

**SPEAKING WITH RESPECT: HOW CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION
SUPPORTS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

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Abstract: In the context of the globalization of Tourism, intercultural dialogue is becoming an important factor in ensuring social stability in tourist destinations and promoting cultural sensitivity. This study analyzes the cross—cultural competencies of specialists in the tourism industry in the development of sustainable tourism, with the example of Uzbekistan, particularly in cases of misunderstanding caused by cultural differences between Chinese and Uzbek guests. The study is based on Bennett's model of cultural sensitivity and the theory of cultural intelligence (CQ), relying on a mixed-style survey of 20 tourism industry people from different ethnic groups. The results show that while participants find themselves highly flexible and aware, formal training and language barriers still remain an urgent problem. While respondents view cultural heritage preservation and mutual respect as a necessary factor for sustainability, the impact of communication on environmental behavior is insufficiently understood. This article proposes to rethink intercultural competence not as a social skill, but as a strategic resource in tourism management. In particular, the need for institutional approaches to teaching cultural knowledge in culturally changing areas such as Central Asia is justified.

Keywords: intercultural competence, Sustainable Tourism, Cultural Intelligence, Central Asia, intercultural dialogue, tourism management, hospitality industry preparations

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the tourism industry is developing rapidly, which encourages representatives of different cultures to get to know each other, communicate, and have conversations. In such an era of international tourism, it is of great importance to develop a system of intercultural communication and to improve the cultural knowledge of each employee working in the tourism sector. Because a person working in this industry communicates directly with representatives of other cultures, they express his/her opinions to them. Therefore, this knowledge is very important for the conversation to be understandable and based on mutual respect. For example, in the current conditions of Uzbekistan, Uzbek and Chinese business agreements have intensified significantly, and the conversational styles and cultural worldviews of representatives of the two different cultures are very different. The Chinese make actions during a conversation that are considered rude to Uzbeks (chewing loudly, and blowing their noses hard). Such situations will certainly affect their conversations and subsequent thoughts about each other. The focus of this study is on minimizing cultural distortions in sustainable tourism while maximizing the benefits of tourism for the host country. Although intercultural communication is not widely recognized, it can help reduce the differences between hosts and visitors, and contribute to the long-term development of tourism while respecting local values.

Literature Review

Cross-cultural and intercultural communication is the most effective factor in developing Sustainable tourism. Effective communication between tourists and host communities enhances

mutual understanding, prevents cultural confrontations, and encourages responsible travel habits. A clear example of this is Bali, where local communities actively opposed the introduction of Sharia tourism policies. In Bali, in December 2015, a proposal will be made to enforce Sharia laws that are contrary to the local Indian traditions, but the majority of the local population is Balinese Hindu, and even the Muslim population will also oppose it. And this situation has shown that the rings with different cultures in the country show that Muslims and the Hindu population of Bali together have a well-developed intercultural dialogue, developing tourism while maintaining their cultures. (Maharani, V., & Setyorini, H. (2025)

Differences in cultural behavior of tourists also indicate the importance of dialogue adapted to different audiences. Kang, M., & Moscardo, G. (2006) have studied Korean, UK, and Australian travelers and have studied their differing Mannerist attitudes towards environmentally friendly travel. According to the results of the study, special marketing techniques adapted to their cultures are required to encourage people of different nationalities to sustainable tourism. In a similar way, Bordian, M., Gil-Saura, I., etc. (2023) have studied the effects of inextricably reported reports of sustainability in hotels in Spain and Ukraine. Their study found that culturally tailored marketing significantly increased environmental awareness and guest loyalty.

Batat, W., and Prentovic, S. (2014) are those who have examined the role of a systematic approach to promoting sustainability, analyzing online tourism advertising in France, the United Kingdom, and Serbia. They argue that local culture-based communication strategies are more reflective of the audience and address environmental and social issues more effectively. In addition, intercultural communication is important in the prevention and management of conflicts in the field of Tourism. Rui Jiang, Xiaowei Zhang (2024) believe that cultural sensitivity and adaptable communication techniques prevent misunderstandings and form peaceful and positive relationships between guests and hosts.

Anak Agung Inten Mayuni, Ni Nyoman Kertiasih, and Made Subur (2024) analyzed what strategic communication methods locals apply to effectively engage with international tourists using the example of Pakudui ecotourism village in Bali. These practices strengthen mutual respect and support sustainable tourism goals. In a broader theoretical perspective, however, AZAROVA, O. and others (2020) argue that intercultural dialogue is the main tool in ensuring the exchange of values between cultures in international tourism, which is necessary for Sustainable Development.

