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To What Extent Can a Balance Between Sustainability and Economic Growth Be Achieved in the Tourism Industry?

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Abstract

This paper reviews international tourism research concerning the ongoing tension between the continuing rhetoric of sustainable tourism and the reality of achieving sustainability through tourism. A range of interrelated sociopolitical, institutional, and behavioural obstructions to implementing sustainability was identified. We discussed four central themes from our research: overtourism, policy inertia, fractured governance, and techno-optimism. While it is clear tourism is locked into a growth paradigm that often greets ecological and social sustainability as a 'nice to have' rather than a fundamental prerequisite of tourism, our research showed that there are pathways towards more just and resilient, socially and ecologically sustainable futures. The case studies undertaken in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Tanna Island, Vanuatu, demonstrated how participatory planning, inclusive governance, and culturally embedded work can offer meaningful alternatives to the ongoing challenges of sustainability in tourism. The paper provided a critical assessment of the existing frameworks and emergent models and ultimately asserted that tourism development cannot be strengthened through a focus on the single bottom line of profit. Our study urged a radical rethink of how tourism development should occur, emphasising that sustainability should be regarded far beyond an operational pursuit but rather as a political and ethical philosophy.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Overtourism, Governance, Policy implementation, Participatory planning, Asia-Pacific

1. Introduction

Research Tourism is increasingly positioned as a major contributor to global economic development, particularly for its role in job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and regional revitalization. As one of the fastest developing sectors in the world, tourism's ability to provide economic opportunity is establishing itself as a key area of economic and policy focus across global contexts for both Less Economically Developed Countries and More Economically Developed Countries. However, tourism's economic promise is increasingly shadowed by concerns about its environmental, socio-cultural, and political costs. In this context, sustainable tourism, which advocates balancing economic benefits, environmental protection, and social equity, has emerged as an important normative reference point for tourism policy and planning. However, the notion of sustainable tourism is often poorly understood and unevenly implemented in practice. While sustainability may be articulated in strategic goals and destination branding, it is often undermined by structural inertia, competing interests, and a growth-first rationale.

This paper aims to investigate the systemic and conceptual barriers to achieving sustainable tourism in different contexts. It first reviews the concept of overtourism, explaining that increasing tourist flows—fueled by commodified travel culture, global mobility, and platform capitalism—overwhelm local environments, infrastructures, and community cohesion. Then it considers political and governance-related barriers, revealing the gap between sustainability rhetoric and the realities of fragmented regulatory systems, competing priorities, and short-termism in policy delivery. It further explores socio-cultural inertia manifested in consumer behaviours that have not been able to turn increased awareness of the ecological crisis into behavioural change. The analysis also includes structural economic dependency on tourism activity that inhibits a political will to impose constraints to reduce the environmental impact of tourism, and techno-optimism, which may foster misplaced confidence in future technological fixes that suggest technological advances will address carbon emissions. The paper concludes with consideration of theoretical and practical innovations—from multi-dimensional conceptual frameworks to co-design and participatory governance—that aim to re-establish a future of tourism that is inclusive, locally embedded, and ecologically founded.

To explore these dynamics, this paper draws on case studies from across Asia and the Pacific—specifically the Philippines, Vietnam, and Tanna Island in Vanuatu. These cases were chosen because they are illustrative of diverse approaches to sustainable tourism governance: from state-supported ecotourism and adaptive planning to community-led, indigenous models of development. Together, they offer valuable insights into how collective governance, local agency, and institutional flexibility can help address the persistent challenges of implementing sustainability in tourism. By examining these examples, the paper engages with both the problems and the potential solutions within the sector, ultimately arguing for a fundamental rethinking of tourism's purpose, metrics of success, and underlying power structures. Sustainability, it contends, must move beyond being treated as a managerial goal and instead be understood as a political and ethical imperative that reshapes the very logic of tourism development.

2. Challenges

The tourism sector faces a range of interconnected challenges related to sustainable development. Sustainable development is generally understood as development that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [43]. When applied to tourism, however, this concept becomes particularly contentious and has prompted scholars and policymakers to debate, both in terms of its theoretical foundation and practical feasibility. Some argue that while environmentally responsible tourism is crucial, achieving sustainable development through tourism is an unattainable goal. This ongoing academic debate and policy discussion highlight the challenges of reconciling tourism growth with environmental and social sustainability. These challenges stem from established political and institutional frameworks, the complexities of consumer behavior, and the substantial environmental impacts of tourism activities, particularly in relation to transport. Understanding these multifaceted and competing barriers is essential for developing effective pathways toward sustainable tourism in the future.

2.1. Overtourism and the Strain on Environmental and Social Systems

A central challenge in aligning sustainability with tourism-driven economic growth lies in the phenomenon of overtourism, where visitor numbers exceed the capacity of a destination to cope without suffering environmental degradation, reduced quality of life, or cultural dilution [46]. As tourism continues to be one of the fastest-growing global economic sectors, contributing significantly to regional

development and employment, many destinations are experiencing a sharp increase in tourist arrivals that often exceed both physical and socio-cultural thresholds. [29]

The root causes of overtourism are structural and systemic. To a significant extent, this pressure stems from the mass commodification of travel, fueled by low-cost carriers, digital booking platforms, and the marketing logic of continual growth. Such growth is compounded by rising global incomes and the normalization of frequent leisure travel, creating a surge in tourist demand that is poorly regulated and spatially concentrated [30]. This demand-driven growth is rarely matched with adaptive infrastructure or robust governance frameworks, leading to unsustainable destination management models.

The implications of overtourism are severe and multi-scalar. It generates a cascade of negative outcomes: from environmental degradation (such as ecosystem disruption and increased carbon emissions) to the depletion of cultural assets and a decline in resident well-being. For instance, research on Barcelona and Venice illustrates how overtourism has resulted in social tensions, resident displacement, and infrastructure overload [37]. Moreover, the commodification of local spaces for tourism reduces their livability, as essential services like waste management, water supply, and housing become strained. These tensions create a loss of perceived destination authenticity and fuel anti-tourist sentiments, which in turn threaten the long-term viability of tourism as a harmonious economic driver.

Overtourism is not simply an issue of high visitor numbers—it reflects deeper systemic failures in aligning tourism growth with environmental limits and social well-being. Despite being a well-documented risk, overtourism is often inadequately addressed due to the dominance of economic objectives in tourism policymaking. As destinations become increasingly saturated, the resulting strain on ecosystems, infrastructure, and community tolerance signals a widening gap between tourism development models and sustainability principles. Unless growth is reconceptualized and more effectively managed, overtourism will continue to undermine the long-term resilience of both host environments and local societies.

2.2. Political Inertia and Structural Governance Barriers

One of the most persistent challenges to achieving sustainable tourism development lies in both political inertia and the fragmented nature of governance systems. Despite mounting evidence of tourism's ecological impacts—especially those related to transport emissions—many governments have failed to take decisive structural action [14]. Even when policy documents explicitly state sustainability goals, the implementation of these goals is often delayed, diluted, or absent altogether.

