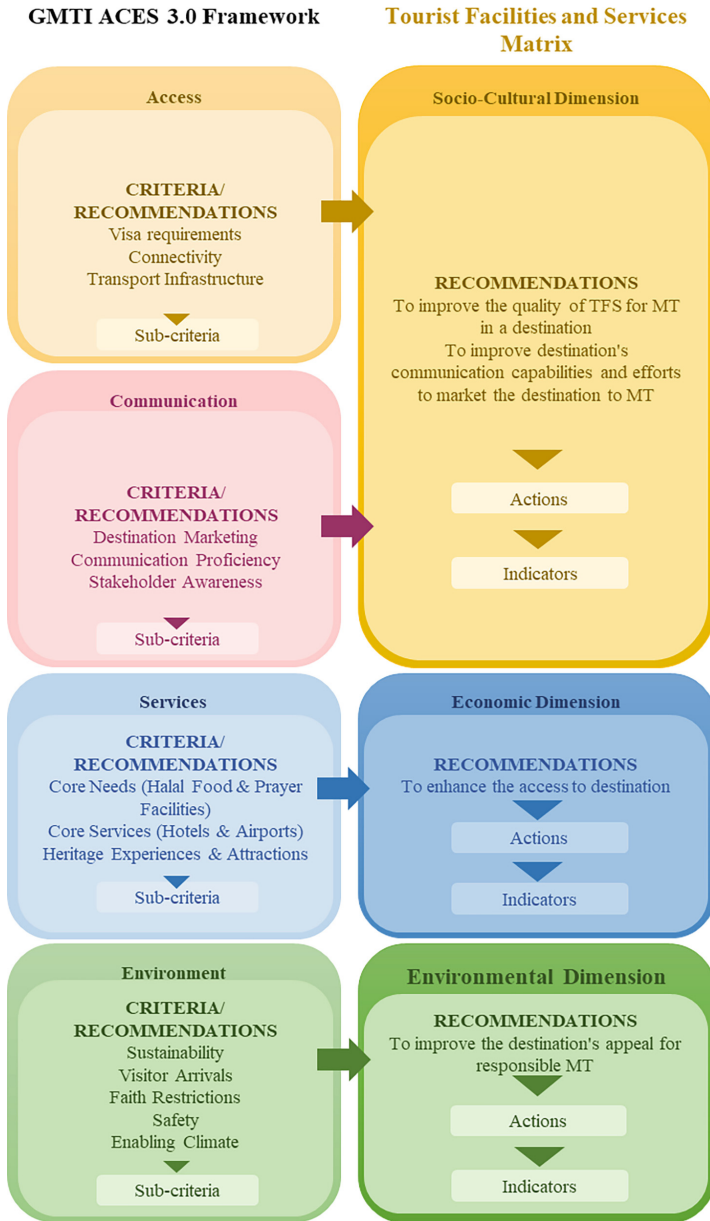


Fig. 2. Methodological framework for the development of Tourism Facilities and Services Matrix

## 4 The Role of Muslim-Friendly Tourism in Contributing to Sustainable Tourism from a Circular Perspective: An Evaluation Framework

The diversity of interpretations and the lack of real knowledge of the MFT market are some of the main obstacles to be overcome to implement it [6]. The development of a multidimensional approach should be a solution to overcome this knowledge gap and to analyse halal tourism, offering numerous different opportunities for scholars to find strategic formulations able to contribute to the advancement of research on both a theoretical and practical level [35].

To implement MFT, evaluation tools can play an important role both in the ex-post phase to assess the multidimensional impacts of MFT, and also in the ex-ante phase to forecast these impacts for supporting and orienting decision-makers in making decisions aimed at achieving sustainable development goals.

Thus, the evaluation tools can foster a tourism environment that reflects the needs and values of MT, contributing to greater customer satisfaction and the success of MFT initiatives, as well as to the development of tourist destinations in a more sustainable and intercultural perspective.

There is a very wide gap in the literature on the use of evaluation frameworks in MFT implementation. Existing studies propose evaluation approaches based on the definition of criteria and guidelines to evaluate specific aspects: for example, Mohtar *et al.* [36] develop a taxonomy to develop an assessment tool for the beauty and wellness industry's readiness to embrace Muslim-Friendly Beauty and Wellness implementation. Rahman and Zailani [37] develop and explore a theoretical framework for the effective outcomes of the service supply chain management of Muslim-Friendly medical tourism.

