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## **GREEN TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE FUNCTION OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*Environmental protection is an inseparable part of tourism development. The modern business environment is increasingly forcing tourism industry stakeholders to implement green practices and protect the environment. Considering the advantages and disadvantages of working conditions in tourism, it is not easy to ensure the implementation of these practices among employees. In this process, the leader plays a key role, with green transformational leadership highlighted in the literature as a suitable solution for the successful implementation of green practices. The paper aims to point out the importance, goals, and benefits of implementing green transformational leadership as a modified leadership style that should contribute to greater employee motivation in implementing green practices in tourism. The paper uses the methods of induction and deduction. In conclusion, green transformational leadership is a suitable mechanism for motivating employees to implement green practices at work and create a green, creative environment.*

**Key Words:** *green transformational leadership, green practices, tourism, green innovations*

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## Introduction

Modern business conditions increasingly impose an obligation on organizations to implement green practices and adopt new green technologies to minimize the harmful impact of their operations on the environment (Abbas, 2024). A particularly important role in implementing green practices is played by organizational leaders, whose task is to familiarize employees with the need for and conditions for introducing these practices, which require an appropriate leadership style. Among the different styles, transformational leadership has emerged as a compelling and influential approach that transcends conventional management understandings and supports the introduction of green practices (Janjua et al., 2024). Transformational leadership is based on a sense of community between leaders and employees, motivating and encouraging employees to learn, be creative, suggest ideas, and introduce changes (Bjekić & Strugar Jelača, 2020). In recent years, a model of transformational leadership has emerged in particular – green transformational leadership (hereinafter GTL), which has attracted the attention of researchers around the world (Ali Hussain et al., 2025). GTL is a leadership style that motivates employees to create value while respecting environmental preservation (Filimonau et al., 2024).

Given the tourism industry's contribution to the global economy and the role of environmental sustainability in tourism development, tourism employees have expressed concern about global climate change and increasingly supported environmental sustainability initiatives over the last twenty years (Mo et al., 2025; Sharma et al., 2025). Green employee behavior, which consequently contributes to the environmental sustainability of an organization, has become a key issue in academic research (Mo et al., 2025). As leaders guide and shape employee behavior, the application of green principles in the tourism industry will depend on the leadership style applied. Research shows that implementing GTL provides benefits to tourism businesses by fostering pro-environmental creativity among employees and strengthening employees' self-efficacy regarding environmental conservation, which further positively impacts green organizational performance (Filimonau et al., 2024) and encourages innovation in tourism (Janjua et al., 2024). The authors point out that research has largely neglected the role of employees' green behavior (Mo et al., 2025) as well as the conditions for creating green services in tourism (Subas et al., 2026). Therefore, there is a critical need to investigate the current state and possibilities for further

use of GTL in tourism, as well as the effects of green orientation of tourism enterprises (Mo et al., 2025).

Based on the above, the paper aims to point out the importance, goals, and benefits of implementing GTL as a modified leadership style that should contribute to greater employee motivation in implementing green practices in tourism. The paper uses the methods of induction and deduction. Starting from individual findings and research results on the application of green practices in tourism, general conclusions about the goals and importance of GTL were drawn using the induction method. By applying the deduction method, we start from the general concept (transformational leadership) to highlight the importance of its modified version (GTL) and its impact on the motivation of employees in tourism.

The paper, in addition to the introduction and conclusion, contains three parts. The first part describes the specificity of green transformation in tourism development by indicating the reasons for focusing on green practices. The second part of the paper presents an overview of the definitions of GTL. The third part points out the results and benefits of implementing GTL in tourism, as well as the necessity of guiding employees towards green practices.