This lack of progress is frequently attributed to what scholars describe as the "implementation gap"—a disconnect between stated policy ambitions and the actual execution of those policies [20]. Policymakers are often reluctant to engage in reforms that could be politically unpopular, such as restricting air travel, removing fossil fuel subsidies, or introducing carbon taxes on tourism-related activities. These so-called "transport taboos"—politically sensitive issues such as restricting air travel or taxing tourism emissions—are especially difficult to address in democracies where powerful interest groups or voter opposition can stall reform [5]. Additionally, there remains a deep-rooted ideological association between tourism and economic growth, even within academic and policy-making communities, which limits the adoption of environmentally sustainable tourism models.

The complexity of regulatory environments and the fragmented nature of multi-level governance structures further compound the issue. Disparities in goals, authority, and capacity between national, regional, and local governments often lead to inconsistent policy outcomes [4]. A lack of accountability, unclear role delineation, and infrequent policy evaluations exacerbate this disconnect. For example, while countries like France have introduced national frameworks, such as the *Comité Stratégique du Tourisme*

(Strategic Tourism Committee), to foster collaboration between public authorities, private stakeholders, and civil society, even these well-intentioned bodies struggle with vertical coordination. The Committee aims to align tourism policy with long-term sustainability, but in practice, it must navigate bureaucratic inertia and conflicting short-term economic priorities across different government tiers. France's experience highlights how promising initiatives can falter when systemic alignment and institutional commitment are lacking.

Ultimately, the challenge is not the absence of sustainability frameworks or pilot initiatives but the lack of deep structural and political reform. Entrenched growth-first paradigms, institutional silos, and fears of political fallout prevent governments from taking the bold actions required for systemic change. Without resolving these underlying governance and political barriers, sustainable tourism will continue to exist more in rhetoric than in practice, with transformative change remaining out of reach.

2.3. Consumer Behaviour and Socio-Cultural Inertia

In addition to governance barriers, consumer behaviour presents a major obstacle to sustainable tourism transitions. Although awareness of tourism's environmental impacts—particularly those related to air travel—has grown among both tourists and the industry, this awareness has not led to corresponding changes in consumer behavior. Most travellers continue to prioritise convenience, affordability, and personal enjoyment or experiential value over environmental considerations, leading to a mismatch between sustainability awareness and actual consumer decisions [22].

This contradiction is often described as the "awareness-attitude gap" or, more precisely, the "attitude-behaviour gap." The awareness-attitude gap refers to situations where individuals are aware of an issue—such as environmental harm from tourism—but do not develop a concern or favourable attitude toward solving it. In contrast, the attitude-behaviour gap describes cases where individuals *do* hold positive attitudes or intentions (e.g., supporting sustainable tourism) but fail to act on them in practice. The latter is considered more precise because it highlights the disconnection between what people believe and how they behave, rather than just their level of awareness. [25]. While tourists may express concern about environmental issues, this concern rarely influences their final travel choices. Price sensitivity, time limitations, and habit formation all reinforce less carbon-intensive travel modes, such as air or cruise travel. Additionally, travel behaviours are deeply shaped by social and cultural norms, where flying frequently or exploring exotic destinations remains aspirational. Even efforts to influence behaviour through carbon labels, sustainability rankings, or visitor information portals struggle to overcome these entrenched patterns [8].

Compounding this is the distinction between behaviours exhibited "at home" and those enacted while "away." Tourists often suspend everyday routines while travelling, perceiving holidays as temporary reprieves from everyday ethical considerations. Practice theories offer insight here, suggesting that tourism behaviours are not just individual choices but socially constructed and repeated performances shaped by materials (e.g., infrastructure), competencies (e.g., ability to navigate sustainable alternatives), and meanings (e.g., the symbolism of travel) [38]. These factors create resilient routines resistant to individual-level nudges or appeals.

Attempts to drive sustainability purely by informing or persuading individual consumers overlook the socio-structural forces that sustain tourism behaviours. The tourism industry is highly fragmented and transnational, making it difficult to design standardised tools, incentives, or messaging campaigns that reliably shift behaviour at scale [13].

For example, despite Sweden's highly educated and environmentally aware population, a 2019 study found that a significant share of Swedes still continued to opt for air travel over domestic train travel for leisure, even though the country has an efficient rail network and the "flygskam" (flight shame) movement gained international attention [22]. This indicates that while the discourse around sustainable travel has evolved, behaviours have lagged due to convenience, cost, and deep-rooted travel norms. Even the presence of carbon offset options during booking failed to significantly alter purchasing decisions, illustrating how individual awareness often loses out to structural and cognitive ease and ingrained norms. Ultimately, reshaping tourism demand is not simply a matter of educating consumers—it requires structural change across the industry and a deeper understanding of the routines and meanings embedded in travel culture. Without tackling the socio-cultural inertia that underpins tourism habits, individual-facing strategies will continue to fall short of achieving transformative sustainability goals

2.4. Economic Dependency and the Growth Imperative

From a macroeconomic perspective, tourism is widely positioned as a crucial pillar of national and regional economic strategies. It provides employment, contributes to GDP, and brings in valuable foreign exchange earnings, especially for countries with limited industrial diversification [15,16]. As a result, many governments continue to prioritise tourism expansion to stabilise or stimulate their economies, particularly in the aftermath of economic downturns or crises in other sectors.

This dependence has created a strong structural and policy bias toward the maximization of tourist arrivals and expenditures. Tourism is consistently framed within a capitalist growth logic that prioritises continuous economic expansion and revenue generation as primary indicators of success, where more visitors and greater revenues are equated with progress [36]. Unfortunately, this narrow economic framing often sidelines sustainability goals related to environmental protection or social welfare, particularly when these are seen as limiting growth or increasing operational costs. Even when sustainable development is included in tourism strategies, it is frequently subordinate to economic objectives. Additionally, competing national and local priorities often skew heavily in favour of short-term economic gains, especially when tax revenues and employment statistics are tied to tourist numbers [20].

Efforts to incorporate alternative models, like "sustainable de-growth," challenge this paradigm by proposing reductions in consumption and production, but such ideas face resistance from businesses and policymakers due to their misalignment with capitalist economic systems [12]. Some countries, like Costa Rica, have promoted inclusive models where tourism explicitly aims to improve local well-being and ecological outcomes. However, these initiatives exist within the broader context of deeply entrenched economic structures that continue to favour expansion over ecological balance.

The heavy reliance on tourism-generated revenue creates vulnerabilities when environmental or social concerns call for limits to tourism. For example, in the Maldives, over 25% of GDP is directly attributed to tourism; this economic dependency limits policy flexibility [40]. Despite the nation's extreme vulnerability to climate change and rising sea levels, economic incentives continue to encourage the construction of luxury resorts on ecologically fragile islands. Proposed regulations to protect coral reefs and limit overdevelopment have been weakened or deprioritized due to fears of reduced investor interest and declining tourist arrivals. This tension illustrates the core conflict: measures needed for environmental preservation are politically and economically unpalatable when economic dependency on tourism is so high.

