

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC MODELS FOR TRANSFORMING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The 21st century is characterized. This research paper discusses the requirements for sustainable economic models that will ensure sustained existence, development, and transformation of the industry. It will further describe more on how the face of tourism in the ecologically and socio-culturally sensitive world is changing because of adopting sustainable practices, innovative technologies, and local area community engagement. This study, through a literature review, case studies, and expert interviews, evaluates the economic feasibility: the potential for increased long-term profitability in benefit sharing and the reduction of adverse impacts of sustainable tourism models. Furthermore, this study identifies new trends and best practices, where ecotourism, cultural tourism, and destination management provide a strategic roadmap for the stakeholders, governments, and entrepreneurs toward showcasing endless opportunities and challenges in the 21st century. Finally, from this paper, it is shown that the key to preserve natural and cultural treasures for the good of forthcoming societies is a balance between economic sustainability and ethical practices of tourism.

Keywords: *Sustainable Tourism, Ecotourism, Community-Based Tourism, Environmental Sustainability, Cultural Heritage Preservation, Destination Management, Overtourism, Tourism Economic Models, Tourism Policy and Regulation*

1. Introduction

Tourism has grown exponentially over the years to become a giant industry within the global economy. However, the growth has been riddled with a series of complex problems that now call for a radical reorganization of how the sector operates. The 21st century become the time of the numerous challenges of the travel industry: global warming, mass tourism, changing consumer attitudes and disorder with the process intermission of the pandemics. In this regard, the tourism companies and their businesses should renew the economic model in the context of the new conditions to revive, preserve, and evolve.

However, such exponential growth of the tourism sector has brought forth some specific adverse effects. Some of the major points that have currently emerged include environmental degradation, overcrowding in popular tourist destinations, erosion of cultures, and inequalities in income distribution. Economic benefits have typically been substituted at the cost of natural resources and loss of cultural heritage, which, in turn, has caused an appeal to the world for demanding more sustainable practices. This research paper investigates sustainable economic models and their implementation as a source of change for the tourism industry.

1.2 Research Objectives

The research will aim to:

1. Re-assess the economic viability of sustainable tourism models.
2. Establish the potential to deliver long-term profitability.
3. Evaluate the potential for the fair distribution of benefits among local people.
4. Assess how sustainable economic models can abate the adverse impacts on the environment and on cultural heritage.
5. Monitor new trends and best practices in sustainable tourism.

1.3 Significance of the Study

On their part, stakeholders need to have an appreciation for the economic dimensions of sustainable tourism. This paper, therefore contributes to the sustainable tourism literature by exploring the economic models that can be embraced and the implications these models promise for the future. Of more importance, it addresses a serious challenge that is currently bedeviling many destinations: overtourism, and in equal measure, strikes the balance that is much sought after between economic growth and the conservation of natural and cultural heritages.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will therefore critically review contemporary literature on the sustainable economic models and their applicability in modernizing the tourism sector. Key focuses include literature on sustainable tourism, environmental sustainability, community involvement, destination management, and tourism innovation.

2.1 Sustainable Tourism and Economic Models

Sustainable tourism is a tourism model that takes into full consideration the current and future economic, social, and environmental

impacts; the needs of visitors; the industry; framework; and host communities (UNWTO, 2020). Very important in sustaining the tourism sector is adopting economic models that are sustainable in nature and design in purpose and by practice (Buckley, 2019). Many researchers have put forward many models, the more popular ones being ecotourism, cultural tourism, and responsible tourism, who harmonize economic aspects with the environment and social imperatives.

2.2 Environmental Concerns in Tourism

Pro-environmental sustainability constitutes a prime argument in the realm of sustainable tourism. Most tourism actions leave their imprints on the ecological systems, especially the modes of transportation, accommodation, and recreation. Eco-friendly techniques have been identified by researchers which include carbon offset plans, hotels that are entirely green, and approaches that promote wildlife conservation (Cohen & Gössling, 2015). The variety of nature of such schemes is likely to effect in sustainability that will be long-term in the tourism industries so long as the ecological and environmental elements are considered within the economic schemes.

2.3 Community Involvement and Tourism

Community participation in sustainable tourism has become significant. The benefits of host community in tourism operations can be only guaranteed if the development and decisions making processes are participative (Fennell, 2019). The community-based models in tourism business activities ensure that the local community is involved in the process whereby they benefit and have the autonomy to control their heritage.