### **Specificity of green transformation in tourism development**

The tourism industry, a dynamic part of the global economy, provides a variety of services and experiences to millions of people around the world (Mahran et al., 2025). Numerous data indicate the growth of this industry. Since 2020, there has been an increase in the number of international tourist arrivals (increased by 4% in 2025), international tourism receipts, number of employees, and occupancy rates (UN Tourism, 2026). Recent research (Mahran et al., 2025) shows that the expansion of this industry is increasingly influenced by increased environmental awareness and consumer transformation towards green practices. In the implementation of green practices, employees who are committed to environmental protection and adopt such practices within their organizations play a key role (Mahran et al., 2025). In this context, recent research identifies GTL as an effective mechanism for motivating employees to achieve green goals (Subas et al., 2026). Investment in GTL provides significant benefits to tourism and tourism enterprises, including lower costs, improved operational efficiency, and increased employee satisfaction and morale (Mahran et al., 2025).

By pointing out the importance of employees for the development of tourism, it also imposes an obligation to point out the limitations that employees face, which will also limit the successful implementation of green practices. Tourism employees are exposed to stress, working weekends, and limited opportunities for advancement. These problems further lead to low employee commitment, as well as high levels of burnout and intention to leave the job (Mo et al., 2025). Given this status of employees, it is difficult to identify and oblige employees in tourism to implement green strategies and build a commitment to environmental protection (Mo et al., 2025). In such situations, leadership style plays a key role. Namely, the leaders who motivate employees to implement green practices contribute to the satisfaction of employees and the entire industry.

### **Definition of green transformational leadership in tourism**

Although several leadership styles such as transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire have demonstrated positive results in practice (Bjekić & Strugar Jelača, 2020; Abbas, 2024), contemporary environmental conditions require their adaptation. As noted, GTL represents an approach that emphasizes sustainability, environmental protection, and social responsibility (Ali Hussain et al., 2025). Such leaders foster green creativity and innovation among employees while enhancing overall environmental performance (Rahi et al., 2025). The focus of GTL is to motivate followers to achieve green goals and inspire performance that exceeds expected environmental standards (Ali Hussain et al., 2025).

As a relatively recent leadership approach, GTL has been the subject of efforts to establish a clear and precise definition, particularly in relation to classical transformational leadership. An overview of recent GTL definitions is presented in Table 1. Based on the definitions presented, GTL can be characterized by three main attributes (Ali Hussain et al., 2025):

- Leaders' commitment to environmental protection. This means that leaders must demonstrate that they care about green development through their actions and approach to the environment;
- Motivating and inspiring employees to create green ideas. Through GTL, leaders are held accountable for developing green innovations by their employees;

- Promoting a culture of two-way communication. GTL requires openness from leaders that enables employees to discuss environmental issues within the organization and reach consensus on how to address them.

Table 1: *Definitions of Green Transformational Leadership*

| Author(s)                 | Green transformational leadership is:                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chen & Chang (2013)       | “...leadership behavior that encourages and motivates followers to exceed expected levels of environmental performance. ”                                                                                              |
| Singh et al. (2020)       | “...leadership behavior where the key goal is to provide a clear vision, inspiration, motivation to employees, but also to support their development needs towards achieving the organization's environmental goals. ” |
| Sanusi & Sopiah (2023)    | “...a series of actions that motivate subordinates to meet environmental protection requirements and encourage them to develop beyond environmental protection requirements.”                                          |
| Abbas (2024)              | “...a special form of leadership necessary to solve and manage environmental problems and obstacles throughout the life cycle of an organization. ”                                                                    |
| Janjua et al. (2024)      | “...motivational and inspirational skills, as well as the ability to generate innovative ideas in support of environmental goals. ”                                                                                    |
| Ali Hussain et al. (2025) | “...the ability of management to change employee behavior towards accepting sustainable and environmentally friendly changes through the power of influence. ”                                                         |

Source: *Authors*

Effective GTL is in line with the goal of ecological greening, pays more attention to environmental conservation, understands the green needs of various stakeholders, and is committed to corporate green change (Xin & Wang, 2023). GTL provides instrumental support (i.e. knowledge and skills) and socio-emotional support to employees in the process of building green innovations (Subas et al., 2026).