Moreover, sustainability in such cases is often treated as a secondary goal or an ancillary objective rather than a foundational principle guiding tourism development. The unwillingness to cap or reduce tourism

flows, even when ecosystems are under threat, reflects the dominance of economic priorities over ecological and social well-being.

To move toward genuine sustainability, the tourism sector would benefit from redefining metrics of success to include beyond economic growth and recognizing the ecological and social limits of destinations. However, the structural embedding of tourism in growth-dependent policies and political agendas makes any such transition difficult without broader shifts in development paradigms and governance priorities.

2.5. Emissions, Mobility, and Technological Optimism

Tourism-related mobility, particularly air travel, is among the fastest-growing sectors contributing to global CO_2 emissions. As the demand for tourism increases, emissions from transport—especially aviation—are also rising. Air travel, once considered a luxury, has now become more accessible due to deregulation and the proliferation of low-cost carriers, transitioning it into a commodity [41]. Despite the apparent environmental consequences, the tourism industry continues to push for growth in intmobility, which further exacerbates the sector's carbon footprint [35].

The persistence of this problem is shaped by both ingrained behavioural norms and “technology myths”—a belief that future technologies will offset current environmental damage. On the one hand, habitual travel behaviours—like the normalization of air travel—are deeply embedded in tourists’ routines. On the other hand, there is a widespread belief in the potential for future technological innovations (e.g., electric aircraft or carbon-neutral aviation) to solve the emissions problem, which fosters policy inertia. These "technology myths" delay necessary structural reforms by promoting the idea that emissions can be dealt with in the future, without the need for immediate behavioural or infrastructural changes [13]. This optimism leads to a reluctance to invest in alternatives like high-speed rail or implement carbon pricing mechanisms that would provide immediate solutions.

This belief often leads governments and the tourism industry to deprioritise tangible, near-term solutions in favour of speculative innovation. While there are technological innovations like biofuels or improved aircraft designs, these have not yet and likely will not achieve the required emissions reductions [2]. For example, in Europe, despite the introduction of rail alternatives, short-haul flights remain the preferred choice due to their low cost and convenience. A 2021 study in China showed that the introduction of high-speed rail between major cities led to a significant reduction in CO_2 emissions from air travel [35]. However, replicating these successful models globally has faced substantial barriers, hindered by a lack of investment and reluctance to shift from the aviation sector due to entrenched practices. With rising air travel demand in emerging economies, the urgency for practical solutions is escalating.

The challenge of reducing emissions from tourism mobility—especially aviation—is one of the most pressing sustainability issues in the tourism sector. The combination of deeply ingrained travel behaviours, structural advantages for high-carbon transport modes—such as government subsidies for aviation, regulatory exemptions from fuel taxes, and continued investment in airport expansions—and technological optimism creates significant resistance to change. Without addressing these barriers and focusing on proven, immediate alternatives such as rail, the tourism sector will struggle to meet its climate goals. Policy interventions must address the socio-political “transport taboos” that protect aviation from meaningful reform and focus on practical, low-carbon solutions.

2.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of the sources indicates that implementing sustainable tourism is a multifaceted process, and the impediments to success arise from overlapping conceptual and practical

challenges. These challenges encompass several conceptual contradictions surrounding sustainable development. First is its historical association with economic growth, which conflicts with the tangible pressures of overtourism on destinations and their environments. Second, a generalized lack of political will and institutional biases often inhibit effective policy development. Third, there are long-standing difficulties in influencing consumer behaviour and overcoming socio-cultural path dependency. Fourth, the economic imperative to pursue continuous growth reinforces dependency on tourism. Fifth, tourism-related transportation—particularly aviation—has an enormous environmental impact, often sanitized by an over-reliance on future technological solutions. Addressing these issues altogether requires a comprehensive and well-coordinated effort by the government at the local, national, and global levels, alongside the tourism sector, academia, and civil society. In addition, this requires a fundamental shift in how tourism success is measured—moving away from purely economic indicators toward frameworks that prioritize environmental sustainability, social well-being, and reimagining the dominant structures that shape the tourism system.

3. Solutions

As previously discussed, the tourism sector faces increasing difficulties in achieving true sustainability, particularly as overtourism grows. While sustainable tourism aims to reduce negative impacts on the environment, society, and economy, it often encounters structural and political barriers that prevent its mainstream adoption. Overtourism, described by the UNEP and World Tourism Organization as complex and presents a set of interlinked challenges, including overcrowding and resource strain caused by unsustainable growth. These issues require a collaborative, cross-sectoral approach that creates new success metrics in tourism, fosters cooperation, and integrates the political dimensions of sustainability.

To address these challenges, various solutions have been proposed, ranging from policy interventions to collaborative approaches like co-design and participatory governance. Real-world examples, such as Bhutan's "high-value, low-impact" tourism model and Santorini's "Tourism Carrying Capacity Assessment," demonstrate how effective strategies can be implemented to manage tourism sustainably. Together, these solutions offer promising pathways for mitigating the consequences of overtourism and advancing more equitable and environmentally conscious tourism development.

3.1. Conceptualizing Challenges to Inform Solutions

Developing clear definitions and models to represent the complexity of overtourism is a foundational step toward mitigating its adverse impacts and guiding transitions to sustainable tourism. These conceptual models aim to offer multidimensional frameworks that encompass the full range of overtourism-related pressures across economic, socio-cultural, environmental, socio-psychological, and political domains. They help clarify the term "overtourism," which remains underdeveloped in academic discourse and highly variable across disciplines, leading to inconsistent applications in policy and planning [30].

In recent years, scholars have advanced increasingly complex models to assess and mediate overtourism risks by incorporating a wide array of interrelated capacities. For instance, models such as Tourism Carrying Capacity Assessments (TCCA) have emerged to evaluate how destinations manage fluctuating tourist volumes while maintaining ecological and social balance. These frameworks combine indicators like infrastructure saturation, resident feedback, and tourist behavior to measure both quantitative strain and qualitative perceptions of overcrowding [27].

This trend toward multidimensional modeling has emerged in response to the inadequacy of traditional tourism planning tools that fail to account for intangible yet impactful dynamics like social fatigue (for

example, resident burnout from tourist interactions), political resistance, and cultural erosion. The increasing visibility of local resistance to mass tourism in global cities like Barcelona has catalyzed scholarly interest in models that not only quantify impacts but also explain underlying social and psychological tensions. In such contexts, models help decode complex realities by acknowledging tourism as a layered phenomenon that intersects with broader systemic structures [30].

These models have proven effective in guiding practical interventions. For example, in the Cyclades islands, including Santorini, a model integrating tourism density and intensity metrics was employed to identify areas most vulnerable to overtourism. It revealed that Santorini had among the highest scores in tourism saturation, leading regional authorities to adjust infrastructure and visitor management policies to reduce strain [27]. In Barcelona, the ongoing application of conceptual frameworks grounded in social movement theory has helped contextualise public protests and policy pushbacks against tourism expansion. These models have guided planners to introduce regulation of short-term rentals, diversify urban usage such as short-term rentals, reclaim residential spaces previously converted to tourist accommodations, repurpose tourist-dominated zones for local services and cultural uses, and promote community-centred tourism agendas [30].

