

## Sustainable Tourism Leadership: A Collaborative Approach to Drive Ecosystem and Accelerate Innovation in Indonesia

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### Abstract

Tourism is a key contributor to Indonesia's GDP. Although the sector experienced major setbacks during the pandemic, it has since shown signs of recovery with notable achievements. One of the critical success factors involved in such a rebound is leadership. At the same time, the pandemic highlighted the importance of building a more sustainable tourism climate. While existing frameworks to create sustainable tourism mainly focus on technical and governance aspects, less attention has been given to the role of leadership. This research, therefore, examines how leadership enhances sustainable tourism in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach to dig deeper into the perspectives of tourism industry players, from the government, NGOs, academics, and local communities, using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) coupled with a literature review. The findings show that various challenges in sustainable tourism leadership hinder its maximum growth. While innovation has become at the forefront of sustainable tourism stakeholders in Indonesia, it is still isolated from a bigger sustainable tourism ecosystem. Leadership frameworks should enhance, accelerate innovation, and spur ecosystem creation. This research provides a theoretical contribution to leadership literature, particularly the role of sustainable tourism leaders in improving the sustainable tourism climate. Practically, this research informs leaders in implementing their blueprint to create a robust, sustainable tourism industry.

### Keywords

sustainable tourism; Indonesia tourism; tourism leadership; tourism innovation; ecotourism; tourism ecosystem

### Introduction

Tourism is one of the cornerstones of the Indonesian economy. In 2019, the tourism sector contributed 4.97% to GDP, although this figure significantly declined to 2.24% during the pandemic (Santika, 2023). The decline was attributed to countries partially shutting down their economies and imposing travel restrictions (Anele, 2021), which impacted tourism income and resulted in employment losses (Cahyadi & Newsome, 2021). The Indonesian government, both central and regional, has made efforts to revive the tourism

sector, from providing incentives or discounts on airline tickets (Atmojo & Fridayani, 2021) to providing social assistance and professional development programs (Kristiana et al., 2021).

The government's efforts successfully helped the tourism industry rebound in 2022. The sector has even achieved accolades, including second place globally for halal tourism (Akbari, 2023). Additionally, Indonesia saw an increase in foreign tourists from 1.57 million to 5.47 million (Finaka, 2023). This rise demonstrates the global appeal of Indonesian tourism, particularly halal tourism. The 2022

halal market report assessed that the halal economy in Indonesia has the potential to increase GDP by 5.1 billion dollars per year.

Recovering the tourism industry is a multifactor effort, with leadership diversity playing a significant role, as leaders are responsible for creating policies and encouraging the team to make the best effort. Several studies have investigated the impact of leadership on organisational success (Bhutto et al., 2021; Rakhman et al., 2021; Sinaga, 2020; Tuan, 2017; Yanti et al., 2021). Aside from leadership, education and training factors (Gupta & Sahu, 2021) and competitive intelligence (Kettani, 2021) are just as significant for the industry's recovery. Nonetheless, formulating education and training programs to improve the tourism industry also depends on the leadership's decision-making.

The pandemic has also provided valuable lessons to encourage a sustainable tourism ecosystem. In this aspect, the Indonesian government needs to improve significantly. For example, although the tourism businesses on Pari Island have provided economic benefits, new problems have emerged: decreased social cohesion and cooperation between residents, reduced compliance with local customs, increased materialistic values, and conflicts between communities and companies (Kinseng et al., 2018). Moreover, in Surabaya, the community observes that several stakeholders engage in ecotourism planning without adequately involving all members of the local population around the tourist sites (Idajati et al., 2016).

These problems indicate that there is a missing leadership role across sectors. Research has shown that effective stakeholder collaboration is needed to sustainably develop ecotourism, particularly in developing countries (Wondirad et al., 2020). Managing relationships with primary stakeholders can yield more than sustained participation (Graci, 2013a; Keyim, 2018; Petrova & Hristov, 2016). Among these

stakeholders, the local community plays a central role in implementing the program (Aly et al., 2021; Manaf et al., 2018a; Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019). Therefore, this research aims to examine leadership practices across various tourism sectors in Indonesia. This research contribution lies in identifying challenges across stakeholders and visualising sustainable tourism leadership patterns as a model. This model can serve as a reference for stakeholders to practice more effective leadership in the tourism sector.

## Literature Review

### Sustainable Tourism: Definition and Principles

Since the emergence of the sustainable tourism concept, researchers have made significant efforts to reconcile the diverse definitions (Budeanu et al., 2016; Hashemkhani Zolfani et al., 2015; Postma et al., 2017). Several key themes have emerged in the discourse surrounding sustainable tourism, including the transformation of business models, the adoption of organisational processes for mitigation, the integration of cleaner and smarter technologies, the preservation of cultural heritage as a core component of sustainable tourism products, rural development, green investment, and the establishment of sustainability standards and reporting mechanisms (Roblek et al., 2021).

