

# **Environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors for sustainable tourism development: The way forward toward destination resilience and growth**

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## **Abstract**

While environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance is increasingly gaining popularity in corporate and financial domains, its application in the tourism industry is still relatively underexplored. Hence, the objectives of this research are fivefold: (1) A systematic review appraises the extant literature on the intersection of the ESG dimensions and sustainable tourism; (2) It provides a synthesis of the content of the extracted articles and maps thematic intersections related to travel destinations' environmental stewardship, social equity and governance frameworks; (3) It assesses ESG-aligned strategies that are intended to address the destinations' challenges including their carrying capacities and overtourism issues, climate risks, socio-cultural tensions as well as institutional accountabilities; (4) It provides a holistic conceptual framework that guides policymakers, practitioners and stakeholders in integrating ESG into tourism planning and development, for sustainable and economically-viable outcomes. In conclusion, (5) it advances theoretical and managerial implications.

**Keywords:** Sustainable tourism, environmental, social and governance dimensions, ESG performance, carrying capacity, overtourism, responsible tourism.

## **Introduction**

Sustainable tourism is based on the principles of sustainable development (Fauzi, 2025). It covers the complete tourism experience, including concerns related to economic, social and environmental issues. (Bang-Ning et al., 2025; Wang & Zhang, 2025). Its long-term dual objectives are to improve the tourists' experiences of destinations they visit and to address the needs of host communities (Kim et al., 2024). Arguably, all forms of tourism have the potential to become sustainable if they are appropriately planned, led, organized and managed (Camilleri, 2018). Destination marketers and tourism practitioners who pursue responsible tourism approaches ought to devote their attention to enhancing environmental protection within their territories, to mitigating the negative externalities of the tourism industry on the environment and society, to promoting fair and inclusive societies to enhance the quality of life of local residents, to facilitating exposure to diverse cultures, whilst fostering a resilient and dynamic economy that generate jobs and equitable growth for all (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023 Scheyvens & Cheer, 2022).

Conversely, irresponsible tourism practices can lead to the degradation of natural habitats, greenhouse gas emissions, and to the loss of biodiversity through air and water pollution from unsustainable transportation options, overconsumption of resources, waste generation and excessive construction (Banga et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2024). Indeed, any nation's overdependence on tourism may give rise to economic difficulties during economic crises, like increased cost of living for residents, seasonal income and precarious employment conditions, leakage of revenues when profits go to foreign-owned businesses and displacement of traditional industries like fishing and agriculture, among other contingent issues (Mtapuri et al., 2022; Mtapuri et al., 2024).

In addition, tourism may trigger social and cultural externalities like overcrowding and an increased strain on public services, occupational hazards for tourism employees and inequalities

due to uneven distribution of benefits, displacement of local communities to give way to tourism infrastructures, the loss of authenticity in local traditions, to an erosion of local identities and traditional lifestyles under external influence, as well as to increased crime rates or illicit activities (Ramkissoon, 2023).

In the light of these challenges, this research seeks to provide a better understanding of how environmental, social and governance (ESG) dimensions can be embedded within sustainable tourism, to strengthen long-term destination resilience and economic growth. Debatably, although the use of the ESG dimensions is gaining traction in various corporate suites, their application in tourism and hospitality industry contexts is still limited. Notwithstanding, ESG research is still suffering from inconsistent conceptualizations, measurements and reporting systems (Legendre et al., 2024).

To address this gap, this contribution outlines five interrelated objectives: (1) It relies on a systematic review methodology to investigate the intersection of ESG principles and sustainable tourism; (2) It synthesizes the findings and maps thematic connections related to environmental stewardship, social equity and governance structures in tourism destinations; (3) It evaluates ESG-based strategies that address carrying capacity limitations, overtourism, climate vulnerabilities, socio-cultural tensions, and institutional accountabilities; (4) It advances theoretical insights; and (5) It develops a comprehensive conceptual framework, to guide policymakers, practitioners and stakeholders in embedding ESG considerations into tourism planning and development, thereby promoting environmental sustainability, socio-economic resilience and corporate governance.

Guided by these objectives, this timely research addresses four central research questions. Firstly, it asks: [RQ1] How have high-impact scholarly works conceptualizing and operationalizing ESG dimensions in order to promote sustainable travel destinations? Secondly, it

seeks to answer this question: [RQ2] What empirical evidence exists on the effectiveness of ESG-aligned strategies in enhancing destination resilience and fostering long-term economic growth? The third question interrogates: [RQ3] What academic implications arise from this contribution, and how might its insights shape the future research agenda? Finally, the study seeks to address this question: [RQ4] How and in what ways are the ESG pillars interacting within sustainable tourism policy and practices? This research question recognizes that the ESG dimensions may or may not always align harmoniously with the sustainable tourism agenda.

While the sustainable tourism literature has often been linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to broader corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks; the explicit integration of ESG principles into this field is still underdeveloped (Back, 2024; Legendre et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2024; Shin et al., 2025). Much of the existing literature examines the environmental, social and governance (E, S and G) dimensions in isolation (Moss et al., 2024), with scholars often addressing, for example, environmental sustainability through climate adaptation strategies or governance via destination management systems, without adequately considering their interdependence or combined impact on tourism outcomes (Comite et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2024). This pattern was clearly evidenced in the findings of this research,

This article synthesizes the findings of recent high-impact publications focused on sustainable tourism through the ESG performance lens, in order to advance a holistic conceptual model that bridges academic scholarship and policy application. In sum, this proposed theoretical framework clarifies how environmental stewardship, social inclusivity and governance accountability are shaping sustainable tourism trajectories. In conclusion, it puts forward original theoretical as well as the managerial implications. Theoretically, it enriches the sustainable tourism literature with an ESG-integrated analytical framework grounded in systematic evidence. Practically, it offers an actionable, governance-oriented blueprint that aligns environmental, social

and economic objectives for responsible tourism planning and development. Hence, it provides a tangible roadmap that embeds ESG dimensions and their related criteria into sustainable tourism strategies for destination resilience and long-term competitiveness.