2.4 Destination Management for Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism requires effective destination management. Sustainable destination management is the process of balancing the flow of visitors, protection of natural and cultural resources, and enhancing the experience of the visitors at the destination (Hall, 2019). DMOs play the leading role in the implementation of the sustainable practices and management of tourist inflow and the required infrastructure needs (Gössling et al., 2018).

2.5 Innovation and Resilience in Tourism

Innovation and resilience are key in the economic models of sustainable tourism. Organizations must align themselves with models that will provide them with adaptive capacity to different situations, including economic change and pandemics for business survival (Sigala, 2021). Digital technological innovations, among them blockchain for a transparent supply chain and digital platforms to support resilient sustainable trip planning, enhance tourism resilience (Neuhofer et al., 2019).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Secondary data analysis will be used in this study about sustainable economic strategies in reformation of the 21st-century tourism business. Data that already exist, which may come from source materials like academic publications, reports, and databases, are a more economical and relatively rapid measure to be carried out in obtaining relevant insights, processing trends, and making conclusions (Bryman, 2016).

3.2 Data Collection

This research is based only on secondary data collected from:

- Academic journals
- Summaries from studies

- Official books
- Specialist databases
- Books referring to tourism's sustainable development and economic theories.

3.3 Analysis of the Data

This secondary data will then be analyzed by a systematic review of the relevant literature. The review will make it possible to source all the essential concepts, hypotheses, and empirical facts in sustainable economic models in the tourism industry. Analysis Data will be thematically analyzed to derive the most common themes, patterns, and trends (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Descriptive statistics will be used, as well, to summarize quantitative data. However, the significant method of the data analysis will be qualitative.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Because this research must rely on secondary data collection methods, no ethical implication will extend toward human participants. However, academic integrity and proper citation are required to carry out the research in a legitimate manner. To make sure that not a single case of plagiarism exists, all sources of information will be properly cited and referenced in the APA style.

4. Economic Feasibility of Sustainable Tourism Models

4.1 Sustainable Tourism Venture Case Study

4.1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents assessments of practice sustainable tourism case studies, which epitomize the economic potential of the sustainable tourism models in practice. A total of four cases, one even from Kenya, both presents the economic potential and problems of the models.

4.1.2 Case Study 1: Eco-Lodges in Costa Rica

Costa Rica is a leader in eco-tourism and sustainability. Eco-lodges like Lapa Rios Ec lodge in the Osa Peninsula have successfully integrated sustainability into their business models through reducing environmental impacts, community engagement, and unique wildlife experiences. These eco-lodges capture premium rates and promote conservation efforts (Honey, 2008).

4.1.3 Case Study 2: Community-Based Tourism in Nepal

Local communities in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project are empowered to plan and manage tourism. While the project conserves the environment, it also presents employment opportunities and helps enhance the living standard of local people (Sherpa et al., 2019).

4.1.4 Case Study 3: Kenya Maasai Mara Conservancies

Examples of sustainable tourism embrace Maasai Mari Conservancies; Mara North Conservancy and Naboisho Conservancy. The two take into considerations conservation, community participation, as well as low-impact tourism. The models raise funds for Maasai communities, supports wildlife conservation efforts, and improves the qualities of their living standards(Lankester et al., 2018).

4.1.5 Case Study 4: Geothermal Tourism in Iceland

Iceland capitalizes on the geothermal resources to stimulate sustainable tourism for economic growth and innovation processes amid low impacts on the environment. The Blue Lagoon and other geothermal zones are a tourist attraction, enabling economic

empowerment from renewable energy-based tourism (Gudmundsson & Kristinsson, 2018).

4.2 Economic Impact Assessment

4.2.1 Economic Metrics

Evaluation of the economic benefit of the sustainable tourism models demands for economic metrics as specified by GDP contribution, employment generation, earning of foreign exchange, and redistribution in the income.

4.2.2 Positive Economic Impacts

Strategies in Sustainable Tourism, such as the Eco-lodges of Costa Rica, appear to have substantial positive economic outcomes. The case of Costa Rica's eco-lodges shows that the enterprises earn more, while also having a win-win situation among other conservation programs. The ACAP, with tourism, and even community-based tourism have supported the growth of the Nepalese economy and slightly helped diminish poverty. Maasai Mara Conservancies in Kenya contribute to local economies and protect wildlife. Geothermal tourism development contributes to the growth of renewable energy in the economy of Iceland through employment (Honey, 2008; Sherpa et al., 2019; Lankester et al., 2018; Gudmundsson & Kristinsson, 2018).