Although there is no universally agreed-upon definition among researchers, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) provides a widely referenced framework for understanding sustainable tourism. UNWTO posits sustainable tourism as a form of tourism "that fully considers its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005). To operationalise the concept of sustainable tourism, there are six indicators: resource

preservation, environmental education, stakeholder inclusion, economic planning, cultural awareness, and community resource identification (Cárdenas et al., 2015).

**Table 1.**  
**Global Code of Ethics for Tourism Principles**

No	Global Sustainable Tourism Principles
1	Tourism must understand and respect the social and cultural life of the local community
2	Tourism acts as a fulfillment of individual or collective needs
3	Tourism functions as part of sustainable development
4	Tourism provides space to enjoy the beauty of natural panoramas and the environment as well as world cultural heritage, while still contributing to the preservation of nature and the environment, as well as the traditions and culture of a nation
5	Tourism must make a clear and tangible contribution to the country and community communities in and around tourism destinations
6	Tourism must regulate the rights and obligations of interested parties (stakeholders)
7	Tourism must regulate the rights and obligations of the community in traveling
8	Tourism must provide tourists flexibility to move from one destination to another
9	Tourism must regulate the rights and obligations of tourism business actors
10	Tourism must regulate the obligations of countries to implement the global principles of this tourism code of ethics

Source: Nurjaya (2022)

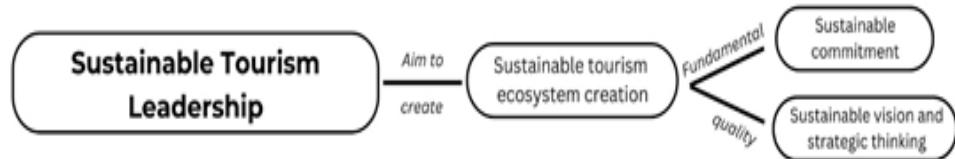
Achieving sustainable tourism requires effective leadership across all sectors, including government, business, and community stakeholders, to uphold and implement the principles of sustainability. The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET) outlines ten core principles that serve as a guideline for leaders in fostering sustainable tourism practices. These principles aim to ensure tourist satisfaction, deliver meaningful and enriching experiences, raise awareness of sustainability-related issues, and promote responsible and sustainable tourism behaviour (Streimikiene et al., 2021).

## Sustainable Tourism Leadership

Sustainable tourism leadership is an effort to create an ecosystem and develop tourism innovation with a collaborative approach. Sustainable tourism leaders have a far-sighted vision and strong strategic thinking skills to develop tourism destinations sustainably. They understand the importance of planning and implementing long-term strategies and are highly committed to translating long-term plans into concrete actions (Jang et al., 2017; McGehee et al., 2019). Raising awareness of the importance of preserving the environment and developing sustainable or green behaviour is also a critical criterion (Ahmed et al., 2021).

Sustainable leadership must adapt to the evolving developments and demands of the times. In the context of tourism, sustainable leaders should encourage their team to learn many new rules and demands in exchange for developing a sustainable tourism climate. Research has shown that adaptive leadership moderates the association between learning organisation and organisational innovation, learning organisations and change self-efficacy, and change self-efficacy and organisational innovation (Chughtai et al., 2023). In the complex environment, leaders seek to mobilise knowledge rapidly, respond to contextual needs, and empower colleagues to take action, even when the path forward is uncertain and the process may be chaotic (Dunn, 2020).

One of the tasks of leaders today is to facilitate and oversee collaboration with various actors. The catalyst for collaboration is how a leader communicates a shared vision (Sun & Henderson, 2017). Through a shared vision, leaders can create a collaborative governance. This approach brings together organisations from the public, private, and civic sectors to work as stakeholders, relying on deliberation and collective decision-making to pursue shared goals that cannot be fulfilled individually (Wang & Ran, 2023, p. 1189). Collaborative leadership has four objectives:



**Figure 1. Sustainable Tourism Leadership**

Source: Author's primary data (2024)

to define policies that minimise external cost, to promote the development of innovative economic niches related to tourism in the social and technological sectors, to use technology to promote a more sustainable model, and to use the higher number of tourists to create business opportunities in tourism (Barandiarán et al., 2019).

Sustainable tourism leadership aims to create an ecosystem that can encourage the growth of a sustainable tourism climate. To that end, leaders must be committed to sustainability efforts in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This commitment must be accompanied by a clear vision and strategic thinking, which are fundamental qualities for leaders across all sectors. Such leaders must also adapt the methods to create a sustainable tourism climate, while remaining aligned with their strategic vision.