## **Background**

The evolution of sustainable and responsible tourism paradigms can be traced back to the environmental consciousness that characterized the 1960s and 1970s. At the time, several governments were concerned over the ecological and cultural consequences of mass tourism. Early initiatives, such as the European Travel Commission's 1973 campaign for environmentally sustainable tourism, sought to mitigate the negative externalities of rapid sector growth. Subsequently, South Africa's 1996 national tourism policy introduced the concept of responsible tourism, that essentially emphasized community well-being as an integral component of destination management. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has since positioned sustainable tourism as a catalyst for global development.

Eventually, the declaration of 2017 as the *International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development* has underscored its potential to contribute directly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specific targets like SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 14 (life below water), and SDG 15 (life on land) highlight the sector's capacity to create jobs, preserve ecosystems, safeguard cultural heritage and benefit vulnerable economies (Mahajan et al., 2024), particularly in small island states and least developed countries (Grilli et al., 2021). However, an ongoing achievement of these objectives necessitates balancing environmental, social and economic interests, a process that is

often complicated by the diverse, and at times conflicting, priorities of a wide array of stakeholders (Civera et al., 2025).

Governments are important actors in this process. They can influence sustainable tourism outcomes through regulation, education, destination marketing and public–private partnerships (Dossou et al., 2023; Mdoda et al., 2024). Generally, their underlying policy rationale is to ensure that tourism development supports long-term economic growth while protecting cultural and natural assets, in order to improve community well-being (Andrade-Suárez & Caamaño-Franco, 2020; Breiby et al., 2020). Yet this ambition is often undermined by market pressures, limited institutional capacities, and the difficulty of translating high-level sustainability commitments into enforceable measures at the local levels.

In this light, the ESG framework a concept that was popularized by a United Nations Global Compact (2004) report, entitled, “*Who Cares Wins*”, offers a coherent approach for the integration of environmental stewardship, social equity and institutional accountability for the advancement of responsible tourism planning and development. Hence, in this context, practical tools are required in order to translate inconsistent guiding principles into actionable destination management strategies. For instance, the carrying capacity acts as a practical control mechanism within such a theoretical framework (Mtapuri et al., 2022; O’Reilly, 1986). It ensures that tourism figures remain compatible with the preservation of natural, cultural and heritage assets. For the time being, there are challenges as well as opportunities for governments to translate the holistic vision of sustainable tourism policies into robust governance systems that maintain economic vitality and the integrity of their destinations.

## Methodology

This study draws on a synthesis of findings from high impact articles that critically examine the intersection between “sustainable tourism” and the three (3) dimensions of the ESG framework. A bibliographic research exercise was designed to identify and extract the most-cited scholarly contributions that explicitly address these connections, thereby providing a robust empirical and theoretical foundation for a constructive discussion. The secondary research activities were carried out through Elsevier’s Scopus. The search string was focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, published in English between January 2020 and December 2025. The query was formulated to capture publications that comprised the term “*sustainable tourism*” alongside one of the ESG dimensions: “*environment*”, “*social* or *societal*”, and “*governance*” in the title, abstract, or keywords. Specifically, the query featured the following content:

- (i) TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "sustainable tourism" AND "environment" ) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2027 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "j" ) ).
- (ii) TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "sustainable tourism" AND "social" OR "societal" ) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2027 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "j" ) ).
- (iii) TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "sustainable tourism" AND "governance" ) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2027 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "j" ) ).

In addition, the “*ESG*” acronym was used alongside the term '*sustainable tourism*' to identify how many publications integrated both concepts of sustainable development. In this case, the search parameters comprised the following elements:

(iv) TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "sustainable tourism" AND "ESG" ) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND PUBYEAR < 2027 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE , "j" ) ).

The search results yielded 796 articles focused on the environmental dimension, 1,422 publications related to the social/societal dimension, and 283 papers associated with governance. However, the query just retrieved 7 documents when it combined the sustainable tourism concept with the ESG acronym. This finding confirms that there is a significant knowledge gap in research that simultaneously addresses ESG and sustainable tourism. Despite the growing emphasis on ESG issues in both corporate and tourism contexts, the limited number of studies integrating these two sustainability concepts clearly indicates that scholarly attention is still fragmented in this regard.

Therefore, this contribution extracted the most cited publications that featured one or more of ESG's environmental, social and/or governance dimensions. Some publications were captured more than once in this bibliographic study's systematic review exercise. For example, Mamirkulova et al. (2020) was listed under "Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"; "Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal", as well as under "Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance" search queries. Appendix A presents sixty-two (62) of the most-cited articles focused on sustainable tourism and one or more of the environmental, social and governance dimensions. It lists the author's or authors' name(s) and identifies their article's year of publication, research objectives, theoretical foundation (where applicable), the methodological stance employed for data collection and analysis, and outlines the implications of the findings. The systematic review revealed that ecotourism, tourism development, sustainable development, tourist behavior, tourism stakeholders, COVID19, cultural heritage, economic growth, social media and spatiotemporal analysis were ten (10) of the most popular keywords that were used by the contributing authors to describe their research.

A thematic analysis was conducted on the extracted articles to identify and interpret recurrent patterns, relationships and conceptual linkages across the dataset. Each article was evaluated in its entirety, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of its contributions. Such an inductive approach generated deep interpretive insights into the frameworks, strategies and paradigms that connect sustainable tourism and ESG. Initial codes were systematically developed and iteratively grouped into overarching themes, which were then refined to highlight the most salient intersections between the ESG pillars and sustainable tourism principles. The analysis provided a structured synthesis of current scholarly discourse in this emerging area.