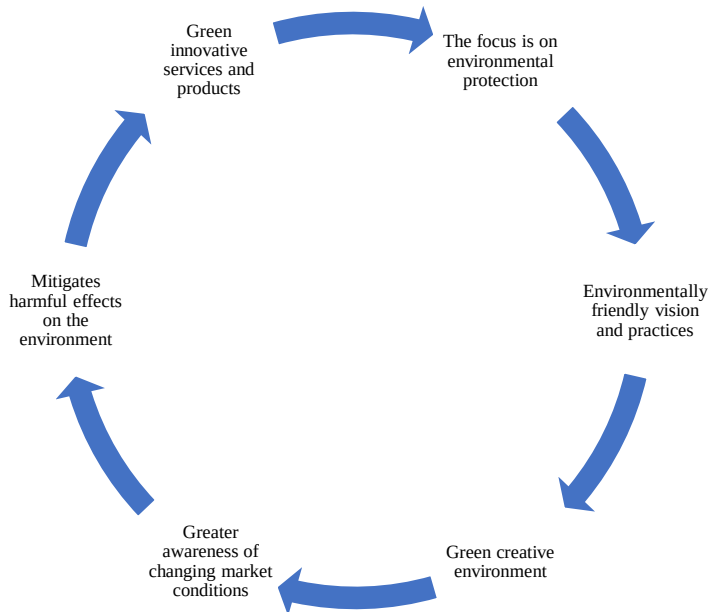
### **The contribution of implementing green transformational leadership in tourism**

The application of GTL in tourism integrates environmentally friendly practices into business strategies, ensuring a balance between economic growth and environmental protection (Abbas, 2024). GTL is an essential managerial tool for creating an organizational environment in which employees’ competencies are crucial for achieving business sustainability

and broader environmental outcomes. The contributions of implementing GTL are clearly highlighted and illustrated in Figure 1:

- Building green innovative services and products in tourism (Janjua et al., 2024);
- Greater focus on environmental protection, which is an inseparable part of tourism development (Ali Hussain et al., 2025);
- Greater motivation of employees to adopt environmentally friendly vision and practices, thereby contributing to the efficient achievement of environmental protection and sustainability goals (Janjua et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2024; Ali Hussain et al., 2025);
- Employees are encouraged to be green, creative, and build a green, creative environment, allowing organizations to improve their environmental performance and enhance reputation as a socially responsible enterprise (Aslam et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2025);
- Encourages employees to be informed about changing market conditions (Janjua et al., 2024);
- Reduces the harmful effects of tourism on the environment (Janjua et al. 2024).

Figure 1: *The contribution of implementing green transformational leadership in tourism*



Source: *Authors based on literature review*

Leaders and employees are directly responsible for all of the above benefits. In tourism, due to all the advantages and disadvantages of working conditions for employees, adopting green practices is not easy. However, if leaders use their leadership style to convince employees to follow the principles of green behavior, they will ensure the execution of sustainable strategic policies and contribute to environmental sustainability (Sharma et al., 2025). GTL promotes a shared vision and goals, ensuring alignment with long-term sustainability objectives (Lu et al., 2024). GTL stimulates and enhances green organizational learning and green creativity, leading to increased ecological efficiency and promotion of innovative strategies for dealing with environmental issues (Aslam et al., 2024).

Research shows that GTL directly and indirectly affects sustainable tourism, emphasizing the leaders' visionary role and their focus on the environment when defining sustainability strategies and promoting sustainability in tourism (Rahi et al., 2025).

### **Conclusion**

Modern business conditions are increasingly forcing the tourism industry to respect green principles. The implementation of these principles requires appropriate resources, as well as leaders' commitment to ensuring the green orientation of tourism businesses and other tourism stakeholders. The implementation of green practices is carried out by employees, and its success largely depends on the leadership style. Practice shows that GTL has produced positive results as a leadership approach that motivates employees to implement green practices. The benefits are multiple for both the company and the tourism industry, ranging from lower costs and more efficient operations to a reputation as a socially responsible company, as well as increased awareness of environmental protection and a contribution to sustainable growth. The contribution of implementing GTL in tourism includes the development of green innovative services and products, environmental protection, the establishment of an environmentally friendly vision, the creation of a green creative environment, greater awareness of changing market conditions, and the mitigation of harmful environmental impacts.

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