Tourism development, especially in many Asian countries, is commonly initiated, managed, and completed by central government agencies (Li et al., 2021a). However, stakeholder collaboration is increasingly important in the development of tourism (Nyanjom et al., 2018). In practice, sustainable tourism leaders in government, business, and community work collaboratively to create an ecosystem. Supportive government policy interventions are needed to ensure effective conservation of environmental and natural resources without compromising the locals' economic viability and social well-being (Baloch et al., 2023). Community leaders not only foster community engagement (Poskas & Messer, 2015) but also play a central role in implementing programs

alongside other stakeholders (Manaf et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the private sector supports local socioeconomic development in terms of employment creation, skills training and development, the payment of lease fees, as well as through philanthropic development projects (Snyman, 2020).

Thus, in the context of collaboration and innovation in sustainable tourism, sustainable tourism leadership aims to create an ecosystem that can encourage the growth of a sustainable tourism climate. To that end, leaders must be committed to sustainability efforts in accordance with the SDGs. Commitment must be backed by a clear vision and strategic thinking. These qualities are essential for leaders across sectors, who in sustainable tourism must also adapt their methods while staying aligned with their vision.

The novelty of this study is the greater emphasis on leadership. This study discusses how leadership practices and stakeholder collaboration create a sustainable tourism sector. It also discusses the perspectives of cross-sector stakeholders to assess the extent to which sustainable tourism leadership has been implemented. This study aims to complement previous research by highlighting leadership in creating a sustainable tourism sector.

## Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach for three primary reasons. The first is to gain insights from the practical experiences of leaders in the tourism industry. The second is to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can enable the development of an understanding of the meaning that people

attach to their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). These experiences and feelings are important to dig deeper into how sustainable tourism leadership is practised. Patterns and meanings can be explored, which can lead to the development of new frameworks or concepts that might not emerge from purely quantitative studies.

Data were collected in four months from January 2024 to April 2024 through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), which are a valuable method in capturing participants' opinions (Jamshed, 2014). FGDs are also time- and cost-effective, especially when held via platforms like Zoom, allowing for concise discussions that capture diverse perspectives. The participants consisted of representatives from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Respondent 1), Tourism Planning and Development Centre, Bandung Institute of Technology (Respondent 2), The Pacific Asia Travel Association (Respondent 3), tourist village manager of Nglangeran in Gunung Kidul, Yogyakarta (Respondent 4), and Association of Indonesian Tour and Travel Agency (Respondent 5). These sources provided diverse perspectives, both from the perspective of the government, the private sector, organisations, and local communities. This inclusive approach provided the author with diverse and in-depth insights, facilitating the development of a comprehensive tourism leadership model in Indonesia.

The FGDs were conducted via Zoom for 60 minutes and recorded with the consent of the participants. The questions asked were divided into two categories. The first question was general, namely, the opinions of each stakeholder on the balance between economic growth and environmental sustainability in current tourism development. The second question is themed on the role of each stakeholder in promoting a sustainable tourism ecosystem. Transcription was done after the FGDs were completed. The content

was categorised based on themes, and then analysed and interpreted to see the patterns. Secondary data from previous research were incorporated to complement the primary data. The literature selection was guided by its contextual relevance and potential to add value to the research. The inclusion of secondary data was limited to studies published within the last ten years.

## **Results**

### **Inconsistency Between Vision and Implementation**

The Indonesian government has committed to developing tourism with the principle of sustainability. According to the Director of Strategic Studies of the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf), Agustini Rahayu, Kemenparekraf carries five strategic issues in developing sustainable tourism in Indonesia, namely sustainability, competitiveness, added value, digitalisation, and productivity. The targets for achieving sustainable tourism, according to the message of Kemenparekraf, are economic growth, job creation, policies that are right on target, time, and benefits (Darandono, 2022). Sandiaga Uno said that Kemenparekraf targets a reduction in carbon emissions of up to 50 per cent by 2030 and 0 per cent from 2045 to 2060 (Sahira, 2023).

However, there is a mismatch between vision and implementation. Chairman of the Association of Indonesian Tourism Scholars, Azril Azahari, said that Indonesia's tourism policy 2024 still needs to be clarified: whether to move towards quality tourism or to focus on mass tourism (Zaini, 2024). Respondent 2 explained:

“..... Economic growth remains the primary focus in Indonesia. Consequently, environmental sustainability has not yet become a central consideration. This is largely due to the relatively low level of environmental awareness among the Indonesian population”.

Respondent 4 added:

“... Indicators of the success of tourism development are assessed by ‘how much economic benefit’ is obtained, how much tourism growth is in the area, and how much investment is taking place there”.