This methodological approach allowed for both breadth and depth: breadth in capturing the overall state of scholarly discourse on the topic, and depth in developing evidence-based understanding of how ESG principles are being operationalized within sustainable tourism settings. The synthesis generated through this process serves as the empirical foundation for the conceptual framework that is proposed in this article.

## **Results**

The thematic analysis indicates that the sustainable tourism concept is interconnected with each of the E, S, G's dimensions. The findings suggest that sustainable tourism integrates environmental stewardship, social responsibility and sound governance to advance ecological preservation, community well-being, and organizational accountability. Hence, it supports long-term destination resilience. The bibliographic results report that each of the environmental, social and governance components are not only essential for sustainable tourism but are interdependent pillars that enable the sector to thrive in a responsible manner. Therefore, it is imperative for governments to safeguard natural and cultural heritage, to empower local communities and to

foster transparent and effective governance, to ensure the sustainable development of destinations as well as their economic growth (Chong, 2020; Grilli et al., 2021; Mamirkulova et al., 2020). The ESG framework, along with its criteria, serves as an important lens through which stakeholders can shape and evaluate sustainable tourism policies and practices (Işık et al., 2025). Table 1 features the most conspicuous themes that emerged from this study. Additionally, it presents definitions for each theme along with illustrative research questions examined by the academic contributions identified in this systematic review.

**Table 1. Themes of the most cited journal articles on the intersection of “Sustainable Tourism” and “Environmental, Social and Governance” (“ESG”) dimensions**

Theme	ESG dimension(s)	Definition	Research Questions
Environmental stewardship	E.	Practices that minimize tourism’s ecological footprint, including energy efficiency, waste reduction and biodiversity protection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do tourism enterprises implement environmental management systems to reduce carbon emissions?</li> <li>• Which sustainable practices are most effective in minimizing ecological impacts at tourist destinations?</li> </ul>
Circular economy in tourism	E.	Adoption of resource-efficient, waste-minimizing approaches in tourism operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do tourism enterprises implement circular economic practices? What is the impact of circular strategies on environmental and economic sustainability?</li> </ul>
Social responsibility, stakeholder and community engagement	S.	Initiatives that promote social equity, cultural preservation, fair labor practices. Engagement with governments, businesses, non-governmental organizations, consumers and local communities to co-create ESG-aligned tourism strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do tourism operators engage local communities in decision-making?</li> <li>• What social initiatives enhance residents’ support for sustainable tourism development?</li> <li>• How do multi-stakeholder partnerships enhance ESG performance in tourism?</li> <li>• What governance models support collaborative sustainable tourism initiatives?</li> </ul>
Tourist behavior about sustainable tourism destinations	S.	The tourists’ knowledge and attitudes toward sustainable destinations that communicate about their ESG credentials. Their attitudes could influence their travel choices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How and to what extent do tourists’ perceptions and attitudes about sustainable destinations affect their willingness to visit them?</li> <li>• What motivates tourists to select sustainable tourism destinations?</li> </ul>
Corporate governance in tourism	G.	Structures, policies, and practices that enhance accountability, transparency and ethical decision-making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do governance mechanisms influence ESG performance in tourism businesses?</li> <li>• What role do boards and management play in fostering sustainable tourism practices?</li> </ul>

<b>Theme</b>	<b>ESG dimension(s)</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
Sustainable destination management	G.	Integrated planning of tourism destinations to balance economic growth, social equity and environmental preservation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do destinations implement policies that align tourism growth with environmental sustainability?</li> <li>• What governance strategies enhance destination resilience?</li> </ul>
ESG reporting and performance measurement	G.	Methods for assessing, tracking and communicating ESG performance in tourism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effectively do tourism firms report ESG performance?</li> <li>• Which ESG indicators are most relevant for sustainable tourism evaluation?</li> </ul>
Innovation and technology for sustainability	E,S,G.	The use of digital tools, smart systems and innovative models to enhance ESG compliance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can digital platforms reduce tourism's environmental impact?</li> <li>• What role does technology play in monitoring social and governance performance?</li> </ul>
Risk management & resilience	E,S,G.	Strategies to anticipate, mitigate and recover from ESG-related risks, including environmental disasters or social conflicts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do tourism businesses integrate ESG considerations into risk management?</li> <li>• What governance frameworks improve resilience to climate-related events?</li> </ul>
Policy & regulatory compliance	E,S,G.	Alignment of tourism practices with national and international ESG-related laws and standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do regulations shape sustainable tourism practices?</li> <li>• What policies most effectively encourage ESG adoption in tourism enterprises?</li> </ul>
Economic implications of ESG in tourism	E,S,G.	Evaluation of the financial and economic outcomes of ESG-aligned practices in the tourism sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the economic impact of implementing ESG strategies in tourism?</li> <li>• How do ESG initiatives influence profitability and long-term viability of tourism enterprises?</li> </ul>

## **The environmental dimension of sustainable tourism**

The tourism industry is dependent on natural ecosystems. Therefore, it is in the tourism stakeholders' interest to protect the environment and to minimize their externalities (Wu et al., 2021). There is scope for them to promote the conservation of land and water resources (Sørensen & Grindsted, 2021). Water scarcity is a pressing global concern that is amplified in many tourist hotspots (WTTC, 2023). Whilst tourism development and its related infrastructural expansion ought to respect ecological thresholds and preserve green spaces, particularly in urban areas. Hotels, resorts and attractions could implement water-saving technologies such as rainwater harvesting, low-flow fixtures and wastewater recycling (Foroughi et al., 2022). These sustainable measures reduce stress on local water supplies and help preserve aquatic ecosystems. In addition, tourism entities can avail themselves of renewable energy sources like solar panels, wind turbines, et cetera, and may adopt energy efficient appliances and lighting solutions (Abdou et al., 2020; Zhan et al., 2021).