By capturing the multi-causal nature of overtourism and encouraging systemic thinking, these models enable more informed, inclusive, and adaptable policy responses. They function both as diagnostic tools that identify intervention points and as strategic guides that enable cross-sectoral coordination, making them especially powerful in complex urban and insular tourism contexts.

Ultimately, the development and application of multidimensional conceptual models provide tourism researchers, destination managers, and policymakers with the clarity and precision needed to sustainably manage overtourism. By grounding interventions in holistic frameworks rather than reactive measures, these tools promote long-term sustainability, local well-being, and resilience across diverse destination types. Their use in high-impact areas like Santorini and Barcelona highlights their real-world relevance and effectiveness, positioning them as essential instruments in reimagining tourism futures.

3.2. Enhancing Sustainable Tourism Paradigms

A growing number of tourism scholars are calling for a shift away from the traditional model of sustainable tourism, which narrowly focuses on the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental "three pillars." Instead, a new paradigm advocates moving from abstract sustainability concepts to practical sustainability implementation. This evolving approach encourages integrating responsibility, governance, and political sustainability into the tourism discourse, ultimately fostering more operational, accountable, and systemic frameworks [3]. The transition aims to reframe tourism planning around real-world implementation capacities rather than idealistic models.

This shift has prompted researchers to develop hybrid models that merge sustainability and responsibility, such as the Responsible Tourism Implementation Framework (RTIF), which connects the theoretical ideals of sustainability with actionable levers like regulation, monitoring, and community co-management. These models offer a more coherent way of addressing overtourism, equity, and resilience by contextualizing sustainability in real political and operational landscapes [34]. This contrasts with earlier paradigms that treated sustainability as a static goal rather than an adaptive, continually negotiated process. The shift arises from disillusionment with the ineffectiveness of conventional approaches, which often produce fragmented or symbolic sustainability efforts without tangible impact. For instance, in many destinations, sustainability certifications are used more as branding tools than genuine accountability mechanisms [20]. Researchers argue that traditional sustainability paradigms fail to address political

drivers, institutional constraints, and community resistance, thereby necessitating frameworks that go beyond disciplinary silos and support multi-level governance [3,34]. Integrating political sustainability into these models acknowledges the role of power dynamics, policy trade-offs, and governance effectiveness in shaping tourism outcomes.

One real-life application of this revised paradigm can be seen in Cape Town, South Africa. Following severe droughts in 2017–2018, Cape Town re-evaluated its tourism strategy using an integrated governance-based sustainability framework that prioritized not just environmental limits, but also social equity and political feasibility. The approach combined real-time water monitoring, stakeholder negotiations, and adaptive policymaking to manage tourism demand while protecting community access to water [6]. Tourism demand was managed through targeted messaging campaigns that encouraged "water-wise" behavior among visitors, as well as temporary caps on tourism-related water usage in hotels and recreational facilities. This shift from abstract sustainability rhetoric to implementation-based planning helped reduce conflict, reallocate resources, and position Cape Town as a model for crisis-responsive sustainable tourism.

Similarly, in Switzerland, researchers developed a destination-specific policy tool using political ecology and institutional theory to analyze how cantonal governments negotiate sustainable tourism amidst agricultural expansion, housing development, and environmental conservation, particularly in alpine regions where land is limited and ecologically sensitive. The tool not only assessed environmental impacts but also scrutinized political decision-making, identifying governance bottlenecks and enabling transparent stakeholder engagement [31]. These examples illustrate the effectiveness of integrating sustainability implementation into tourism planning, allowing destinations to go beyond checklist-style strategies and move toward adaptive systems of governance and responsibility.

Shifting the paradigm from theoretical sustainability to operational implementation may offer a more pragmatic and context-sensitive path toward managing complex tourism dynamics. By integrating new dimensions like responsibility, governance, and political sustainability, these revised frameworks enable more grounded and impactful decision-making. Case studies like Cape Town and Switzerland demonstrate how this shift leads to better stakeholder coordination, systemic awareness, and long-term resilience. As such, embracing implementation-focused paradigms represents a critical step in evolving tourism into a truly sustainable practice.

3.3. Overcoming Implementation Barriers

Overcoming the multifaceted barriers to implementing sustainable tourism requires a comprehensive policy and institutional shift that emphasizes integration, clarity, and long-term stakeholder commitment. This approach calls for strategies that address governance shortcomings, enhance inter-institutional collaboration, and reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies. Such shifts may include establishing inter-ministerial tourism-environment councils, embedding sustainability criteria in national tourism funding mechanisms, and developing cross-sectoral monitoring systems to track long-term progress. Research from Portugal identifies key obstacles such as the lack of a clear long-term vision, underdeveloped definitions of sustainable tourism, insufficient policy integration, and the persistent prioritization of economic gains over environmental and social concerns [9]. These systemic issues obstruct effective planning and create fragmented, short-lived initiatives that fail to deliver sustainable outcomes.

The situation in Portugal illustrates how entrenched governance structures and narrow economic priorities can stifle sustainable tourism goals. Excessive bureaucratic hurdles, poor inter-ministerial coordination, and the absence of standardized sustainability benchmarks have made it difficult for stakeholders to access

funding, cooperate effectively, and engage in shared decision-making [9]. As a result, sustainable tourism often remains a rhetorical commitment rather than an actionable reality, particularly in countries where tourism development is largely driven by private investment and short-term economic metrics.

These barriers persist because governments frequently lack the institutional frameworks, such as dedicated legal bodies, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, enforceable regulatory tools, and the political will necessary to implement cohesive sustainability policies. Without a unified vision, tourism strategies tend to operate in silos, and environmental or socio-cultural dimensions are often marginalized in favor of rapid economic returns. This fragmentation also undermines public trust and leads to policy fatigue among communities that perceive tourism planning as top-down and exclusionary. Furthermore, an over-reliance on market-driven mechanisms without adequate regulation exacerbates imbalances between tourism growth and resource protection. For example, in destinations with loosely regulated tour operators or under-enforced zoning laws, unchecked expansion can overwhelm local infrastructure, degrade sensitive ecosystems, and crowd out community land use—undermining the very sustainability goals policymakers aim to achieve.

Despite these challenges, the Portuguese experience also demonstrates that targeted reforms can yield meaningful results. The national strategy, Tourism Strategy 2027 by Turismo de Portugal (2017) for the year 2027, provides a successful example of integrating long-term sustainability into policy by aligning public and private interests around clear, cross-cutting goals. This initiative emphasizes environmental stewardship, stakeholder inclusivity, and data-driven planning as core tenets and has served as a guiding framework for sub-national entities [39]. In the Algarve region, local authorities collaborated with tourism stakeholders—including hotel associations, environmental NGOs, local business owners, and community representatives— to establish regional monitoring systems and participatory planning forums, which helped bridge the gap between policy formulation and on-ground implementation. These initiatives show that when governments reduce bureaucratic complexity, standardize sustainability definitions, and enable multilevel governance, implementation becomes not only feasible but also scalable and adaptive to local contexts.