The government still prioritises economic growth over building tourism centres that prioritise environmental aspects. There is a reason why the Indonesian government continues to apply this mindset. In terms of economic demographics, many Indonesians live below the poverty line. According to BPS data 2024, there are 25,22 million people living in poverty (Ahdiat, 2024). Addressing the population's immediate needs takes precedence, which means that sustainable practices have not yet become a primary focus.

Although economic growth has created new jobs and businesses, the condition of natural resources and the living environment deteriorates (Baloch et al., 2023), as elaborated by Respondent 3:

“Several tourist destinations experience spatial conflicts with other activities, which threaten the ecosystem. Issues such as waste, environmental damage, and spatial planning that encroach on mining operations create significant inconvenience for tourists.”

### The Challenge of Sustainable Tourism

There are several challenges in creating a sustainable tourism ecosystem. From a technoenvironment perspective, the challenges revolve around high energy use, extensive water consumption, and habitat destruction (Pan et al., 2018a). Other researchers highlight how changing the environment can enhance consumer motivation for sustainable tourism and encourage more sustainable behaviour (Streimikiene et al., 2021). These challenges are important to consider; however, in Indonesia,

one of the challenges lies in inappropriate policies. Respondent 1 stated:

“... Policy uncertainty is a concern; frequent changes create uncertainty for tourism stakeholders, complicating efforts to develop a sustainable tourism leadership model. Ironically, the policies intended to support sustainable tourism sometimes undermine the sustainability of the programs themselves.”

Frequently changing policies makes it difficult for many stakeholders to play their roles. Investment and infrastructure development have no clear orientation. This uncertainty can hinder efforts to create and implement sustainable tourism strategies in the long term. The misalignment of these policies has another impact, namely the lack of awareness of the importance of sustainable tourism. This occurs among both the government and the community.

Respondent 4 explained:

“... Consider a situation where there is a gradual change in leadership within a service. The initial head of the service was already knowledgeable about the development of sustainable tourism and related matters after transitioning from the library service, which involved a different process for understanding sustainable tourism.”

The statement suggests a lack of awareness among government officials, indicating that they do not share a unified mindset. As a result, the policies made are not fully aligned with the spirit of sustainable tourism. This also happened in London, where only a few local officials promoted the principles of sustainable tourism in policy documents, and even fewer implemented them (Maxim, 2016). In addition to government officials, the community also shows a low level of awareness, though for different reasons. Respondent 2 explained:

“... People remain preoccupied with survival and meeting their basic needs, which diminishes their perception of the importance of environmental preservation. This mindset ultimately affects tourism management efforts in significant ways.”

Economic factors are a significant concern for the community. Many Indonesians are preoccupied with the challenge of putting food on the table, as their primary focus is on meeting their basic needs. Moreover, potential threats in the tourism sector, such as a limited market, fierce competition, and a short tourist season (Lasso & Dahles, 2018), make people innovative to find a more stable income. However, the economy is only one factor among many others. Respondent 1 explained:

“... This understanding and awareness are shaped by various factors, including the level of education, personal experiences, and the interests and values held by each individual's role.”

The lack of government understanding and public awareness has resulted in low community involvement in sustainable tourism programs. Respondent 4 explained the relationship between these factors:

*“At times, the community may be aware of certain issues; however, misunderstandings by specific parties can undermine the collective awareness and empowerment that the community has developed. This raises questions about the current state of awareness.”*

Achieving sustainable tourism is unlikely to succeed without the active participation and comprehension of local communities in the decision-making processes and the implementation of tourism programs. Communities should be regarded as essential contributors to tourism development, not

merely as consumers, but as key stakeholders in the process.

### Sustainable Tourism Leadership Alignment

Reflecting on these challenges, it is clear that strong leadership is essential for advancing sustainable tourism as it ensures regulatory certainty and fosters innovation through collaboration, which creates a robust and conducive sustainable tourism climate. Respondent 1 stated:

“...Tourism leadership emphasises leadership expertise. A leader in tourism must effectively orchestrate governance, manage the tourism ecosystem, and strengthen the vision and strategy. Essential skills include planning, destination management, and branding. A strong leader ensures that a destination has a compelling image and unique selling points, making it memorable for tourists.”

Respondent 2 provided a more comprehensive statement:

“Sustainable leadership requires an awareness of the importance of long-term planning and a commitment to its implementation. A leader who lacks this awareness cannot be considered sustainable or committed to development. Additionally, effective leaders must build strong teams that share this commitment; individual awareness is insufficient if the team is not aligned. Leaders should also be adept at assigning roles based on competence and authority to optimise contributions. They must act as orchestrators, integrating various sectors to support tourism and demonstrating the courage to unify these diverse areas. Finally, ongoing commitment to monitoring and evaluation is essential.”

