

Editorial

# Tourism, Governance and Sustainable Development

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we introduce the themes and approaches that are covered in this special issue on tourism, governance and sustainable development. Firstly, we present a discussion of the themes and topics that have informed the creation of this special issue and, secondly, we provide an overview of the content of each paper that is included within it. This editorial piece provides a useful introduction to the relationship between tourism, governance and sustainable development that can be used by researchers as a starting point for their own research. The special issue itself helps to address the relative lack of research in this area in the context of developing countries and emerging economies.

**Keywords:** tourism; governance; sustainability; policy; destination management

## 1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism and its associated discourses have been a feature of the tourism literature since the 1980s [1]. Typically, this research has been concentrated on topics such as carbon emissions [2], resource depletion [3], waste [4], and community engagement [5]. The main product typology associated with sustainable tourism is eco-tourism [6], but there are many case studies available that consider the sustainability of other typologies, including a small but growing amount of research into sustainable mass tourism [7] and enlightened mass tourism [8]. The topic of governance is not often considered within the sustainable tourism literature, and this special issue adds to this field with an international collection of research papers that address this gap.

Governance is a concept that should be understood as a process involving coordination, collaboration and the cooperation of stakeholders, in order to ensure the multiplier effects from the social and environmental development of tourism in the local economy [9–11]. The inherent complexity of tourism also requires that its development be accompanied by efficient planning and management processes that are based on the fundamental principles of sustainability. Discrepancies between national government structures and local government perspectives often tend to create a space for the dominance of local, private interests rather than on strategies that lead to socially fair development which takes into account the needs of local residents [12]. To the challenge effective management, frequent institutional, economic and social changes are added, which make cooperation and governance difficult to manage [13], in an environment of shifting governance modes. These shifts in modes are a recent focus of the tourism governance literature, along with some key concerns related to mobility and hyperneoliberalism [14].

Governance is a multi-faceted concept and along with its multi-scalar nature in tourism [15], this helps to explain the plurality of approaches that have been taken in understanding, firstly, the nature of governance in tourism, and, secondly, how to govern the tourism industry effectively.

Governance is not simply the act of governing, or the activities associated solely with formal institutions of governance such as national and local government, national tourism offices and destination management organizations [16]. Rather, the governance of tourism involves an increasingly networked set of inter-relationships between actors in the public, private and third sectors [17], and should bring together tourists, host communities, businesses and the traditional institutions of the state with an interest in tourism, in order to achieve the sustainable management of tourism within and between destinations. With this in mind, a broad range of tourism topics can be explored from a governance perspective, including tourism policy, overtourism, risk management, capacity studies, the quality of services and satisfaction of tourists, competitiveness, environmental impacts, digitalization and the smart economy, and many other topics.

Effective governance is a fundamental condition for the sustainable development of tourist destinations. Previous studies in tourism governance have identified the shift from government to governance in tourism policy [18], the emergence of new networked and postmodern forms of governance affecting tourism [17], the changing roles of destination management organizations [19] and the complexities of tourism governance in a globalised world [20]. However, much of this research has been carried out in the developed core countries of the international tourism industry. This special issue of Sustainability brings together new research on this topic from diverse geographical and socio-economic perspectives, and re-examines the area of tourism governance in light of the many contemporary crises affecting the sustainability of tourism destinations.

## 2. Overview of Articles in the Special Issue

Niñerola et al. [21] contribute a significant bibliometric review paper to the special issue, analysing 4647 papers published in the field of sustainable tourism from 1987–2017. They found that there has been significant growth, which is continuing, in the publication of research on sustainable tourism, and that this research is increasingly focusing on the strategic aspects of sustainability, including on the governance of destinations. This paper identifies key trends in the research into sustainable tourism to date and gives a valuable overview of the topic through the application of bibliometric analysis techniques.

Four of the papers in this issue examine issues connected to tourism, governance and sustainability from the perspective of the communities in tourism destinations. Harun et al. [22] analyse the attitudes and perceptions of the local community towards sustainable tourism development in the Kurdistan Regional Government area of Iraq. Using survey methods, the authors analysed the host communities' perceptions of tourism development in this emerging tourism destination, which contains heritage sites of global importance. From their findings, Harun et al. make several recommendations for future tourism policy and planning in this area of Iraq, suggesting ways in which this could take place in a way that maintains the high levels of support that they discovered in the host community. Zhou et al. [23] examined tourist satisfaction and the encounters between hosts and guests in Shaosan Township, China. They specifically looked at the different types of host–guest interactions made possible by activity that the local government was supporting in this destination: enterprise services such as tourist attractions and restaurants, and public services such as transportation and other infrastructure. Their findings show that interactions in both of these settings can have a significant positive influence on tourist satisfaction, and that service encounter theory provides a useful approach for considering how best to encourage public and private sectors to work together in destination management.