Ultimately, addressing the institutional and policy barriers that hinder implementation is essential to transitioning from aspirational frameworks to tangible, sustainable tourism practices. Long-term commitment, intergovernmental coordination, and clear, inclusive policies remain central to realizing this transformation—as demonstrated in the Algarve region of Portugal, where collaborative governance and stakeholder engagement have begun to bridge systemic gaps between national strategy and local implementation.

3.4. Embracing Collaborative and Participatory Approaches

A key pathway for facilitating transitions to sustainable tourism development is through co-design (collaborative design) of future sustainable tourism opportunities. Co-design is important as it elevates participation and human values to the forefront of the design process. Whereas tourism development often favours the designer's choice for others, co-design seeks to find ways of designing with others—such as local residents, tourism operators, policymakers, and indigenous groups—ensuring that plans reflect shared needs, cultural priorities, and place-based knowledge [11]. Co-design values ownership and provides ethical leverage for sustainable change. The co-design research practice is conceptualized as finding new ways to create "connections"—including emotional investment, shared visioning, and institutional alignment—to a collective future, releasing and connecting participants' individual creative potential, and contributing to wider systemic change. A study focused on co-design around Lake Mjøsa,

Norway, highlights the opportunities that emerge when practitioners such as landscape architects, tourism developers, local planners, and environmental NGOs engage in co-design inquiry together, allowing agencies to challenge predetermined goals and prescribed processes [11]. The co-design process included a range of practitioners who provided diverse interpretations, helping develop a shared identification, ownership, and motivation towards framing the project as "Our Mjøsa." This collaborative approach generated new opportunities, new meanings, and new thinking; most importantly, it fostered an advanced awareness of the complexities and paradoxes in sustainable tourism development.

The research presents a framework comprising three zones: inertia (where tourism systems remain locked in old patterns), sustaining tourism (where surface-level sustainability goals are adopted without systemic change), and re-imagining tourism (where foundational assumptions and power structures are questioned and redesigned) [11]. Similar participatory design principles have been applied in other destinations as well. For example, in Western Australia, the collaborative "Local Futures" initiative brought together Aboriginal communities, government representatives, and tourism operators to co-develop tourism policies rooted in shared heritage and sustainability values. This inclusive model emphasised joint ownership and cultural sensitivity while promoting long-term sustainability. Unlike the Mjøsa case, which focused on shifting conceptual framings and values within existing governance structures, the Western Australia initiative led to tangible policy outcomes, including co-management agreements and the formal integration of Aboriginal knowledge into regional tourism plans. Likewise, in Slovenia, the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism engages local residents, businesses, and municipal leaders in a participatory certification program that directly connects national sustainability goals to local action, enhancing implementation and community buy-in.

Change—particularly through frameworks such as co-design and multi-stakeholder engagement—is critical to establishing shared values, imagining desirable futures, and stimulating a paradigm shift toward re-imagining and transforming tourism.

3.5. Addressing the Political Dimensions of Sustainability

Sustainable development and its goals, including those related to tourism, are inherently political. By "political," it refers to issues of power that influence decisions regarding who benefits, who loses, who is involved, when decisions are made, what decisions are made, why they are made, and how these decisions are implemented (and who may be impacted as a result). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a historic opportunity for the normative emergence of sustainable tourism, framed as a process of metagovernance—that is, the coordination and steering of multiple governance actors and mechanisms (including public, private, and civil society institutions) without relying on hierarchical control. However, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding interpretations, implementation, and the rights and responsibilities tied to sustainability as a political process in tourism [32].

An example of how politics shape sustainable tourism can be seen in the case of Bhutan, where the government has enacted a "high value, low volume" tourism policy. This policy, which places strict limits on the number of tourists entering the country and requires high daily fees, has been a political decision aimed at preserving the country's cultural and environmental integrity. While the policy aligns with the SDGs' goals of sustainable tourism, it is heavily influenced by political decisions about what kind of tourism is acceptable and who benefits from it. This decision has sparked both praise for protecting the environment and criticism for limiting access to tourists who might wish to experience Bhutan's unique culture. In this case, tourism sustainability is not just about ecological or economic factors but is deeply tied to political values and priorities.

It is essential that the SDGs' normative frameworks should not be uncritically followed, but instead, consider their assumptions, focus, and the impacts on alternative approaches to sustainable action. Understanding the politics surrounding sustainable tourism is crucial to better informing the SDGs and identifying factors that contribute to either their success or failure. Political engagement and will are critical "pushing forces" behind implementing sustainability measures. Indeed, research has shown that barriers to sustainable policies—especially those concerning sustainable mobility—are often rooted in a lack of political will and resistance to sustainable measures that could have economic implications [32].

For example, the implementation of low-emission zones for tourists in cities like London and Paris has faced considerable opposition from local businesses and certain political factions, who argue that these policies could hurt the tourism sector and local economies. Despite the potential environmental benefits, the resistance is often tied to political and economic interests, highlighting how sustainable measures are not just about environmental outcomes but are shaped by political forces [32].

Future research and practical strategies must delve deeper into the many forms of agency, interests, and values that affect how sustainability goals are achieved and interpreted within political systems. It is clear that advancing a transformative tourism agenda goes beyond economic or environmental commitments; it is fundamentally political [32] The political dimensions of sustainability must therefore be thoroughly examined to ensure that these goals are not only achievable but equitable and meaningful.

3.6. Managing Visitor-Resident Interactions

Visitor-resident relationships are central to the social sustainability of tourism, especially under conditions of overtourism. Visitor-resident irritants—issues that arise from tensions between visitors and local populations—are an important aspect of understanding and managing these relationships, which in turn can foster resilience for sustainable tourism [26]. In situations of overtourism, where high visitor numbers overwhelm local communities, these irritants can exacerbate tensions, leading to community resistance and dissatisfaction.

Some studies have explored the use of 'big data' approaches to examine visitor–resident tensions by identifying correlations between tourism activity and public sentiment. For instance, researchers have combined sentiment analysis of social media or public feedback with structured data from sources like Google Trends to track changes in public perceptions of tourism over time. These studies found that spikes in online searches for travel to specific destinations often coincided with negative shifts in resident sentiment, suggesting that rising tourism interest can correspond with increased local frustration. This correlation highlights the psychological and social costs of overtourism, such as overcrowding and diminished quality of life. Although the study primarily focused on modelling these irritants, it also compiled a set of indices—covering resident satisfaction, participation in tourism planning, and perceived benefits—that have since been integrated into broader models of sustainable tourism [26].