Based on the above statement, five critical leadership characteristics are essential for leaders in sustainable tourism: effective tourism ecosystem management, a long-term vision, strategic planning, and robust branding. These elements are indispensable for developing tourist destinations, as they ensure a long-term, focused approach, contributing to sustainable growth. Selin (2017) argued:

“Sustainable tourism development leaders work beyond the boundaries of traditional organisations, working in public settings where they have little formal authority to compel organisations and people to act. Instead, they employ a different set of roles and capabilities to convene diverse stakeholders, build a compelling vision, sustain participation, and achieve collective impact” (p. 1368).

Sustainable tourism leadership is crucial for fostering holistic awareness. It extends beyond traditional boundaries, often relying on informal authority, and emphasises uniting diverse stakeholders into a cohesive ecosystem. Such leadership promotes open participation and leverages stakeholder competence to advance sustainable tourism.

For a sustainable tourism ecosystem to function effectively, integration must be supported by horizontal coordination at the national level, bottom-up initiatives facilitated through institutional transformation, active public participation, and the strategic utilisation of urban planning systems (Brendehaug et al., 2017). The central and regional governments play a crucial role as regulators, providing legal and policy certainty that enables active stakeholder engagement. Their commitment is essential, as the emphasis on sustainable development must be driven from both levels of policymaking. They need to provide regulatory certainty to ensure that other stakeholders can proceed without apprehension about potential changes.

When regulations are stable, other stakeholders can act without concerns over constant policy changes. Nevertheless, one role must be played collectively to have maximum impact. Respondent 4 explained:

“When we talk about sustainability, preparation and raising public awareness are key elements that are sometimes overlooked and are even the most significant challenges. Moreover, community-based tourism is the process of preparing the following human resources to continue the leadership and management of tourist villages.”

Respondent 2 added:

“Before engaging with the community, all relevant parties need to recognise the importance of sustainable tourism for effective development. This awareness is not solely about building public consciousness; it also involves the government needing to clarify and emphasise the significance of sustainable tourism practices.”

Each stakeholder plays a key role in building awareness and understanding within the community and institutions. Without this foundation, innovation and collaboration between agencies cannot occur. The role of sustainable tourism leaders is to ensure that all parties have awareness, understanding, and a vision aligned with sustainable tourism. Leaders must sustain the spirit of developing sustainable tourism, as this drives stakeholders to innovate. Research shows that various parties have already made such efforts. Representing the regulator, Respondent 1 explained:

“... We aim to develop the innovation sector, conduct capacity-building training for tourism and creative economy stakeholders, and promote digital destinations. Our strategy involves leveraging digital technology and online platforms to

enhance destination promotion and increase the use of social media and information technology in tourism marketing."

Meanwhile, from the academics, Respondent 2 said:

"Based on our research, we have implemented several innovations, including the development of thematic homestays. Each homestay is designed around the unique advantages of its village or destination. We also provide interpretation boards in the rooms to educate the community, homestay managers, and tourists about the significant natural and cultural resources of the area."

From the tourism management perspective, Respondent 4 explained:

"Our approach to supporting sustainable innovation in tourist villages involves integrating community activities into tour packages and demonstrating to tourists that these offerings align with their interests. We focus on identifying unique selling points within the community and raising awareness to showcase their appeal. Additionally, we set a target for innovation every two to three years to ensure continual progress."

These innovations must be integrated and collaborated into a cohesive framework. Sustainable tourism leaders should orchestrate innovations from various parties to maximise their impact. Leaders need to unite isolated stakeholders into a comprehensive ecosystem. Respondent 5 emphasised:

"... We must embrace a pentahelix approach that includes business leaders, media, government, and academia, recognising that collaboration is essential for success.

As emphasised by the Ministry of Tourism, the call for collaboration has been clearly articulated by the minister, who stated the importance of working together."

Respondent 3 added:

"... Collaboration among the community, government, and academics is essential and must be continuous. Each party should understand the benefits of this collaboration, ensuring that the desire to implement it arises not from coercion but from a shared necessity. Maintaining the sustainability of the environment and tourist destinations should be viewed as a collective responsibility and a common need."

## Discussion

The research results show many challenges to creating sustainable tourism, ranging from a lack of awareness and understanding of the community and government to a lack of community involvement and alternative policies. The root of all this is the dilemma between prioritising economic growth and balancing it with environmental aspects. Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) argues that tourism's major problem is the overemphasis on economic growth. In three decades of discussion on sustainable tourism, tourism authorities continue to promote tourism based on economic growth, despite the ecological and social limits of life on a limited planet. In Southeast Asia, tourism-oriented toward economic growth harms the environment, such as in Indonesia and the Philippines (Ahmad et al., 2019). Although stakeholders are aware of the potential of sustainable tourism, its implementation is still limited (KC et al., 2021).