The rapid growth of tourism has historically been linked to environmental degradation through waste accumulation and pollution (Bekun, 2022). Circular economy strategies including improved waste management and pollution control through responsible waste disposal as well as by reducing, reusing and recycling of certain resources, can help decrease the industry's externalities, but also to create healthier spaces for tourists and staff (Camilleri, 2025; Dey et al., 2025; Jain et al., 2024).

Tourism significantly contributes to the generation of greenhouse gas emissions through transportation and accommodation (Kim et al., 2024). Addressing climate change within sustainable tourism is critical to reducing the sector's ecological footprint and enhancing destination resilience to climate impacts (Comite et al., 2025; Scott, 2021). Many tourism

businesses invest in carbon offset programs including reforestation, renewable energy projects and community-based conservation as mechanisms to offset their emissions (Banga et al., 2022). Eco-certifications such as Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), Green Globe, EarthCheck, GreenKey and LEED, among others, encourage the adoption of low-carbon practices. They enable practitioners and consumers to make environmentally conscious choices (Dube & Nhamo, 2020; Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022). Moreover, green transportation policies can encourage public transit, cycling, walking and the adoption of electric and hybrid vehicles for tourism-related travel, thereby reducing carbon footprints (Kim et al., 2024).

Ecologically sensitive zones such as national parks and marine reserves, which are home to wildlife, fragile species and habitats are some of the most visited places by tourists (Partelow & Nelson, 2020; Tranter et al., 2022). Hence, they should be protected from overtourism by implementing visitor limits, buffer zones and conservation fees to reduce human impact (Leka et al., 2022). Restoration projects like reforestation, coral reef rehabilitation and wetland conservation are good examples of proactive environmental stewardship linked to tourism (Herrera-Franco et al., 2020; Muhammad et al., 2021). Environmental sustainability also depends on shaping tourist behaviors and fostering responsible activities like environmental awareness campaigns, community involvement in conservation efforts as well as engagement in low-impact alternatives like birdwatching, hiking and sustainable diving, among other stewardship practices (Khuadthong et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2021).

## **The social dimension of sustainable tourism**

Sustainable tourism outcomes extend beyond environmental stewardship principles. Its social dimension encompasses criteria related to the preservation of cultural heritage; community engagement and empowerment; social equity, inclusion and cohesion; as well as to responsible tourist behaviors, among other aspects (Bellato et al., 2023; Bianchi & de Man, 2021; Joo et al., 2020a; Xu et al., 2020; Yang & Wong, 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). Sustainable tourism practices are clearly evidenced through improved relationships between tourists and local host communities, resulting in tangible benefits to both parties (Ramkissoon, 2023).

The tourism industry can be considered as a catalyst for cultural appreciation as well as a threat to cultural authenticity (Bai et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2024). Therefore, host destinations need to safeguard their cultural heritage, historical landmarks and monuments. Regulations and visitor management policies ought to be in place to limit wear and degradation of archaeological and religious sites, as well as historically important buildings and architectures (Mamirkulova et al., 2020). The social dimension of sustainable tourism entails that destination marketers preserve their cultural heritage and authenticity. They may do so by showcasing indigenous tastes and aromas of the region, including local foods and wines, and by promoting traditional music, dance, arts, crafts, et cetera, to appeal to international visitors (Andrade-Suárez & Caamaño-Franco, 2020). This helps them keep their cultural legacy and maintain a competitive edge (Bellato et al., 2023). As a result, incoming tourists would be in a better position to appreciate local customs and folklore. Notwithstanding, their behaviors can play a crucial role in shaping social dynamics within destinations, as their activities might support community well-being and promote equitable access to tourism benefits (Mamirkulova et al., 2020).

However, policy makers are expected to manage visitor flows within a destination's carrying capacity to prevent overcrowding, and to avoid social tensions, while fostering inclusivity, mutual respect and positive interactions between visitors and host communities (Back, 2024; Koens et al., 2021). Perhaps, destination management organizations should educate visitors about cultural sensitivity issues, to demonstrate their respect to host communities (Foroughi et al., 2022; Joo et al., 2020b; Mdoda et al., 2024). For example, they may raise awareness on appropriate behaviors in specific contexts, including dress codes and etiquette to mitigate cultural clashes, discourage exploitative tourism practices like invasive photography in certain settings and prevent unethical animal encounters, in order to foster mutual respect, enhance positive exchanges and safeguard community values (Ghaderi et al., 2024).

The sustainable tourism concept encourages participatory tourism planning. It prioritizes the empowerment of indigenous communities in tourism decision making and policy formulation (Ramkissoon, 2023). The involvement of local residents may require capacity building to equip them with relevant skills to participate in the tourism sector, and to foster their economic advancement (Mamirkulova et al., 2020). The proponents of sustainable tourism frequently refer to the provision of fair employment opportunities, including for native populations, in terms of equitable wages and salaries, as well as decent working conditions, in order to enhance community livelihoods and social cohesion (Mtapuri et al., 2022). Very often, they report that destinations would benefit from sustainable tourism practices that build social capital and reduce economic leakage, by incentivizing local entrepreneurs and community-based tourism initiatives to ensure that financial returns remain within the community (Chong, 2020; Partelow & Nelson, 2020).

The systematic review postulates that sustainable tourism concept is meant to promote social justice and reduce inequalities (Bianchi & de Man, 2021). The extant research confirms that

it fosters social inclusivity across various demographic groups in society, by supporting gender equality, thereby enriching the sector's diversity (Bellato et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2020). The industry's labor market may include individuals hailing from different backgrounds in society, including young adults, women, senior citizens, immigrants and disabled people (Bianchi & de Man, 2021; Camilleri et al., 2024). Tourism businesses are encouraged to develop infrastructures and services that accommodate people with accessibility requirement in order to broaden their destinations' reach and social value (Sisto et al., 2022).