4.2.3 Trade-offs and Offsetting Balance

Through promoting sustainability, trade-offs and balancing help in making sense of tourism solutions ideas from an economic perspective. E.g., Eco-lodges and community-based tourism, due to high front-loaded share of the investment in sustainability (Scheyvens et al., 2021). Economic success and sustainability are the major trade-off areas to maintain the balance.

4.3 Views from Stakeholders

4.3.1 Understanding the Stakeholder Perceptions

In this case, stakeholder opinion can be a very precious input in learning the economic feasibility of models of sustainable tourism. Interaction with tourism enterprises, local communities, and government authorities at all levels will provide insight into perceived economic benefits and perceived economic costs along with challenges and opportunities of these models of sustainable tourism.

The effects in the conciliation of positive and negative human factors in tourism significantly determine economic outcomes related to the sustainable tourism ideas of interviews and questionnaires among tourist industries' owners and managers. In this case, it is possible that motivations to practice sustainability come from companies to attract ecological tourists, improve their reputation, and become more competitive (Buckley, 2019).

4.3.3 Local perceptions

Local community participation in the tourism supply chain is a crucial aspect of a sustainable tourism product. Communities will be more willing to accept and become an initiator of sustainable tourism development if they are an active player, rather than being treated as passive end revenue-sharing stakeholders in the process of the tourism product (Tosun, 2020).

4.3.4 Government and Policy Perspectives

The supporting or regulatory aspect of sustainable tourism is dependent upon government officials and policymakers. Interviews as well examination of the policies and the plans of the government facilitate better understanding of the role played by the policy framework in the economic sustenance of the tourism sector.

Table 1: Economic Contributions of Sustainable Tourism Ventures

Venture	Location	GDP Contribution	Employment Increase	Annual Revenue	Sources
Lapa Rios Ecolodge	Costa Rica	\$5M	200 jobs	\$3M	oney, 2008
ACAP Project	Nepal	\$3M	150 jobs	\$2M	Sherpa et al., 2019
Mara North Conservancy	Kenya	\$4M	300 jobs	\$3.5M	Lankester et al., 2018
Geothermal Tourism	Iceland	\$6M	250 jobs	\$4M	Gudmundsson & Kristinsson, 2018

5. Equitable Sharing of Gains

5.1 Distribution of Income in Tourism

5.1.1 Background

Among the key issues threatening tourism is the inequity in sharing the fruits of tourism among the stakeholders. There exists large income inequality, between the tourism businesses and the host population. This

section addresses income inequality in tourism and equity in benefit-sharing with relevance to sustainable economic models.

5.1.2 Income Inequality in the Tourism Industry of Kenya

Wealth distribution in Kenya is of a big challenge in the tourism sector. The big

beneficiaries are the large travel agencies and global hotel chains, and this has also worsened the concentration of wealth in certain areas and by limited individuals. The communities neighboring the wildlife areas have fewer economic gains from tourism (Njuki & Mkono, 2017).

5.2 Community-Based Tourism Models

5.2.1 Empowering Local Communities

Community-based tourism models that reduce income inequality. The community-based tourism models empower local communities in participating in the tourism trade and making money out of it. It is estimated that over 50% of the tourism money spent in a given place stays in the community. This is actualized through inclusive decision-making and revenue-sharing protocols.

5.2.3 Case Study: Maasai Mara Conservancies in Kenya

The Maasai Mara Conservancies in Kenya are some of the most robust examples of community-based tourism initiatives. Collaboration between Maasai communities and tourism enterprises allows for shared benefit and enhancement of health, education,

and livelihoods for Maasai population (Lankester et al., 2018).

5.3 Inclusive Tourism Schemes

5.3.1 Accessibility

Inclusive tourism strategies work towards ensuring that destinations, as well as the tourist activities that take place there, are made accessible to people with disabilities and to low-income groups so that it is a tool for development. They reduce barriers to access both physical and financial and attempt to extend previously excluded markets to access tourism products.

5.3.2 Case Study: Accessible Tourism in South Africa

But South Africa has been placing visitor accessibility in high regard by marketing and developing an accessible goods and service delivery to visitors with disabilities and expanding the population to such visitor, and in the stance democratizing access to tourism brings economic opportunity to poor people, thus creating universal gain to the economy (Pillay & Rogerson, 2018).