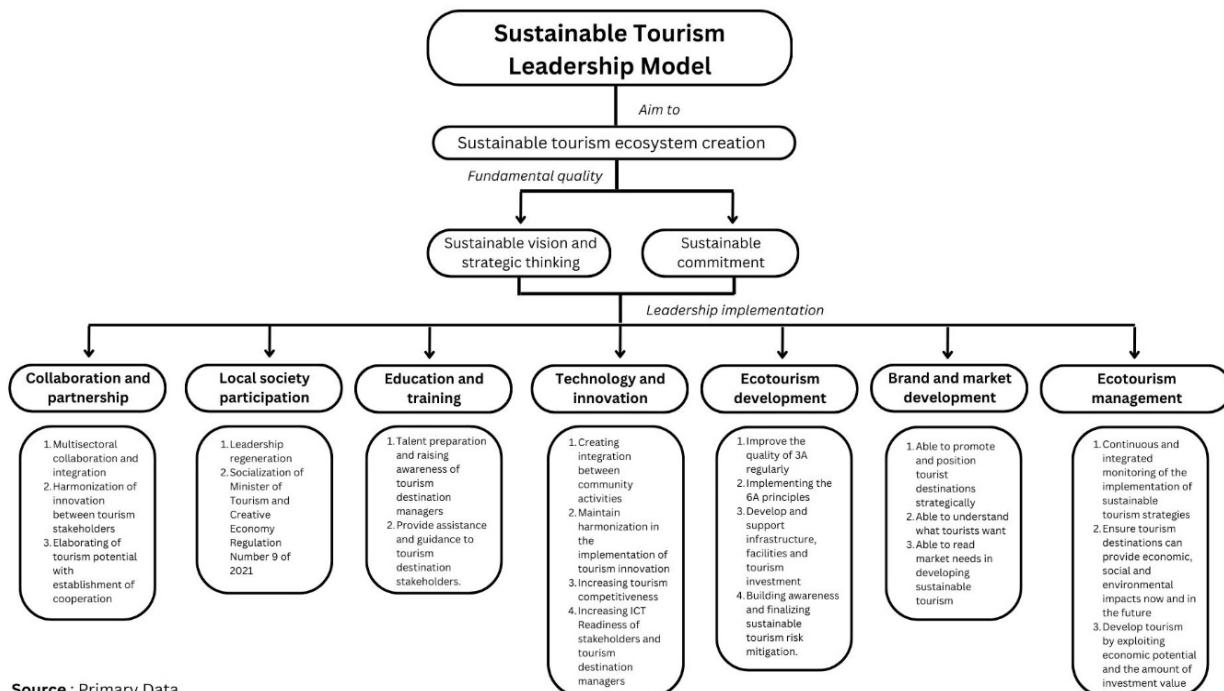
Therefore, the tourism sector in Indonesia must escape the trap of policies based on economic growth. Sharma et al. (2021) argue

that tourism development must focus on: government response, technology innovation, local belongingness, and consumer and employee confidence. Agyeiwaah et al. (2017) suggest that sustainable tourism focuses on seven indicators: job creation, business viability, quality of life, water quality, waste management, energy conservation, and community integrity maintenance.

Nevertheless, many stakeholders demonstrate a high level of adaptability, such as significant efforts to create sustainable tourism in Indonesia. However, these initiatives remain isolated from the broader sustainable tourism ecosystem. Therefore, leaders play a key role in weaving cross-stakeholder collaboration through a shared vision and commitment. This shared commitment and vision are realised by developing tourism that considers environmental, social, and economic sustainability. This involves strategic management of tourist destinations by considering long-term visions, stakeholder

involvement, sustainable innovation, and empowerment of local communities.

Each stakeholder's role depends on clear regulations for developing sustainable tourism. Thus, an effective enabling environment with sound governance arrangements is essential (Becken & Loehr, 2024). The government should create a national policy integrated with national energy and environmental policies to facilitate the transition towards a sustainable tourism sector (Nepal et al., 2019). The government must also formulate solutions that harmonise these aspects to achieve sustainable tourism goals (Kapera, 2018). The central government should provide strategic direction for rural tourism development, while regional governments are tasked with implementing these strategies on the ground. Regional authorities manage tourism practices directly, coordinate with businesses and local communities, and address any issues that arise, ensuring the practical application of the central government's policies (Liu et al., 2020).



**Figure 2. Framework of Sustainable Tourism Leadership Implementation**

Source: Author's primary data (2024)

When regulations related to sustainable tourism are clear, other stakeholders can play their roles and carry out their contributions in a more precise direction. In this study, a model of aspects is developed based on the findings. In order for sustainable tourism in Indonesia to develop optimally, there are eight factors that leaders must implement, namely collaboration and partnership, local community participation, training, technological innovation, ecotourism development, brand and market development, and ecotourism management.