Zuhui Liao et al. (2025) advance the concept of " globalization " (i.e., combining global and local communication strategies) and explain that this approach increases the inclusiveness and efficiency of tourism practices. This view has also been espoused by Anatolyevich Rubtzov et al. (2019); he has shown that intercultural dialogue promotes regional tourism through the appreciation of cultural values and cooperation between stakeholders. Finally, Fathilah Ismail et al. (2018), in their cross-cultural analysis of island tourism, have revealed how cultural values influence perceptions of destinations and the sustainability of tourism models.

Studies like this in general show that respect-based and context-conscious communication (i.e. high and Low Context cultures) not only enriches the traveler experience, but is also a strategic tool for advancing globally sustainable tourism initiatives in addition. The reason is, this increases the productivity of communication, and businesses better understand one another.

Methodology

Research Design

The research studied how cross-cultural communication supports sustainable tourism, applying a quantitative research method. A survey-based methodology was chosen to gather measurable data about tourism professionals' ideas, experiences, and practices based on intercultural communication in their work and daily life. This survey aims to identify patterns and challenges that influence respectful communication on sustainable tourism outcomes.

Participants and Sampling

During the survey, collected total of 20 respondents. These participants were selected via a purposive sampling method, the main target was chosen from people in tourism-related industries such as hospitality workers, travellers, and tourism managers. The majority of participants were aged 21-30, and from different nationalities (Uzbek, Tajik, Russian, Indonesian, etc.). Their tourism experience also varied from less than one year to 1-3 years.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire provided by Google Forms. The survey questions contain bilingual English and Uzbek to make them more accessible. And its structure consisted of:

1. Demographic part (origin, age, profession, experience)
2. Scaling part by satisfaction and agreement (from 1-5 rate): confidence, cultural awareness, views about sustainability
3. Open-ended questions it is the most crucial part because respondents explained their thoughts better

The survey was shared via social media platforms like Telegram, Instagram, and through email as well.

Data Analysis Methods

All the data were analysed with the help of Microsoft Excel and other MS Office tools.

On this, analytics were applied using these methods:

- a) Cleansing and visualisations of the information
- b) Percentages as well as the distribution of answers
- c) Thematic analysis of open-ended responses (grouped by themes such as language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and the need for basic cultural or language training)

Ethical Consideration

All participants were informed that it was just a survey questionnaire and their private information would not be disclosed to third parties. So that, respondents gave voluntary responses, all responses were collected anonymously, and no identifying info (e.g., names and contacts) was published or retained.

Analysis and Discussion

The bulk of the survey participants are between the ages of 21-30, which makes up 75% of the total participants, the rest are between the ages of 20 and 15%, and those between 31-40 and 41-50 from 5%. Of these, 8 Uzbek, 3 Tajik, 2 Russian, Kazakh, Indonesians, and 1 uzbek-arab, Chinese, and Pakistani people participated. Looking at these indicators, following the study, representatives of different nationalities took part in this survey, and at the same time, their age level is also different. This ensured that he had an intercultural background. Participants ' work activities here are also areas directly related to tourism. For example :

Hospitality worker (Mehmonxona xodimi)	6
Tourism Manager (Turism menejeri)	3
Traveller (Sayyoh)	10
Traveller, manager, gid	1

More than half of the participants (55%) have indicated that they have a tourism preference of less than 1 year, while only 10% of people have defined that they are more than 7 years old, indicating that they are still new to tourism.

This group is culturally diverse however, it is part of the travel sector that does not yet have a great preference. For this reason, the study of their early cultural barriers as well as intercultural knowledge has a very important value.. According to the "development of intercultural sensitivity" model developed by Bennett (Bennett, 1993), these gurung are stages of understanding different cultures, but yet their behaviors may not fully possess the skills of intercultural adaptation.

Results of Sections B

Question	Key Findings
Q5: Confidence in intercultural communication	100% rated 4 or 5 (75% rated 5)
Q6: Language barriers hinder communication	65% agreed (ratings 4-5), 35% neutral
Q7: Awareness of potentially misunderstood behaviors	80% rated 4 or 5, 20% neutral
Q8: Adjust behavior to cultural background	80% rated 4 or 5, 15% neutral
Q9: Miscommunication led to conflict	60% rated 4 or 5, 20% neutral, 15% disagree, only 5% very disagree
Q10: Received training	Only 50% rated 4 or 5; 20% neutral, 30% rated 2 or lower

The data obtained means that there is a high level of self-confidence in communication(Q6) and awareness of possible behavioral misunderstandings(Q7). However, this communication was made difficult by the language barrier, more than half of the respondents confirmed it. In tourism, language acts not only as a means of communication, but also as a symbol of respect and action (Kim, 2005). Neutral responses suggest that when participants move, they may not have fluency or systematic support.