A real-life example of how social dynamics can be addressed is found in Venice, Italy, where overtourism has significantly strained the relationship between visitors and residents. In response, local authorities have started using data-driven approaches to measure resident satisfaction and understand irritants more effectively. For example, using real-time data from social media platforms, the city has been able to track resident sentiments during peak tourist seasons, which has led to the introduction of measures such as restricting tourist access to sensitive areas during certain hours and promoting tourism dispersion to reduce the pressure on local communities [26]. Unlike many destinations that rely primarily on economic indicators or visitor numbers, Venice is shifting toward resident-centric governance by incorporating

social sentiment and emotional well-being into its tourism planning—marking a notable departure from traditional, growth-focused tourism strategies.

This example underscores that solutions to overtourism and social dynamics need to involve and understand the perspectives of local communities. By engaging with residents and incorporating their views into decision-making processes, tourism can become more sustainable and equitable, fostering greater community acceptance and resilience in the long term.

3.7. Shifting Away from Growth-Centric Models

A recurrent challenge identified in the source materials concerning the sustainability of tourism is its continued entrenchment in a growth-oriented paradigm, with economic growth taking centre stage at the expense of broader sustainable development [26]. The overemphasis on economic growth, often at the cost of environmental and social well-being, has allowed the tourism sector to expand temporarily, but this growth is frequently achieved with little regard for the long-term impacts on sustainability. The "Brundtland-as-usual" logic, in which tourism is often pursued under the guise of sustainability, has failed to challenge this growth-centred mentality, leading to an often disconnected and competitive tourism industry that grows without truly respecting the finite limits of environmental and social systems [7]. This situation arises, at least in part, because the original Brundtland definition of sustainable development—"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"—is often interpreted in tourism as a green light to continue to develop economically, as long as some form of environmental mitigation or community benefits is included. In practice, this often amounts to mass tourism with a few possible ecotourism additions (like using a green certification or recycling program), while ignoring much broader issues such as, for instance, displacement at home, commodification of culture, or carbon emissions from long-distance travel. The result is that 'sustainable tourism' often becomes a label rather than a transformational concept.

In light of this, the imperative question to ask is, what exactly is being sustained through tourism development if not the tourism industry itself? The "profit-forever" industry logic has perpetuated an unsustainable trajectory, but by eliminating this mindset and adopting a more responsive and collaborative approach to tourism development, this can be steered towards sustainable degrowth. This shift would prioritize environmental and social limits over infinite growth [20]. By questioning the underlying assumptions of tourism, it is possible to move beyond merely commodifying nature and culture, towards a re-imagined tourism that emphasizes care for places instead of abstracting and commercializing them.

A real-life example of this shift can be seen in Bhutan's approach to sustainable tourism. The country has embraced the concept of "high-value, low-impact" tourism, with a clear commitment to limiting the number of tourists through a daily fee, ensuring that tourism remains within the country's environmental and cultural limits. By prioritizing environmental sustainability and local culture over unchecked growth, Bhutan's approach provides an alternative to traditional tourism models that focus on expanding economic benefits without regard for sustainability

Through practices like co-design, where stakeholders work together to re-imagine tourism development, democratic change can be forged that takes into account diverse perspectives and challenges existing assumptions. Collaborative efforts to rethink tourism can offer a platform for new conceptualizations that prioritize the care and stewardship of places, contributing to a more sustainable and responsible tourism future. Such transitions will not only promote the preservation of destinations but also challenge the prevailing notion that tourism's primary purpose is to drive economic growth at all costs.

3.8. Conclusion

Achieving sustainable tourism, particularly in the face of challenges like overtourism, requires a multi-faceted approach that goes beyond narrow and conventional notions of sustainability. Some possibilities identified include greater conceptual clarity and holistic models that use a range of capabilities, beyond the usual three pillars of sustainability. In order to grapple with the many barriers to effective implementation, political will, definitive policies, less bureaucracy, and a long-term shared vision are all essential. Moreover, collaboration and participatory methods, such as co-design and multiple stakeholder approaches, are necessary for local ownership, appreciation of different perspectives, and reimagining tourism futures. Overall, recognizing and grappling with the political aspects of sustainable development, including researching questions of access to power, and confronting the status quo grounded in specific tools (e.g., Sustainable Development Goals) can all be seen as minimum requirements of any significant change. Equally, perhaps more importantly, moving away from growth-based models of tourism development and prioritising care for destinations and communities over the pursuit of unlimited consumption. Overall, all of these approaches–grounded in an understanding of complexity, collaboration, and critical engagement–provide the beginnings of a pathway to more sustainable and responsible tourism.

4. Case Studies

Asia and the Pacific have experienced rapid economic growth, particularly since 2005, leading to increased opportunities, but also posing significant challenges for sustainable development. With the global tourism industry expanding at an unprecedented rate, the region has seen a surge in the number of both international and domestic tourists. According to the UNWTO Asia Tourism Trends Report (2020), international tourist arrivals in Asia and the Pacific grew by an average of 6% per year from 2005 to 2017, outpacing the global average of 4%. In 2017 alone, the region welcomed 323 million international tourists, accounting for approximately 25% of the world's total. In 2019, Asia accounted for approximately 38% of global international tourist arrivals, with the Pacific region also witnessing substantial growth. This dramatic increase in tourism calls for effective governance to maximize its benefits while minimizing adverse environmental and socio-cultural impacts.

Traditional, linear approaches to development often fall short in addressing the complexities associated with tourism growth. These methods overlook the need for adaptive and nuanced interventions that can respond to emerging challenges. To ensure long-term sustainability, it is critical to move away from linear development paths and adopt integrated, collaborative systems that foster resilience and inclusivity. Sustainable outcomes are best achieved when governance structures enable cooperation among diverse stakeholders—including local communities, government bodies at multiple levels, tourism operators, civil society organizations, and environmental groups—ensuring that developmental progress is both balanced and equitable.

The following case studies, drawn from various destinations across Asia and the Pacific, illustrate how regions have successfully navigated the challenges of tourism development. These case studies, as will be discussed in the following section, highlight the governance mechanisms and collaborative frameworks that were implemented to address the negative impacts of tourism. By examining these examples, this section will explore how regional stakeholders have worked together to promote sustainability and the lessons that can be learned from their experiences. [42]

4.1. Understanding the Approach Used in the Philippines

The province of Bohol in the Philippines presents an insightful example of a locally-driven approach to

sustainable tourism governance. Facing the challenge of rebooting its tourism industry, Bohol set out to diversify its tourism sector with a vision centred around ecotourism. This initiative was motivated by the realization that ecotourism could be the key to achieving sustainable development while addressing environmental and socio-economic concerns. According to a report by UNWTO (2017), the shift toward ecotourism represented a paradigm change in how tourism could be developed in harmony with the environment and local communities.

At the core of Bohol's ecotourism initiative was the understanding that sustainable development could not occur without the active participation of the local population. The province recognized the need for a shift towards eco-cultural tourism, which would blend environmental conservation with cultural heritage preservation. The ultimate goal was to integrate this vision with institutional reforms that would ensure the economic benefits of tourism were channelled into the local economy, helping to alleviate poverty through an inclusive value chain—a system in which local producers, service providers, artisans, and small businesses are actively integrated into the tourism supply chain and equitably share in its profits and opportunities [46].