**Collaboration and partnership.** Collaboration and partnership are paramount, extending beyond national boundaries to include international cooperation. Much research emphasises the collaboration in developing a country's potential (Emmendoerfer et al., 2023; Graci, 2013b; Li et al., 2021). Effective stakeholder collaboration requires an orchestration of roles, which involves three key elements: 1) trust, which is essential at every stage of collaboration; 2) clear delineation of stakeholder roles; and 3) regular communication to keep stakeholders informed with the latest updates (Park & Kohler, 2019). The collaboration should not be seen as an obligation but as a shared need, with the understanding that maintaining environmental sustainability and tourist destinations is a collective responsibility.

Collaboration should also involve the private sector, the media, and the local community. Local communities are a key factor in facilitating community participation, as is the attachment residents feel towards their area. Local communities possess unique knowledge and skills that can complement those of tourism experts, contributing to creating more sustainable and inclusive destinations (Bellato & Cheer, 2021). This indigenous knowledge and expertise can empower local communities to lead sustainable tourism development in their regions. When residents are closely connected to their surroundings, they are more

likely to recognise and address the impacts of tourism on their environment (Bajrami et al., 2020). Anyone who wants to collaborate with the local community must be able to establish ties with formal and informal leaders in the community (Priatmoko et al., 2021).

**Community participation.** Involvement in developing sustainable tourism must be balanced with training and education. In Sedang Abiensem Village, Bali, the education and training program has incorporated mapping tourist targets and employing digital influencer innovations. The use of digital influencers serves as a powerful tool for mass and persuasive information dissemination. This program aims to strategically attract tourists to Sedang by leveraging reviews, promotions, and communication networks through digital media. The education and training initiative has demonstrated significant potential in increasing tourist arrivals. However, the selection of influencers and the crafting of persuasive messages are critical factors that must be managed effectively (Jayanti et al., 2023).

**Training and education.** Training and education in sustainable tourism development must address four key barriers that impede stakeholder participation and the realisation of sustainable tourism: limited vision, insufficient institutional structures, lack of strategic orientation, and financial self-interest (Hatipoglu et al., 2016). Dangi and Jamal (2016) assert that leaders must adopt an integrated local-global approach grounded in ethical principles and supported by effective governance. Active intervention facilitates knowledge transfer and collaborative engagement among academics, government, and tourism practitioners globally, fostering the development of a cohesive local-global strategy.

**Technology and innovation.** Training and education should also encompass leadership development and the integration of an

innovation mindset alongside the utilisation of digitalisation. Effective leadership is contingent upon the incorporation of innovation and digital tools. Leaders must adopt an entrepreneurial approach to innovate and create memorable tourist experiences while considering economic, social, and environmental aspects. Tourism is fundamentally about experiences, and leaders must be adept at providing tourists with enriching encounters. Leadership defines the behaviour standards that influence others, and during the leadership process, two dimensions of leadership styles are evident: task-oriented behaviours and tolerance behaviours. Digital leaders are characterised by a clear vision and an understanding of how technology and data can realise that vision. They guide their colleagues in leveraging information technology for digital transformation. Transformational leadership in the digital era facilitates mindset changes to adapt to organisational developments and prepares leaders to become agents of change in digital technology (Junaidah et al., 2022).

Such innovations can be applied to various tourist attractions. By highlighting each location's natural wealth and providing comprehensive information to visitors, visits are likely to increase. Visitors who are well-informed about a destination are more likely to share their experiences, which can drive further interest. Additionally, digitalisation is crucial for promoting and disseminating information. For instance, in the Indian travel industry, a strong interactive and active online presence is prioritised to sustain and boost cultural tourism contributions (Menon et al., 2021).

In digitalisation, tourist areas must progress through four stages: increasing digital literacy, building e-business capabilities, establishing e-commerce platforms, and enhancing e-commerce functions (Pranita et al., 2021). Leaders should incorporate these stages into educational agendas, as digital exposure enhances opportunities for both domestic and international tourists. Improving digital

literacy, particularly in marketing, promotion, and business development, is essential. A solid foundation in digital literacy enables the development of smart tourist destinations. Smart tourism can improve the tourism experience and well-being of local people, increase the effectiveness and competitiveness of business objectives, and lead to overall competitive sustainability (Hanum, 2020).