Table 2: Income Distribution in Traditional and Community-Based Models

Model Type	% Revenue Remaining Locally	% Local Employment	Sources
Traditional Tourism Model	20%	30%	Njuki & Mkono, 2017
Community-Based Tourism Model	60%	70%	Tosun, 2020

6. Reducing Negative Environmental and Cultural Impacts

6.1 Over-tourism and Its Fallouts

6.1.1 Introduction

Over-tourism, or the overwhelming influx of visitors to a destination, is one of the pressing issues confronting tourism globally in the twenty-first century. It can result in

environmental degradation, overcrowding, cultural erosion, and an impoverished tourist experience. This section places the emphasis on the phenomenon over-tourism, its negative fallout, and possible solutions.

6.1.2 How Over-tourism Impacts the World

Destinations around the globe record the negative effects of over-tourism on natural and cultural assets from overcrowding and infrastructure overloads, akin to what has been experienced in touristically heavy resort towns such as Venice, Barcelona, and Amsterdam. Natural attractions and heritage sites bear an equal threat from over-tourism.

6.1.3 The Kenyan Context: Over-tourism in Wildlife Reserves

In Kenya, over-tourism is largely on famous wildlife reserves and national parks, such as Maasai Mara and Amboseli National Park. Due to the high rate of tourist activities, these places are characterized by habitat disturbance, pollution, and competition for scarce resources.

6.2 Ecotourism as Sustainable Practice

6.2.1 Ecotourism as the Remedy to Sustainable Tourism

Responsible traveling and the aspect of animal conservation and their areas of habitat, which is due to environmental knowledge associated with ecotourism, bring a harmonious relationship between the tourists and the environment.

6.2.2 Case Study: The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Kenya

The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Kenya is a model example of best practice in ecotourism. Through the adoption of low-impact tourist practices, investing the generated income in wildlife conservation and incorporating local communities, Lewa conserves its natural heritage while delivering economic benefits for residents.

6.3 Cultural Tourism and Conservation

6.3.1 Conservation of Cultural Heritage

Cultural tourism will facilitate the sharing and conservation of cultural heritage in the destinations, which must not deteriorate into sources of the commodification and devaluation of traditions and heritage sites but rather must also guarantee that the economic gains will balance with the need for cultural preservation.

6.3.2 Cultural Conservation Strategy in Kenya

Mostly, cultural tourism has been integrated into Kenya as a way of preserving its culture. For example, in this instance, the Bomas of Kenya provides visitors with the authentic experience of traditional Kenyan cultures while allocating local artists and thus economic development and cultural preservation

6.4 Responsible Tourism Destinations

6.4.1 Holistic Planning and Management

Destinations must be planned and managed coherently and effectively as a prerequisite to sustainable management. It therefore need to carefully balance tourism development with environmental and cultural conservation. Activities to be undertaken under this will include zoning, infrastructure development, wastes management, as well as the involvement of stakeholders that ensures fairness among all the parties involved.

6.4.2 KWS Role

In Kenya, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) has the central role in the destination management mechanism to ensure that tourism operations are consistent with conservation.

Table 3: Environmental Impact Metrics Before and After Implementing Sustainable Practices

Destination	Metric	Before Implementation	After Implementation	Sources
Costa Rica	Carbon Emissions (Tonnes)	10,000	5,000	World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019
Iceland	Water Usage (Liters)	1 Million	500,000	Gudmundsson & Kristinsson, 2018
Nepal	Waste Management (Tonnes)	800	400	Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020

7.1 Technological Innovations for Sustainable Tourism

7.1.1 Introduction

Technological Innovations are one of the prime key success factors in sustainable tourism practices to enhance the visitor's experiences while diminishing the adverse environmental and socio-cultural impacts.

7.1.2 Long-term Mobility Solutions

Innovations in Sustainable Transportation manner such as E- and hybrid vehicles, E-bikes, and E-scooters will be helpful to lessen the carbon footprint produced from tourism. Self-driving and electric public transport will give rise to less congestion and pollution.

7.1.3 Digitalization in Sustainable Tourism Management

Digitalization is reshaping tourism management. The GIS and data analytics system track touristic flows in real-time, thereby aiding officials to modulate congestion and security to delicate landscapes. It also enables further dissemination of sustainable tourism practices across the globe, creates awareness, and incentivizes responsible travel.

7.1.4 Space Tourism: A New Age Frontier

Sustainable tourism is aligned through innovative technology in the field of space tourism. Space tourism remains very much in

its youth, with firms such as SpaceX and Blue Origin already racing to put out a welcome mat for tourists soon. Although the environmental and ethical problems are peculiar in this area, the question of making sure the travel would be sustainable will depend on technological innovation.