The initiative was supported by several projects, notably the GOLD (Governance for Local Development) project. This project helped assess Bohol's competitive advantages and employed a participatory, multi-stakeholder approach to tourism development. Initially, the province could only influence ecotourism decisions at the municipal level, driven by local executives such as mayors, despite having set the broader strategic direction. This was largely due to the decentralised governance structure in the Philippines, where local government units (LGUs) hold significant autonomy over land use, planning, and tourism development within their jurisdictions. As a result, even when the provincial government outlined ecotourism priorities, implementation depended heavily on the willingness and capacity of municipal leaders to align local initiatives with provincial goals. This situation changed as Bohol worked to convince municipal governments of the potential benefits of green tourism, focusing on poverty reduction and economic growth through an ecotourism value chain [46].

The municipal governments played a critical role, particularly through the establishment of Municipal Poverty Reduction Action Teams. These teams, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, promoted the green tourism initiative. One significant action was the creation of visitor registration programs at key tourist sites such as Kalanggaman Island and Tabuk Island. By 2010, over 5,000 visitors had registered, generating more than USD 6,056 in registration fees [46]. This initiative demonstrated the potential of tourism as a sustainable revenue source for local governments and communities.

The growth of tourism in Bohol was evident, with an increase in the number of boats used to ferry visitors—from just four in 2010 to 17 by 2016. Additionally, local tourist inns were established to accommodate the growing number of visitors. However, this rapid growth raised concerns about sustainability. To address these challenges, the municipality of Palompon in Bohol adopted a comprehensive environmental protection strategy that included regulating visitor registration and carefully managing infrastructure development [46]. This approach helped mitigate the risks associated with uncontrolled tourism growth.

The experience of Palompon underscores the effectiveness of a sustainable tourism model that is driven by local environmentalism and supported by national frameworks. The key takeaway from Bohol’s experience is the importance of integration and cooperation across all levels of government. Furthermore, continuous stakeholder engagement, accountability, and commitment are essential to achieving long-term

sustainability goals. While the reliance on domestic tourists was identified as a constraint, Bohol's strong local vision and structured partnerships, coupled with institutional changes, successfully revitalized its tourism sector. Positive outcomes included improved economic conditions, the creation of small industries, greater domestic investment, and enhanced livelihoods for local communities [46].

4.2. Assessing Tanna Island

Tanna Island, located in Vanuatu, offers a unique case of a destination on the brink of rapid tourism growth due to a distinctly different geographic isolation, cultural richness, and ecologically fragile. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that the island possesses great potential for tourism and scope for vulnerability simultaneously. The remoteness and transportation barriers, and lack of infrastructure make logistics for tourism development complex; however, the strong indigenous customs, and custom culture give it a deep socio-cultural dimension that few destinations occupy at such a scale. The destination is both attractive to niche tourism, but also a high-risk environment for unmanaged growth. However, this growth presents distinct challenges, particularly due to the island's remoteness, transportation issues, inadequate infrastructure, and vulnerability to natural disasters. The impacts of these challenges were starkly highlighted by Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015, which significantly affected the region. Tourism, often seen as a means to stimulate both formal and informal economies and create new livelihoods, could also place immense pressure on natural ecosystems if not managed properly. While tourism brings potential economic benefits, it also carries significant risks, including exacerbating environmental degradation and increasing vulnerability to climate change, as noted by the UNWTO (2017).

The logistical challenges of establishing infrastructure and services on remote islands like Tanna are considerable, with high costs and limited access to information regarding weather and climate trends. Tanna's status as home to the Yasur volcano, a major tourist attraction due to its regular eruptions, makes it a popular destination for visitors, especially those coming from the capital, Port Vila. However, these very characteristics—remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, and the need for infrastructure—present significant obstacles to sustainable tourism development [46].

In response to these challenges, Vanuatu has adopted a national tourism policy, the Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Action Plan (VSTAP), which outlines a vision for tourism as an inclusive and sustainable industry, focusing on economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors. While the VSTAP highlights commendable actions, such as the creation of environmental and social impact frameworks, promotion of local ownership, and support for small businesses—to ensure sustainable outcomes, such as the creation of environmental and social impact frameworks and support for small businesses, it falls short in providing concrete implementation mechanisms, timelines, or enforcement strategies to ensure these frameworks are consistently applied across provinces and tourism operators [46]. However, the Tafea Tourism Plan, which specifically addresses Tanna Island, places a greater emphasis on sustainability. The vision of the Tafea plan is for the region to become a "sustainable role model," focusing on ecotourism that benefits the economy, protects cultural heritage, and safeguards the environment, while also developing necessary infrastructure and human resources.

Developed with input from various local stakeholders, the Tafea Tourism Plan recognizes the importance of integrating customary practices into tourism governance. Despite the plan's emphasis on sustainability, one significant limitation is the insufficient attention given to disaster risk reduction—a crucial oversight given the recent impacts of Cyclone Pam. This gap could be addressed through the incorporation of climate resilience and disaster preparedness into tourism planning, hence developing compulsory risk assessments, early warning systems, and infrastructure design standards for extreme weather events.

Moreover, by involving local communities in the co-creation of emergency protocols and resilience-building initiatives, both preparedness and social trust in the tourism system would be enhanced. Another challenge for Tanna Island is attracting tourists who align with its sustainability vision, particularly "immersion travellers" who seek meaningful cultural experiences, while also managing the impact of large-scale infrastructure projects, such as the proposed international airport and cruise ship terminal [46]. To address these challenges, the importance of holistic planning and sustainable tourism management is emphasized. Effective governance requires defining sustainability through context-specific actions, including a comprehensive vulnerability assessment of climate change. Tools and indicators, such as national accreditation programs and regular reporting to the public, can help track the quality of development and ensure that sustainability objectives are being met. Education and training for local stakeholders are also critical for the successful implementation of sustainable tourism strategies [46].

Tanna Island's case underscores that while policies may articulate sustainability goals, effective governance requires incorporating local vulnerabilities and fostering inclusive decision-making processes. By focusing on culturally meaningful and environmentally sustainable practices, Tanna has an opportunity to leverage a "small window of opportunity" for tourism development, ensuring that governance structures support growth without compromising the island's cultural and environmental integrity. One such culturally significant practice is the Toka Festival, a vibrant event held every 3 to 4 years when the paramount chief deems conditions favourable. This festival brings together neighbouring villages for gift-giving ceremonies, custom dances, and feasting, serving as a powerful expression of solidarity and cultural identity on the island. Integrating such events into sustainable tourism strategies can help preserve cultural heritage while promoting community-led economic development.