Notably, three-quarters adapt their behavior(Q8) to cultural backgrounds, indicating they have an early sign of intercultural competence(Byram,2020). However, the lack of formal cross-cultural and intercultural communications training (Q10) is concerning, as only 40% received this preparation. The scarcity of training might lead to reinforcing stereotypes and prejudice. Besides that, about the misunderstanding in communication, 60% of respondents agreed that it can lead to conflict. This confirms that while many are communicating, they **are not able to resolve deeper intercultural friction**, such as high-context vs. low-context interaction styles (Hall, 1976), which are rarely intuitive but vital in tourism exchanges.

Results of Section C

Question	Agreement (Rated 4–5)
Q11. Intercultural respect supports sustainability	85%
Q12. Local culture should be preserved by tourists	100%
Q13. Tourists should learn local culture beforehand	84,3%
Q14. Communication affects environmental behavior	45% agreed, 45% neutral (10% disagreed)
Q15. Understanding reduces the negative tourist impact	85%

In the answers to Q11–Q13 questions, respect, learning and preservation of cultural heritage were almost unanimous as decisive factors in achieving sustainability. These results reflect the principles of Sustainable Tourism Development (UNWTO, 2005), meaning that the preservation of cultural heritage is equally important with ecological conservation. Respondents strongly supported the idea that tourism should not violate local values and identity—a particularly important message for areas such as Central Asia where cultural heritage is weak and at the same time an integral part of tourist attraction.

However, in the Q14 question (the impact of communication on environmental behavior), the responses were more neutral. This means that there is insufficient understanding of the impact of respect-based communication on environmentally conscious behaviors such as proper waste disposal, careful treatment of protected areas, or water conservation.

In Q15 results, however, 85% high levels of approval suggest that cross-cultural understanding reduces the harmful effects of tourists. This represents an increasing understanding that disrespect, done unintentionally or unknowingly, can adversely affect both social and environmental systems. This approach is reconciled with the concept of cultural intelligence (CQ) (Earley, P. Christopher (2003) as a component of responsible travel behavior in recent tourism literature.

4.4. Optional Section: Open-Ended Insights (Questions: Q16, Q17)

Reported Challenges (Q16)

Five dominant themes emerged:

- I. **Language barriers** (n = 9)
- II. **Cultural misinterpretation** (e.g., greetings, gestures)
- III. **Taboos and discrimination** (e.g., LGBT, gender, race, religion)

- IV. **Service expectations mismatch**
V. **No significant experience** (n = 3)

Suggested Solutions (Q17)

Participants recommended:

- **Basic language training** and translation tools
- **Cultural awareness programs**
- **Nonverbal communication strategies** (gestures, visuals)
- **Mutual respect and tolerance**

While language barriers have stood out as a major problem, some respondents have also cited deeper cultural inconsistencies as religious sensitivities, gender roles, or differences in regional service delivery. This suggests that culture is not limited to language and that sustainable tourism must actively work with hidden norms and values (Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

Participants offered simple but effective tools — language apps, characters, gesture — and expressed the need to use these along with training and awareness. This means that the solution is not just goodwill, but practical cross-cultural literacy. Interestingly, respondents considered tourists and hosts to be in charge of each other — this bilateral awareness is an important factor in the formation of intercultural cooperation on the path to stability.

Conclusion. The study shows that intercultural dialogue needs to be re-conceptualized in the global tourism system not only as a social tool, but also as an important strategic resource in ensuring sustainable development. Empirical results show that young and culturally diverse tourism professionals and representatives are exhibiting a significant level of awareness and flexibility in intercultural contexts (Byram, 2020). However, this potential is largely limited by language barriers and a lack of systematized intercultural competence training. Especially relevant is the development of sustainable political approaches aimed at increasing communication capacity at the institutional level for developing directions in particular, Uzbekistan and Central Asia. Support for the preservation of cultural heritage, mutual respect and continued learning has been confirmed by many respondents. This suggests that they are increasingly adapting to the principles of sustainable tourism. At the same time, the concepts of the Integrative connection between environmental behavior and culture-based communication on respect have not yet formed sufficiently. This suggests that there is a conceptual gap in sustainability education. Intercultural competencies — including cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003) and context-sensitive sensitivity (Hall, 1976) - should now be considered as a mandatory component within environmental responsibility rather than just a social skill.

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that for politicians and marketing strategies in tourism management, the harmonization of sustainability norms at the global level with local cultural contexts is of decisive importance. Such an approach serves to meet the needs of visitors, strengthen the social-cultural resilience of the host society, and increase commitment to the direction (Liao et al., 2025). By integrating these principles into marketing communications, service personnel training and referral programs for tourists, not only cultural stereotyping and

discord are obtained (Jiang & Zhang, 2024), but tourism is also ensured to become an intercultural bridge and global sustainability mover.

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