### **The governance dimension in sustainable tourism**

The integration of environmental and social dimensions of sustainable tourism ultimately depends on transparent, accountable and participatory governance mechanisms (Joo et al., 2020b; Putzer & Posza, 2024). Effective governance provides the institutional framework through which environmental stewardship and social responsibility are translated into actionable policies, coordinated initiatives and measurable outcomes (Back, 2024; Ivars-Baidal et al., 2023).

Governments are entrusted to set the foundation for sustainable tourism through national and local tourism policies that clearly define sustainability goals, action plans and regulatory measures (Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022). Such policies may be related to environmental and/or social regulations. They may enforce environmental impact assessments (EIAs), zoning laws and could be meant to protect cultural heritage (Farsari, 2023). Moreover, they may be intended to encourage or incentivize environmental sustainability practices (e.g. through eco-label or certification schemes) (Bekun et al., 2022). Alternatively, they may be focused on the destinations'

carrying capacity limits and/or on their over-tourism aspects, if they specify visitor limits, and/or refer to taxes, levies or fees imposed on visitors or tourists (Leka et al., 2022).

Sustainable tourism governance depends on multi-sector cooperation (Farsari, 2023) that may usually involve government departments and agencies, the private sector that may comprise accommodation service providers, airlines, tour operators, travel agencies as well as local communities, NGOs and international organizations, among others. Policy makers need to balance diverse stakeholders' interests and to instill their shared responsibilities (Siakwah et al., 2020). Good governance can ultimately ensure that public-private partnerships would translate to long-term, sustainable tourism strategies related to responsible planning and development that consider specific socio-environmental aspects of destinations; green building standards and the use of renewable energy; and/or emergency and crisis management issues (Scheyvens & Cheer, 2022).

Policy makers are expected to conduct regular assessments and evaluations of tourism practitioners' environmental, social and economic outcomes operating in their jurisdictions. They need to scrutinize corporate ESG disclosures, particularly in certain domains (e.g. in European contexts, where they ratified the corporate sustainability reporting directive) (Camilleri, 2025). Governments should monitor business practices to safeguard their employees' wellbeing, environmental sustainability and the communities' interests (Putzer & Posza, 2024). They may avail themselves of sustainability indicators and benchmarking tools such as GSTC's criteria that are used to measure progress in sustainable tourism, in terms of sustainable management (planning, monitoring, governance); socioeconomic benefits to the local community, cultural heritage preservation and environmental protection (Wang & Zhang, 2025). Such responsible and ethical practices increase trust and lead to continuous improvements in the tourism industry.

## **Discussion**

The holistic integration of environmental, social and governance dimensions in sustainable tourism collectively contributes to enhance destination resilience and sustainable economic growth. The conservation of natural attractions such as beaches, forests and coral reefs will enable destinations to remain competitive. Therefore, there is scope in implementing climate-friendly measures, including reforestation and sustainable water management, among others, to reduce vulnerability to floods and storms. At the same time, they may curb ocean-level increases. Pollution prevention, waste minimization and circular economy strategies can help destinations maintain environmental quality, that is crucial for their ongoing tourism appeal. Notwithstanding, eco-certifications of responsible destinations can attract environmentally conscious travelers, who may be willing to pay more to visit sustainable tourism destinations.

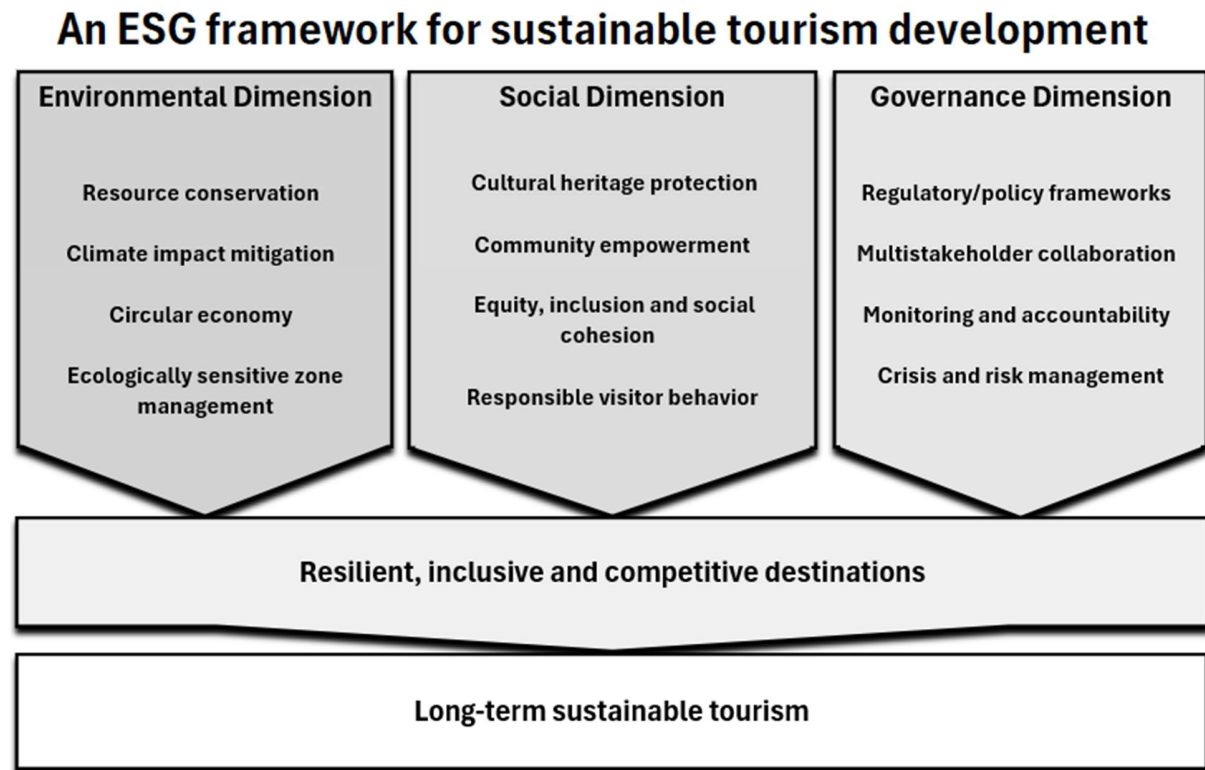
The effectiveness of eco-certifications is amplified when combined with socially responsible practices. The integration of community empowerment, cultural heritage preservation, and social inclusiveness into tourism planning and development can contribute to increasing the sustainability of a destination. Hence, the tourism industry could add value to the environment as well as to local communities. By aligning sustainable development with local priorities and by promoting responsible tourism practices, destinations can provide authentic cultural and heritage experiences, thereby enhancing their visitor satisfaction and revisit intentions, in the future. In turn, this reinforces both market differentiation and long-term social resilience. Furthermore, as entrepreneurship flourishes, the local communities would benefit from circulating incomes and reduced economic leakages. Such outcomes are conducive to tourism growth.