As stated above, for MFT to contribute effectively to sustainable tourism, a twofold empowerment is needed: both by the destinations' side (in terms of facilities and services available for MT) and by the MT side (in terms of sustainable and responsible behaviours adopted during the tourism experience).

In order to assess how MFT can contribute to more sustainable tourism through the adoption and implementation of circular economy strategies, it is necessary to adopt appropriate evaluation frameworks able also to support and orient the choices of all stakeholders involved in this sector, towards a broader intercultural dialogue in the context of international tourism.

Starting from the aforementioned considerations, this study proposes an evaluation framework consisting of two matrices: MTM and TFSM.

They are both based on recommendations, actions and indicators organised in the four dimensions of sustainability: environmental, social, cultural and economic.

Table 1 shows the guidelines and related evaluation matrix for MT to assess the circularity of the tourists' behaviours and to orient them in a more sustainable perspective.

Table 2 shows the guidelines and related evaluation Tourist Facilities and Services Matrix (TFSM) to assess the circularity of the tourist Facilities and Services TFS in terms of cultural inclusiveness, i.e. the capacity to meet the needs of MT.

In both matrices, for each indicator, the identification number and the unit of measurement are also specified.

The evaluation framework proposed uses both quantitative and qualitative rating scales to include tangible and intangible aspects in the assessment. In particular, the Likert scale was used to assess subjective and perceptual aspects deduced through questionnaires and interviews with stakeholders developed in our abovementioned studies [31, 34]. It allows including opinions, attitudes, and satisfaction levels of the different stakeholders in the evaluation process.

#### TFS.

The environmental dimension aims to highlight aspects related to the choice of TFS with recognised environmental certifications, the purchase of products from companies that adopt environmentally friendly behaviour and the attention of the tourist in daily behaviour regarding energy consumption habits or the choice of means of transport.

From an economic perspective, the suggested acts are connected to how tourists help local economies by, for instance, purchasing handcrafted goods and other locally produced goods, funding regional initiatives, etc.

At the social and cultural level, indicators are related to integration and cultural/knowledge exchange among tourists and between tourists and local communities, including aspects related to mutual respect for the authenticity and integrity of the heritage and values of both the host community and MT. This is recognized as one of the main aspects that characterizes the concept of sustainable tourism from a circular perspective [34].

### 4.1 Muslim-Friendly Tourism and SDGs: The Role of Muslim Travellers

It is recognised internationally that tourism can play a fundamental role in the UN's Agenda 2030 [38], as it produces impacts on human well-being, environmental health, and economic growth and is closely linked with the issues of human rights and climate change [39, 40]. Explicitly, tourism contributes to Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth), Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production), and Goal 14 (Life below water), but it has links also with the other SDGs [41].

In particular, the recommendations for MT in the socio-cultural dimension are linked to fostering public interest and promoting intercultural dialogue involving diverse stakeholders (Goals 16, 17) thus promoting cultural exchange (Goal 4) and integration among individuals from different cultures in a fair trade and ethical way (Goals 5, 10). MFT represents an opportunity to establish small-scale, authentic tourism circuits that engage local expertise and provide fair employment opportunities (Goal 8), stimulating innovation (Goal 9) and making local urban settlements more attractive (Goal 11).

A fruitful and respectful interaction between MT and local communities can improve the well-being of both MT (in a good enjoyment of tourism experience) and of locals (which can be supported through donations to local charities and community causes) (Goal 3).

At the environmental level, MT should be responsible and aware of the impacts of their consumption behaviours and choices (Goal 12), for example by preferring TFS adopt sustainable energy systems (Goals 7, 13), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6) systems, thus preserving ecosystems (Goals 14, 15).

**Table 1.** Muslim Travellers Matrix and Related Impact Indicators

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Unit of measure</b>
<b>Environmental dimension</b>		
<b>Recommendation 1.</b> To encourage interconnectedness		
<b>A1.1</b> To dispose of waste properly, avoiding littering, and recycling whenever possible	<b>I1.1.1</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring to use recyclable products in tourist destination	% per year No. Per year
	<b>I1.1.2</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring they prefer to buy minimally packaged goods	% per year No. Per year
	<b>I1.1.3</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring to carry reusable bags, bottles, and utensils to minimise single-use plastic waste	% per year No. Per year
<b>A1.2</b> To pay attention to energy and water consumption	<b>I1.2</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring to turn off lights, air conditioning, and electronic devices when not in use	% per year No. Per year
	<b>I2.3</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring to take shorter showers and reuse towels	% per year No. Per year
<b>A1.3</b> To prefer TFS certified with internationally recognized green labels	<b>I1.3</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring to prefer TFS certified with internationally recognized green labels	% per year No. Per year
<b>A1.4</b> To choose for slow and clean mobility to minimize overcrowding	<b>I1.4</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT using slow and clean mobility	% per year No. Per year
<b>Recommendation 2.</b> To practice compassion towards animals		
<b>A2.1</b> To avoid visiting attractions that exploit animals for entertainment	<b>I2.1</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring to avoid visiting attractions that exploit animals for entertainment	% per year No. Per year
<b>A2.2</b> To choose wildlife experiences that promote ethical and responsible interactions	<b>I2.2</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT who chose wildlife experiences	% per year No. Per year