**Ecotourism development.** Leaders must continuously apply innovation and digitalisation to the development of ecotourism. Gaps in conservation policies, weak protection of community rights, and government inconsistencies underscore the need for stronger policies. The government may need to reform environmental conservation and sustainable ecotourism policies to establish a solid foundation for conservation efforts. Planning and implementation approaches to sustainable development need reassessment to better achieve sustainability goals. Specifically, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Forestry should collaborate to ensure that ecotourism development aligns with principles of preserving natural and cultural resources while supporting businesses and infrastructure development. In other words, leaders across various sectors significantly influence the development of conservation areas within the tourism sector (Chrismansyah, 2022).

Historically, tourism development adhered to the 3A principles: attractions, accessibility, and amenities. With current trends, the government must expand these principles to the 6A model: attractions, accessibility, amenities, ancillary services, activities, and available packages, to create unique and innovative experiences for tourists. Recent global tourism trends indicate that 53% of travellers seek accommodations that combine comfort and innovative sustainability features, 78% desire new and unique culinary experiences, 52% prefer trips where the destination remains a mystery until arrival,

and 68% believe travel helps them become the best version of themselves (Booking.com, 2024).

**Infrastructure.** The primary focus should be on developing both physical and social infrastructure. Physical infrastructure includes roads, sanitation, hotels, restaurants, and other facilities that support tourist accessibility and amenities. In the sustainable paradigm, physical infrastructure encompasses natural, semi-natural, or artificial ecological systems with multifunctional benefits. The key concept in implementing green infrastructure for sustainable tourism is the strategic use of both existing natural elements and newly constructed elements to provide open space, air quality, and wildlife habitat benefits (Pan et al., 2018b). Infrastructure should be based on risk mitigation principles, including climate change adaptation.

Social infrastructure pertains to the stability of local communities in tourist destinations, government policies, development collaborators, and institutions related to tourist destinations. Combining social and physical infrastructure can enhance the attractiveness of tourist destinations. Research indicates that habit persistence (word of mouth), income, hotel rooms, and political stability positively impact tourism demand (Habibi, 2017).

**Investment.** Investment is vital for the growth of sustainable tourism, with investors increasingly prioritizing sustainability. Leaders should channel investment into areas like digital infrastructure, including Internet access. Investment in the development of technology can be seen as a focus on the social issues of sustainability (Streimikiene et al., 2021c). Additionally, European research demonstrates that tourism investments increase tourism revenue and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Paramati et al., 2018).

Significant investments can accelerate sustainable tourism development. This initial stage involves conducting targeted market mapping, followed by tailoring the language

and promotional approach to resonate with the identified audience. Social media and storytelling are key to promoting tourism. Engaging content raises awareness of emerging destinations and encourages sharing, while accessible tools allow individuals to use storytelling, mobility, and performance to influence their networks (Lund et al., 2018).

**Ecotourism management.** Effective management of sustainable tourism destinations involves two critical aspects: monitoring and evaluation, and ensuring that destinations deliver economic, social, and environmental benefits to all stakeholders. Each stakeholder plays a unique role in management. For instance, academics contribute through research that informs improvements in sustainable tourism destinations. The media can uncover untapped potential and spotlight unique stories from visitors. NGOs assist by training and empowering local communities. Local communities can innovate in product development, tour packages, and food and beverages. Businesses can explore the tourism potential of destinations to enhance profitability.

All elements and leadership frameworks are vital for cultivating a sustainable tourism ecosystem. Leadership is fundamental in any sector, and tourism is no exception. Effective leadership and a strategic vision are essential for the sector's growth. Leaders must prioritise sustainable development by considering economic, social, and environmental benefits. Strong leadership will ultimately drive innovation and foster a sustainable tourism ecosystem in Indonesia.

## Conclusion

The sustainable tourism sector in Indonesia holds significant economic potential and can be a major source of income for the country. Many stakeholders have pioneered innovations and created an ecosystem that supports the growth of the sustainable tourism sector. However, these innovations are often limited to a mindset

perspective, and not all stakeholders embrace a sustainable innovation mindset. Consequently, sustainable tourism faces challenges, including low community involvement and ambiguous government policies.

Addressing these challenges requires a leadership framework capable of accelerating innovation and resolving field-specific issues. This framework emphasises the necessity for leaders to possess a strategic vision and a strong commitment to sustainable tourism development. Given that the development of sustainable tourism is a continuous process, the framework aims to guide stakeholders towards adopting a more holistic paradigm and addressing the various problems encountered in the field.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on sustainable tourism and sustainable leadership, particularly the role of leaders in creating a sustainable tourism climate. The research also enriches the body of knowledge on tourism and leadership. This research is practically beneficial as a guide for creating a sustainable tourism ecosystem based on the principles of collaboration. The eight actionable recommendations provided can serve as a reference for cross-sector leaders to contribute to the development of a sustainable tourism ecosystem. Nevertheless, this study has limitations, as it does not fully address the perspectives of businesses or investors, who play an active role in developing sustainable tourism.

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