However, policymakers must implement effective tourism governance to ensure that these economic gains are sustainable. Transparent governance fosters trust among stakeholders and

facilitate sustainable growth and competitiveness. By implementing strategic planning and regulations, local authorities can ensure that tourism development| does not overwhelm infrastructure or degrade natural and cultural assets. This creates a balanced environment where entrepreneurship and community benefits coexist with long-term destination resilience. Therefore, sound governance prevents over-tourism and unmanaged expansion, whilst protecting the destinations' assets. Robust tourism governance frameworks foster stable policy environments, attract further investments and enable long-term planning. Additionally, strong crisis management capabilities can equip destinations to handle unforeseen circumstances including pandemics, natural disasters and economic shocks.

The above analysis underlines that environmental, social and governance dimensions are deeply interlinked to one another and mutually-reinforcing within sustainable tourism. An integrative ESG approach conceptualizes sustainable tourism as a synergistic framework that reconciles ecological integrity, social equity, and institutional effectiveness, as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. An environmental social and governance (ESG) framework for sustainable tourism development of resilient destinations**



### **Theoretical implications**

This study adds value to the growing body of literature focused on sustainable tourism governance (Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022; Işık et al., 2025; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). It clearly identifies key theoretical underpinnings of articles focused on the intersection of ESG dimensions and sustainable tourism practices. The bibliographic findings suggest that the stakeholder theory (Bellato et al., 2023; Ivars-Baidal et al., 2023; Matsali et al., 2025; Mdoda et al., 2024) and the institutional theory (Bekun et al., 2022; Dossou et al., 2023; Hall et al., 2020; Saarinen, 2021; Zhan et al., 2021) shed light on the role of government policies, corporate responsibility and community engagement in shaping the sustainable tourism agenda and different

settings (Lin et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). Interestingly, the Social Identity Theory clarifies how various stakeholder groups, including residents, tourists and industry practitioners, are aligning their behaviors with shared norms and identities that promote corporate ESG values (Yang & Wong, 2020). Drawing on Cognitive Appraisal Theory, it indicates that stakeholders' evaluation of ESG-related risks and opportunities influences their emotional responses and subsequent engagement in sustainability initiatives (Foroughi et al., 2022). The Theory of Empowerment further explains how participatory governance and transparent decision-making can enhance community agency, fostering stronger local support for ESG-driven tourism strategies (Joo et al., 2020a).

In line with the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Attitude–Behavior–Context (ABC) Theory, the findings highlight that pro-sustainability intentions are by attitudes toward ESG as well as by perceived behavioral control and contextual enablers such as policy frameworks and market incentives (Joo et al., 2020b; Khuadthong et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2021). Moreover, the Value–Belief–Norm Theory demonstrates how environmental values and moral obligations underpin behavioral commitments to ESG-aligned tourism (Kim et al., 2024).

From a governance perspective, the Evolutionary Governance Theory clarifies how institutional arrangements, stakeholder relationships and regulatory norms adapt over time to embed ESG principles in tourism planning (Partelow & Nelson, 2020). The review suggests that tourism stakeholders' decision-making including during uncertain situations, can be enriched through Decision Theory and by referring to the Interval-Valued Fermatean Fuzzy Set approach (Rani et al., 2022). These theories enable robust, data-informed prioritization of ESG objectives.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the recursive relationship between the human agency and the structural constraints. The results suggest that stakeholder actions can influence ESG

governance systems. This argumentation is congruent with the Structuration Theory (Saarinen, 2021). Meanwhile, the Resource-Based View (Wang & Zhang, 2025; Zhu et al., 2021) and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Wang & Zhang, 2025) frame ESG adoption as a strategic asset, where unique sustainability capabilities can enhance competitive advantage and long-term destination resilience.

### **Managerial implications**

This research yields clear implications for policymakers, industry practitioners and local communities of tourist destinations. It postulates that the ESG dimensions can provide these stakeholders with a strategic framework to balance growth with long-term resilience. It confirms that ESG policies necessitate a comprehensive approach, that combines environmental conservation, social inclusion, and responsible governance considerations, rather than addressing them individually. Arguably, there may be variations in the importance, focus and implementation of ESG dimensions in tourism, in different contexts, due to the host countries' economic capacities regulatory frameworks, social priorities and/or environmental challenges. As a result, the effects or outcomes of ESG initiatives are not uniform across destinations (Lin et al., 2024).