*(continued)*

**Table 1.** (continued)

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Unit of measure</b>
<b>A2.3</b> To avoid purchasing products made from endangered species or animal parts	<b>I2.3</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring to purchase products not made from endangered species or animal parts	% per year No. Per year
<b>A2.4</b> To report any instances of animal mistreatment to local authorities or animal welfare organizations	<b>I2.4</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT reporting inappropriate or discriminatory behaviours to animals	% per year No. Per year
<b>Economic dimension</b>		
<b>Recommendation 3.</b> To support the well-being of local communities		
<b>A3.1</b> To donate and contribute to local charities and community causes	<b>I3.1</b> Annual amount of donations by MT for supporting local communities	€ per year
<b>Recommendation 4.</b> To support fair trade and ethical consumption		
<b>A4.1</b> To support local artisans and small businesses	<b>I4.1</b> Average daily expenditure of MT for buying local products	€ per day
<b>A4.2</b> To support social enterprises that invest in the local community	<b>I4.2</b> Annual amount of donations by MT for supporting local social enterprises	€ per year
<b>Socio-cultural dimension</b>		
<b>Recommendation 5.</b> To foster public interest		
<b>A5.1</b> To support TFS that adhere to fair trade and ethical practices	<b>I5.1</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring to choose fair trade and ethical TFS	% per year No. Per year
<b>A5.2</b> To prioritize TFS that treat their employees fairly	<b>I5.2</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring to prefer TFS that treat their employees fairly	% per year No. Per year
<b>Recommendation 6.</b> To promote intercultural dialogue		
<b>A6.1</b> To learn about local intangible cultural heritage (customs, traditions, etc.)	<b>I6.1</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring to have informed and learnt about local intangible cultural heritage before and during the trip	% per year No. Per year
<b>A6.2</b> To learn a bit of the local language to foster positive interactions	<b>I6.2</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT declaring that they have learnt a bit of the local language	% per year No. Per year

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Unit of measure</b>
<b>A6.3</b> To choose local guides to better know local cultural tangible and intangible heritage	<b>I6.3</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT who have chosen local guides	% per year No. Per year
<b>A6.4</b> To engage in responsible volunteer opportunities that benefit the community	<b>I6.4.1</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT participating in activities with the local community	% per year No. Per year
	<b>I6.4.2</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT participating in activities organized by the local community	% per year No. Per year
<b>Recommendation 7.</b> To foster education and awareness		
<b>A7.1</b> To share responsible travel experiences and tips on social media to inspire others	<b>I7.1</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT sharing feedback about tourist destinations and experiences	% per year No. Per year
<b>A7.2</b> To stay informed about the latest sustainable travel practices and trends	<b>I7.2</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT sharing information on sustainable TFS that they have visited and that should be known and promoted	% per year No. Per year

In general, sustainable tourism relies on energy, health, and wealth as fundamental elements that enhance well-being and quality of life also contributing to environmental preservation (Fig. 3).

#### **4.2 Muslim-Friendly Tourism and SDGs: The Role of Tourism Facilities and Services**

Also, the growth of more Muslim-Friendly destinations can contribute to the achievement of SDGs. By promoting tourism that is inclusive and respectful of local cultures, Muslim-Friendly destinations can help create job opportunities and increase incomes in host communities (Goals 1, 8). By creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for MT, Muslim-friendly TFS can help promote peace, tolerance and intercultural understanding (Goal 16), contributing also to improving the level of awareness among stakeholders about the specific needs of MT (Goal 17). Cultural and heritage preservation should be at the centre of Muslim-Friendly destinations' strategies, offering services and infrastructure that respect the needs of MT, such as halal food options and prayer-friendly facilities (Goals 3, 5, 10).