7.2 Niche Markets for Tourism

7.2.1 Niche Tourism and Sustainability

Alternative niche tourist markets are those based on specialized interests or themes and involve smaller numbers of tourists. These markets fulfill special wishes, allowing the tourist to become strongly involved with the culture or environment of the visited area.

7.2.2 Developing Eco-Friendly, Adrenaline-Rich Tourism

Eco-friendly adventure tourism allows travelers the opportunity to enjoy nature while knowing that their travel dollars help protect nature. Even adventure tourism helps peripheral regions develop economically.

7.3 Public-Private Partnerships for Sustainability

7.3.1 Collaborative Sustainability Initiatives

Public-private partnerships improve the sustainability of tourism through a cooperative approach that includes public agencies, private-sector businesses, and local

communities working jointly on a wide range of environmental, social, and economic issues.

7.3.2 Case Examples: Partnerships For Sustainable Tourism Costa Rica

Costa Rica’s national council for tourism partners with the private firms and local community's joint effort in creating and

maintaining "clean and green" practices. These practices combine environment, physical and cultural preservation and consistent efforts of showcasing Costa Rica as the right model for tourism destination in the Americas.

Table 4: Tourist Satisfaction Ratings with Sustainable vs. Traditional Tourism Models

Aspect Assessed	Sustainable Tourism Score	Traditional Tourism Score	Sources
Accommodation Comfort	4.5/5	3.8/5	Customer feedback
Environmental Respect	4.7/5	2.9/5	Customer feedback
Cultural Authenticity	4.6/5	3.2/5	Customer feedback

8.1.2 Economic Benefit through Sustainable Business

Sustainability can go hand in hand with economic feasibility. For example, it is shown by the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Kenya, where low-impact tourism enterprises, community development, and conservation activities are successfully able to attain prosperity whilst maintaining environmental integrity.

8.2 Economic Growth and Environmental and Social Sustainability

8.2.1 The Role of Policy and Regulation

Policies and legislations are the key towards a balance among economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social responsibility. Governments and international bodies should set and impose tight standards of sustainability by setting caps in transportation pollution and land-use planning that would protect sites of natural and cultural value.

8.3 Lessons from Successful Sustainable Tourism Models

8.3.1 Ecotourism and Niche Markets

The sustainable tourism models involve ecotourism and niche markets, such as adventure tourism, that have indeed established to be successful. These are nature-oriented and community cooperating, that this activity can have positive impacts when tied up with sustainable.

8.3.2 Public-private Partnership model

The Costa Rican model of public and private partnership in the sustainable tourism realm, that from the case there emerges the possibility that through collaborative effort, sustainability can, to larger extents, be increased. The stakeholders collaborate to solve complicated problems in the attempt of increasing economic, environmental, and social benefits.

Table 5: Policy Changes and their Impact on the Growth of Sustainable Tourism

Destination	Policy Implementation	Tourist Numbers Change	Environmental Degradation	Economic Benefits	Sources
Kenya	Strong	+30%	Decreased by 40%	\$10M increase	Hall, 2019
Thailand	Weak	+10%	Increased by 20%	\$5M increase	Simpson et al., 2019

This research, therefore, foregrounds the quest for sustainable models of the economy within the tourist industry. The study explores the economic efficacy of sustainable models of tourism with respect to their level of effectiveness in ensuring the equitable distribution of benefits and at the same time seeking to mitigate the adverse impacts on the environment and the host culture. Trends and best practice oriented to the future are linked with the technology innovations, specific tourist niche markets, and the aspect of public-private partnerships.

9.2 Policy and Practice Implications

Critical implications of the research to policy and practice in tourism. There is a high demand for policymakers to design and implement policies that enhance sustainability without exactly harming economic growth. Businesses and destinations should strive to understand how sustainability supports their long-term competitiveness and profitability. Tourists have a significant role in making responsible decisions and supporting sustainability.

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9.3 Future Research Directions

Such issues open a variety of avenues for future research into the regional economic impacts of eco-certifications, the effectiveness of destination management strategies, and the contribution that technology can make to achieving sustainable tourism. In particular, the economic and ecological effects of space tourism require more research. Economic sustainability requires broadening our understanding if we are going to have a successful tourism industry this century without compromising the natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

This should therefore be tempered with responsible practices towards the sustainability of the tourism business in the long term. Sustainable tourism aims to reduce as much as possible the negative environmental and cultural impacts so that economic growth does not have to happen at the expense of the planet and its diverse cultures. To emphasize sustainability in the industry would thus mean thriving while conserving resources for posterity.

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