In addition, the size of the businesses can also influence their commitment to account and disclose ESG-related aspects of their performance. Large multinational travel and hospitality firms could benefit from economies of scale, in terms of greater financial, human, and technological resources, resulting in their ESG alignment and compliance with societal norms and regulatory frameworks. They can afford dedicated sustainability teams, advanced data management tools, and external consultants to ensure accurate measurement, benchmarking and disclosure of ESG

performance. In stark contrast, the smaller firms may face resource constraints, limited expertise, and higher relative costs for data collection and reporting. Such non-commercial activities can hinder their ability to systematically track, measure and communicate ESG performance, placing them at a comparative disadvantage, relative to their larger counterparts.

From an environmental perspective, policy makers should operationalize carrying capacity thresholds and implement adaptive management systems to safeguard ecosystems, optimize resource utilization, and enhance climate resilience. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of environmental impacts are essential to ensure that tourism activities remain within sustainable limits. Proactive interventions including the promotion of low-carbon transportation, the adoption of renewable energy, efficient resource management, and waste reduction are critical for aligning tourism development with ESG objectives. Such strategies preserve biodiversity and can contribute to the long-term sustainability of destinations.

The social dimension emphasizes the equitable distribution of tourism benefits and the preservation of cultural integrity. Overtourism threatens community well-being through inflated living costs, cultural commodification and resident–visitor tensions. Hence, managers should foster participatory governance structures that empower local communities, entrepreneurs and cultural custodians in decision-making processes. Technological innovations including artificial intelligence (AI) solutions that monitor visitor flows can further support socially responsible destination management. At the same time, stakeholder engagement ensures that tourism operations retain their legitimacy in society.

Robust governance mechanisms underpin these strategies. Practitioners can align policies with international sustainability standards in order to facilitate transparent accountability. The implementation of ESG performance indicators, enforceable visitor limits and adaptive regulatory

measures, such as dynamic pricing or quotas enable evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvements in responsible destinations. The strengthening of institutional capacities and local skills ensures that governance frameworks are effective and sustainable over time.

Financial innovation is essential for sustainable tourism development. Policy makers ought to invest in green technologies and infrastructures to protect the natural environment from externalities. They can provide incentives and funds to support practitioners in their transition to long-term sustainability. By embedding ESG principles, destinations are in a better position to enhance their resilience to environmental and social shocks, strengthen their reputation and image, whilst maintaining their competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Policymakers are encouraged to increase their enforcement of regulations to trigger responsible behaviors. At the same time, they need to nurture relationships with stakeholders. The hoteliers should embed social innovations and environmentally sustainable practices into core strategies and operations. As for local communities, it is in their interest to actively participate in tourism planning and development, to ensure they preserve their cultural heritage and share tourism benefits in a fair manner. Collectively, this contribution's integrated ESG approach positions destinations for sustained economic growth while safeguarding environmental and social well-being.

## **Conclusion**

This article reinforces the significance of integrating ESG principles into sustainable tourism strategies. By addressing environmental concerns, fostering social inclusivity, improving governance frameworks, and ensuring economic viability, stakeholders can contribute to a more

resilient and responsible tourism sector. This research demonstrates that sustainable tourism is most effectively achieved through the integration of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions, which together foster long-term destination resilience and economic growth. Environmentally, sustainable tourism requires the preservation of natural ecosystems, efficient resource use, and proactive measures to reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Practices such as water-saving technologies, renewable energy adoption, waste reduction, and circular economy strategies not only mitigate ecological impacts but also enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of destinations.

From a social perspective, sustainable tourism supports community empowerment, cultural preservation, inclusivity, and social equity. By engaging local residents in planning and decision-making, promoting equitable employment, and safeguarding cultural heritage, destinations can foster positive resident–visitor interactions and enhance the overall visitor experience. Responsible tourist behavior, participatory governance, and cultural sensitivity further reinforce social cohesion while ensuring that tourism benefits are broadly shared within host communities.

Effective governance underpins both environmental and social outcomes by providing transparent, accountable, and coordinated frameworks for sustainable tourism. Policymakers and destination managers play a critical role in enforcing regulations, monitoring ESG performance, and balancing stakeholder interests. Multi-sector collaboration, the application of sustainability indicators, and adaptive management strategies enable destinations to anticipate and respond to environmental, social, and economic shocks.

Collectively, the ESG approach positions sustainable tourism as a synergistic model that aligns ecological integrity, social responsibility, and institutional effectiveness. By embedding ESG principles into core strategies, destinations can deliver unique, high-quality experiences,

strengthen community livelihoods, and maintain global competitiveness. This integrative framework demonstrates that environmental stewardship, social equity, and sound governance are mutually reinforcing, offering a pathway for destinations to achieve enduring sustainability, resilient growth, and enhanced market differentiation.

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## Appendix A. The most cited journal articles on the intersection of “Sustainable Tourism” and “Environmental, Social and Governance” (“ESG”) dimensions