4.3. Analysing the Actions Taken by Vietnam

In Vietnam, the rapid growth of tourism has raised the question of how to ensure that it contributes to poverty alleviation, especially in remote and mountainous regions. To address this, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) initiatives have been promoted as a key strategy for sustainable tourism development. Despite significant macroeconomic growth that has reduced the national poverty rate, nearly 18 million people, primarily from marginalized communities, still live in extreme poverty. The CBT model, which emerged in the 1970s, is grounded in the belief that local participation, ownership, management, and control over tourism projects can maximize the positive impacts of tourism on communities. For instance, Lac village in the Mai Chau district, which started offering homestays in 1993, illustrates the potential for CBT to empower local communities and create opportunities for economic development [46].

In response to the recognition of tourism's potential to reduce poverty, development agencies have gradually supported CBT initiatives, funding both international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to implement such projects. However, many early CBT initiatives led by NGOs faced significant challenges. These included poor market access, weak governance, and financial instability, which often led to the collapse of projects once external funding ceased. Additionally, focusing narrowly on specific tourism products, such as homestays, led to unequal distribution of benefits, with some community members benefiting disproportionately while others were excluded from the decision-making processes [46]. This highlighted the need for new governance structures and business models to ensure greater inclusivity, participation, and equitable distribution of benefits within the community.

A notable example of overcoming these challenges is the development of the CBT Travel social enterprise, spearheaded by Mr. Duong. Mr. Duong emphasized the importance of partnerships across various sectors, working with local communities, government bodies at multiple levels, NGOs, and private tourism

businesses. In the case of Mai Hich village, the first intervention involved drawing upon pro bono support from tourism experts who provided training. Domestic and international tour companies were then engaged to promote and sell CBT products, ensuring market access for the local community. Feedback from both tourists and industry professionals played a crucial role in shaping subsequent product and service improvements. This collaborative model, complemented by local tourism management board regulations and strong networks with private businesses, led to a dramatic increase in tourist arrivals in Mai Hich, from 474 visitors in 2013 to approximately 6,000 in 2015. Each visitor spent around USD 20, contributing to poverty reduction efforts while also educating tourists about the community's culture and tourism products [46].

On a national level, CBT Travel worked to scale up its successful interventions. This included attending and speaking at national tourism conferences to challenge the mindset that tourism development requires large capital investments. Mr. Duong and his team empowered actors with knowledge of various funding opportunities, specifically tailored to the needs of different communities. Additionally, they organized field trips for government officials and community leaders to demonstrate the effectiveness of CBT in reducing poverty. By 2017, 15 CBT projects had been developed and managed, primarily in rural and mountainous areas with minority ethnic groups. One of the major outcomes was the establishment of a national CBT "community of practice," fostering peer relationships among practitioners and facilitating the sharing of knowledge and innovative practices to create positive social impacts [46].

The Vietnam experience demonstrates that scaling up positive outcomes in tourism requires governance arrangements that allow for collaboration among diverse actors, creating opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and expertise. The success of these initiatives shows that scaling up is not about creating uniformity but rather about fostering more equitable outcomes. The key lessons include the need for active private sector engagement and ensuring that local capabilities and knowledge are translated into practical, shareable guidance for future projects [46].

4.4. Conclusion

To summarize, the case studies from Bohol, Tanna Island and the Community-Based Tourism initiatives in Viet Nam suggest that dealing with the complexities of rapid tourism growth in the Asia-Pacific, as part of sustainable regional development, requires different approaches to traditional tourism planning. These cases demonstrated that good governance is not just the responsibility of governments but involves collaborative, multi-stakeholder partnerships, including local communities, the private sector, and civil society organizations. The challenges included everything from catering to the need to reinvigorate economies that had been previously impacted, while also crossing levels of government, or managing growth in remote and vulnerable contexts that face climate risks and where tourism can contribute to poverty alleviation, which largely depends on business models and how benefits are shared. When thinking through the solutions they provided, there were consistent elements of clear governance arrangements and partnership structures, participatory planning, investment in capacity building and awareness, approaches that were responsive to local realities and taken into account cultural context. The experiences show that success is often dependent on context-responsive governance models and ensuring that resources and skills are available at the appropriate level (subnational in particular), and building trust and a shared vision with stakeholders. Future endeavours should still emphasize integrated planning, anticipate climate and disaster risks and ensure that tourism benefits flow widely, support local livelihoods, and conserve natural and cultural heritage. In the end, these cases reinforce the idea that

sustainable tourism growth and regional resilience are possible when diverse actors collaborate using governance systems that work, and that growth and sustainability can be reconciled.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study support the claim that sustainable tourism is a complicated and multifaceted problem. Sustainable tourism cannot be "solved" by interventions based on a "little" set of expert-driven, technocratic solutions. Sustainable tourism requires a thorough transformation of the tourism sector, one that envisions a tourism that is not a vehicle for unrestricted economic growth but a practice that supports ecological integrity, cultural resilience, and sustainable, equitable human development. To accomplish this, we must move away from the dominant neoliberal development paradigms, which, as outlined, on aggregate rely on the numbers of visitors, GDP contribution, and foreign investment (whatever the local implications and limits to the environment) for local progress. As demonstrated in this article, the interlocking dilemmas of overtourism, disengagement from political discourse and action, behavioural contradictions, economic vulnerabilities, and technological fixes cannot be untangled without a transformative reset of the ideological pillars supporting tourism policy.

The empirical cases reviewed in this paper, including Bohol's ecotourism vision and participatory governance initiatives, Vietnam's community-based tourism enterprise model, and Tanna Island's attempts to balance remoteness and climate vulnerability, are valuable examples of how integrated and context-specific forms of governance can facilitate more sustainable outcomes. These cases highlight the significance of multi-level integration of tourism policies, participatory decision-making for a range of stakeholders, and long-term engagement with stakeholders. They also illustrate the fact that tourism is not sustainable just because we have a plan or are aware of sustainability; it must be negotiated continually, and it requires shared values, institutional capacity, and adaptive learning for future policies.

Furthermore, the paper articulated that sustainable tourism is political, that we are influenced by existing power structures and interests—who makes the agenda, who gets the benefits, and who is silenced. Therefore, sustainability is not going to be achieved by stopping to make a technical fix; it is going to take more effort to change present continuous paradigms of growth, to shift discourses of value, and to create political will. Participatory planning, co-design, and multi-stakeholder governance are not merely scientific or procedural tools; they are mechanisms of empowerment to allow communities to regain control over their tourism futures.

Moving forward, the goal has to be institutionalising sustainability as a norm of tourism systems rather than becoming a peripheral addition. This entails redefining success terms to also include sustainability as environmental resilience, social ties and cohesion, and cultural preservation; establishing governance mechanisms for resilience to political terms and marketplaces; and embedding sustainability literacy for conscious consumerism and within industry practice. Ultimately, we need to conceive sustainability not as an end game but as an evolving, embodied, and contested process—about how we collaborate, challenge and commit ourselves to justice, equity, and planetary boundaries. In this way, the tourism industry can not only achieve meaningful sustainability but also aim to rewind those bounds to achieve transformative outcomes.

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