The adoption of ecologically sensitive solutions, such as responsible management of natural resources (Goals 6, 14, 15) and the shift to renewable energy systems (Goal

**Table 2.** Tourist Facilities and Services Matrix and Related Impact Indicators

Actions	Indicators	Unit of measure
<b>Environmental dimension</b>		
<b>Recommendation 1.</b> To improve the destination's appeal for responsible MT		
<b>A1.1</b> To incentivise the destination's efforts towards sustainability	<b>I1.1.1</b> Amount (percentage and/or number) of TFS certified with internationally recognized green labels	% No
	<b>I1.1.2</b> Presence of measures for Islamic heritage preservation	Yes/Not
	<b>I1.1.3</b> Contribution of the destination supply to the enhancement of MT individual development	Likert scale
<b>Economic dimension</b>		
<b>Recommendation 2.</b> To enhance the access to destination		
<b>A2.1</b> To improve air connectivity between the destination and Muslim outbound markets	<b>I2.1.1</b> Availability of direct flights	Yes/Not
	<b>I2.1.2</b> Frequency of direct flights	No./week
<b>A2.2</b> To simplify visa requirement	<b>I2.2</b> Average time required to obtain a visa	No. of days
<b>Socio-cultural dimension</b>		
<b>Recommendation 3.</b> To improve the quality of TFS for MT in a destination		
<b>A3.1</b> To ensure the general level of safety and security for MT	<b>I3.1.1</b> Level of Overall Perceived Safety by MT	Likert scale
	<b>I3.1.2.</b> Presence of security services	Yes/Not
<b>A3.2</b> To reduce Faith Restrictions in terms of religious practices	<b>I3.2.1</b> Presence of restrictions or limitations for MT	Yes/Not
	<b>I3.2.2</b> Influence of restrictions on the overall experience and perception of the destination by MT	Likert scale
<b>A3.3</b> To enable innovation and entrepreneurship	<b>I3.3.1</b> Appeal and suitability of policy frameworks for innovation and entrepreneurship for MT	Likert scale
	<b>I3.3.2</b> Easy access to finance for MT	

*(continued)*

**Table 2.** (continued)

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Unit of measure</b>
<b>A3.4</b> To improve the appeal and suitability of the destination for MT	<b>I3.4</b> Annual amount (percentage and/or number) of MT arrivals	% per year No. Per year
	<b>I3.5.1</b> Amount (percentage and/or number) of TFS offering Halal-certified food	% No
<b>A3.5</b> To improve the TFS offer to the standards of Muslim culture	<b>I3.5.2</b> Amount (percentage and/or number) of TFS offering prayer spaces	% No
	<b>I3.5.3</b> Amount (percentage and/or number) of TFS offering ablution facilities	% No
	<b>I3.6.1</b> Presence of Halal food options in restaurants	Yes/Not
<b>A3.6</b> To improve the Muslim-Friendliness of airports in a destination	<b>I3.6.2</b> Presence of Prayer Rooms	Yes/Not
	<b>I3.6.3</b> Presence of ablution facilities	Yes/Not
	<b>I3.7.1</b> Number of historical Islamic sites	No
<b>A3.7</b> To improve and emphasize Islamic heritage experiences and attractions	<b>I3.7.2</b> Number of cultural and historical Islamic landmarks	No
	<b>I3.7.3</b> Number of Islamic Attractions	No
	<b>Recommendation 4.</b> To improve the destination's communication capabilities and efforts to market the destination to MT	
<b>A4.1</b> To improve the effectiveness of destination marketing in attracting MT by highlighting the destination's Muslim-Friendly offerings	<b>I4.1.1</b> Clarity and comprehensiveness of the information on websites about the destination Muslim-Friendly offerings	Likert Scale
	<b>I4.1.2</b> Availability of dedicated Halal travel guides	Yes/Not
	<b>I4.1.3</b> Presence of media mentions about the destination's Muslim-friendly offerings	Yes/Not
	<b>I4.1.4</b> Availability of promotional campaigns about the destination Muslim-Friendly offerings	Yes/Not
<b>A4.2</b> To ensure communication proficiency in the top 10 languages MT speak	<b>I4.2</b> Number of languages used in the destination among the top 10 languages used by MT <sup>2</sup>	No

(continued)

<sup>2</sup> (English, Arabic, Bahasa, Melayu, Urdu, Turkish, Russian, French, Persian, and German).