Through an analysis of tourism policy documents from Colombia, Yanes et al. [24] develop a framework for assessing the role of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in developing countries. Their paper proposes a framework for the evaluation of tourism policy documents based on factors that facilitate and constrain CBT in developing countries. The framework was applied to seven tourism policy documents in Colombia using a content analysis approach. The results showed that the policies are weak in providing a base for community engagement in CBT. International experiences indicate that the barriers to CBT are similar throughout the world; thus, the framework is useful in the evaluation of

policy documents in other developing countries. The first of two papers in this issue on Brazil, by Tricárico et al. [25] takes a more bottom-up approach, examining social sustainability in a community rural tourism context. The authors take an innovative, qualitative approach to understanding this issue, using methods from architecture and semiotics to critique socio-spatial aspects of rural tourism, and show the key role of space-based collaborative arrangements in promoting the sustainability of rural tourism.

As well as community, another key perspective evident in this collection is that of institutions, both in terms of how the key governance institutions for tourism function in the field of sustainable tourism development, and also in terms of critiquing specific actions taken by these institutions. Sidor et al. [26] look at sustainability through a consideration of the financial sustainability of a key governance arrangement for tourism, destination management organisations (DMO) in Slovakia. They analyse open data sets relating to business classifications and tax obligations, using application programming interfaces, and show how this approach could be useful in increasing the tax revenues available to support destination management organisations, as well as in reducing tourism-related tax evasion. Also at the destination level, Grapentin and Ayikoru [27] collected data from a range of different stakeholders, in different destinations, to analyse the role of destination certification in the field of sustainability, and provide a detailed overview of the challenges and opportunities that this entails. The study examined recent developments in destination sustainability assessment and certification as a basis for identifying challenges and benefits they engender, from tourist and tourism organizations' perspectives. It used online surveys and semi-structured interviews to collect primary data from prospective tourists and key informants on destination sustainability assessment and certification. The findings highlight the strengths and weaknesses of schemes currently in use, including various factors that might influence their future development.

In common with Grapentin and Ayikoru's paper, the first of two papers on Portugal, by Farinha et al. [28], is concerned with the measurement of sustainability, in a multi-dimensional sense, and provides an example of how specific sustainability indicators can be chosen to monitor sustainable tourism development in the Algarve region of Portugal. Their research was based on the practical example of the Observatory of Sustainability of the Algarve Region for Tourism (OBSERVE) project, and highlights the complexities of evaluating and selecting indicators in this area. They show the difficulties of arriving at a consensus on indicators that meet the strategic needs of multiple stakeholders with a range of social and economic priorities, i.e., public institutions, economic agents, tourists, local communities and residents. The paper by Piñeiro-Naval and Serra [29] is based on a content analysis of municipal websites in Portugal and investigates the relationship between heritage, culture and tourism in the promotion of the country. They found that featuring the area of cultural tourism, and in this case particularly culinary and architectural heritage, in the digital promotion of destinations, can help to promote more sustainable forms of tourism, which bring together the activities of tourists and the social identities of host communities.

A second paper on Colombia is contributed by Restrepo and Clavé [30], who take an institutional perspective on the regional development of tourism. Using the concept of institutional thickness, they show that institutions play a decisive role in regional tourism development for reasons such as the allocation of economic resources, leadership, and interaction among stakeholders. Knowing these dynamics supports better management and planning of tourism destinations throughout governance, coordination, and common agendas, and can enrich the debate on the sustainability of regional tourism development. Regional tourism development is also the focus of the paper by Conceição et al. [31], who utilise a mixed-methods approach to critique the importance of power-relations in the governance of Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) in Brazil. The research presents principles that can be applied to the management of RTOs, especially in the management of conflicts, antagonisms and the harmonization of power relations, which are intrinsic to the regional governance process.

The final set of papers in this special issue covers the sustainability of different types of tourism in destinations. Vij et al. [32] introduce the topic of mega-events into the special issue, examining

resident perceptions of the Dubai 2020 World Expo. Drawing on stakeholder theory and the triple bottom line (TBL) model, the study uses primary data collected from more than two hundred and fifty residents of the region through a structured questionnaire, and applies structural equation modelling and path analysis to develop findings that indicate perceptions from residents about hosting the event. They highlight the scope to improve the level of involvement of these residents to make the event socially sustainable for the destination. Malchrowicz-Mo'sko and Chlebosz [33] look at a specific type of tourism, sport tourism, and consider the comparative sustainability of spectator behaviours for equestrian and athletics events. The research suggests that the sustainability of sports events is affected by the costs of attending them as a sports tourist, and that this must be taken into account when planning to enhance the image of the destination, and the quality of life of attendees and residents. Two papers look at ecotourism, the most common product associated with sustainable tourism development. Carvache-Franco et al. [34] develop a segmentation model for ecotourists visiting Ecuador. Based on a survey of 382 tourists analysed using factorial analyses and non-hierarchical segmentation, they present findings that will help public institutions and private companies improve their tourism offerings and develop more efficient marketing plans, when seeking to develop an ecotourism offering in a destination. Nurhayati et al. [35] also discuss how best to develop ecotourism offerings, exploring the factors that can contribute to the successful management of marine ecotourism in the West Java Province of Indonesia. They conclude that governance innovations such as marine ecotourism zoning rules and infrastructure improvements, as well as regulations, are needed to develop sustainable tourism in Java.

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