**Table 2.** (continued)

Actions	Indicators	Unit of measure
<b>A4.3</b> To improve the level of awareness among stakeholders about the specific needs of MT	<b>I4.3.1</b> Percentage of Muslim population in the destination compared to total population in the destination	%
	<b>I4.3.2</b> Presence of Halal conferences or events	No. Per year
	<b>I4.3.3</b> Awareness of the local community about Halal requirements	Likert scale



**Fig. 3.** Relation between the dimension of Muslim Travellers Matrix and SDGs

7, 13), should make TFS more attractive for responsible MT (Goals 11, 12), ensuring at the same time the environmental protection (Goals 14, 15) (Fig. 4).

This research proposes two evaluation frameworks to orient MFT towards the achievement of SDGs from a human-centred perspective. This perspective focuses on the needs and requirements of today’s users, incorporating also those of future generations, to reduce gaps and injustices. It is oriented towards rebalancing relations between man and the entire ecosystem by adopting a systemic approach to analysing the multiple dimensions involved in development processes.

The systemic approach of the circular economy highlights the importance of closing loops at various levels, considering both processes and products, tangible and intangible aspects, in their different dimensions (environmental, social, economic and cultural).

In the circular economy perspective, all dimensions (cultural, social, environmental, economic) are interconnected, involving several interdependent, complementary and competing sectors [42]. Circular economy represents a model able to generate and regenerate value in multiple dimensions, thus integrating and operationalizing the ecological



**Fig. 4.** Relation between the dimension of the Tourism Facilities and Services Matrix and SDGs

and humanistic paradigms [43] The transition towards a more circular MFT depends on both MT and TFS, on their awareness of the sustainability goals and on their willingness to interact and collaborate [44], thus implementing the human dimension of this sector.

The evaluation frameworks proposed in the circular economy perspective represent the first operational proposal to analyse multidimensional impacts and to orient strategies in the MFT sector, both from the MT and TFS side, grasping the complexity of values involved in this sector. Evaluation frameworks thus conceived can be used as knowledge and awareness-raising tools.

## 5 Discussions and Conclusions

The MFT market presents many development opportunities for destinations and tourism companies worldwide, especially from a sustainable development perspective.

Such opportunities unfold their full potential if businesses and tourist destinations understand the integration of Muslim practices goes beyond simply offering services in line with Muslim culture but does not consist of a deep understanding of, and therefore respect for, the particular cultural practices, faith traditions and sensitivities of MT.

The practices that are gradually opening up in the MFT sector show that there are some emerging trends in this field. Firstly, the growing awareness of the effects of tourism on the environment and society has increased the desire for sustainable travel. MFTs seek eco-conscious options in line with the environmental stewardship principles of their faith. Secondly, the health and wellness tourism industry is booming as people prioritise their well-being. Muslim travellers are very keen on health experiences in line with their religious and cultural needs. Given the specific cultural and religious needs of Muslim travellers, they prefer offers that are culturally sensitive to their needs and habits but at the same time offer authentic experiences. Furthermore, tailor-made travel packages for Muslim travellers can emphasise spiritual growth and skill enhancement, aligning with

their unique needs and interests. These trends are the key factors to invest in for MFT development [1].

In this context, evaluation plays a decisive role in monitoring the impacts of emerging trends and also in guiding development strategies. The proposed evaluation framework represents a first step to defining a tool able to assess the actual contribution of MFT, both by demand and supply side, to sustainable tourism through the adoption and implementation of circular economy strategies. The proposed indicators can be used both as a tool to assess MT behaviour and TFS performance in destinations in an ex-post phase and also to forecast impacts and thus to orient future behaviour, choices and strategies.

A limitation of this research is that the proposed evaluation framework may face the problem of data availability and reliability depending on the application context. Testing the framework would contribute to validating it and identifying any necessary adjustments to make it operational.

The inclusion of qualitative aspects about perceptions and opinions in the framework implies the direct collaboration and involvement of different stakeholders making it more inclusive.

Further research steps will be referred to the testing of the proposed evaluation framework to verify its effectiveness both in evaluating the contribution of MFT to sustainable tourism through circular economy strategies, and in supporting and orienting the choices of all stakeholders involved in this sector, towards a broader intercultural dialogue in the context of international tourism.

**Attributions.** This paper is a result of joint work. In particular: Conceptualization, M.B., F.N., B.P.; theoretical background, M.B., F.N., B.P.; evaluation framework proposal, M.B., F.N.; writing and editing, M.B., F.N., B.P.; writing-review, M.B., F.N.

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