Author(s) and year of publication	Search query	Research objectives	Theoretical underpinning	Methodology	Research implications
Abdou et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study examines environmental management representatives' perceptions of how green hotel practices contribute to achieving environment-related Sustainable Development Goals. It focuses on SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 12, and SDG 13 in Egypt's certified Green Star hotels.		Quantitative	This contribution reports that hotels, especially lower-rated ones, need to enhance their environmental sustainability practices by adopting advanced water, energy and waste management practices. The researchers contend that they should integrate renewable energy, engage with their members of staff and guests, and share best practices in order to accelerate progress toward environment-related SDGs.
Andrade-Suárez & Caamaño-Franco, 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This research examines local residents' perceptions of Port Wine Cellars tourism in Vila Nova de Gaia. It assesses its role in promoting sustainability, economic revitalization and cultural heritage within winemaking territories.	Stakeholder theory	Quantitative	This contribution implies that sustainable wine tourism can drive economic growth, cultural preservation, and territorial competitiveness, provided it is managed through coordinated stakeholder collaboration, integrated sustainability practices, impact monitoring, and policies that align tourism development with local needs.
Banga et al., 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study aims to examine the impact of tourism development on greenhouse gas emissions in OECD countries, and to assess the role of renewable energy in mitigating environmental degradation, using a dynamic generalized method of moments (GMM) model from 2008–2019.		Quantitative	This study highlights that transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy in tourism can decouple industry growth from environmental degradation, supporting carbon reduction goals. Findings encourage wider renewable adoption globally, with further research needed in developing country contexts.
Bekun et al., 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This study sheds light on the long-run and causal relationship between tourism development and real income within the environmental Kuznets Curve framework for emerging industrialized economies. It incorporates institutional quality and trade to address omitted variable bias and to enhance the robustness of this research.	Institutional theory	Quantitative	This contribution confirms that tourism development in emerging industrial economies is increasing CO <sub>2</sub> emissions. It highlights the need for green energy adoption, cleaner technologies, stronger environmental regulations, and policies that align economic growth with sustainability goals. The researchers recommend that policy makers find a tradeoff between tourism expansion and environmental quality.
Bellato et al., 2023	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study systematically maps and clarifies regenerative tourism. It traces its conceptual antecedents, compares it with sustainable tourism, proposes practice principles as well as a conceptual framework, and explores its transformative potential through literature analysis and practitioner insights.	Stakeholder theory	Review	This contribution provides a conceptual framework that distinguishes regenerative from sustainable tourism. It offers practical guidance for stakeholders as it highlights the need for inclusive, place-based, and transdisciplinary approaches that foster transformative tourism practices and advance collaborative, pluralistic research toward regenerative futures.

Bianchi & de Man, 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study critically examines how UNWTO is promoting SDG 8. It analyzes how sustained and inclusive growth narratives obscure systemic injustices in tourism's political economy, and interrogates their implications for equity, labor rights, and genuinely transformative sustainable tourism development.		Review	This contribution underscores the need to reframe sustainable tourism beyond growth-led market orthodoxy. It advocates democratic ownership, equitable resource distribution, and labor empowerment, while challenging UNWTO's SDG 8 discourse to address systemic exploitation and foster genuine environmental and social justice.
Breiby et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study defines sustainable experience dimensions in tourism. It uses a co-design approach in a lake context, to examine how experience design can enhance the tourists' perceived value and destination sustainability.		Qualitative	This contribution postulates that the tourists' sustainable experiences with natural and cultural environments, as well as their contextual activities can enhance their perceived value of destinations.
Cai et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study examines how green/healthy bed and breakfast (B&B) promotion strategies that focus on physical environment, well-being perception, tourist satisfaction and loyalty, can support tourism recovery in East China. It offers insights into sustainable hospitality practices.		Quantitative	The contribution clarifies how design-based strategies and environmental value could enhance hotel guests' well-being, satisfaction and loyalty, while guiding B&B practitioners and policymakers in post-crisis recovery strategies.
Chong, 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment" / "Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This study explores the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of mass tourism on Bali's local community. It focuses on the residents' perceptions in a tourism-dependent island context, to inform sustainable tourism policies that prioritize local well-being and cultural preservation.	Stakeholder theory	Qualitative	This contribution raises awareness on the need for inclusive, community-driven tourism governance that mitigates mass tourism's socio-cultural and environmental impacts in Bali. It implies that this destination ought to enforce regulations, promote cultural awareness, and foster stakeholder engagement to ensure sustainable, respectful tourism development.
Dossou et al., 2023	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	The study examines how governance quality moderates the relationship between tourism development and poverty alleviation in 15 Latin American countries (2003–2015). It integrates institutional quality with macroeconomic factors to inform sustainable development policies.	Institutional theory	Quantitative	This contribution highlights that good governance significantly enhances tourism's role in reducing poverty in Latin America. It commends that policymakers ought to strengthen institutions to maximize tourism's socio-economic benefits. In addition, it postulates that they need to invest in education and health in order to reduce poverty and inequality.
Dube & Nhamo, 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study assesses climate change impacts on Kruger National Park. It examines temperature and rainfall trends, ecological and economic consequences. Afterwards, it recommends climate adaptation strategies that promote sustainable park management and resilience in line with global climate goals.		Mixed methods	This contribution underlines the urgent need for climate adaptation and mitigation strategies in Kruger National Park, to protect biodiversity, infrastructure and tourism activities. It implies that policy makers ought to plan the use of land in a sustainable manner and need to invest in climate-resilient infrastructures for this park, amid changing climatic conditions.

Elmo al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study examines sustainability variables in tourism family businesses and assesses how innovation drivers influence resource allocation, business practices, and long-term viability. It presents a systematic literature review of case studies published between 2015 and 2020.		Review	This contribution highlights the limited integration of innovation in tourism family businesses. It emphasizes the need for resilience, long-term orientation, and social-ecological sensitivity, while calling for expanded empirical research to strengthen innovation's role in advancing sustainable tourism development.
Farsari, 2023	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	The research reviews destination governance literature to clarify its related concepts. It explores their interrelations, advances the application of complex approaches to enhance interdisciplinary understanding and sustainable tourism governance.		Review	This contribution implies that governance models ought to promote inclusive, adaptive and collaborative approaches. It reports that such frameworks can improve sustainable tourism governance, enhance resilience and support the destinations' recovery and transformation in a post-pandemic, interconnected world.
Foroughi et al., 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study investigates how cognitive factors (knowledge, awareness and concern) as well as affective factors (emotional and social values) could influence hotel guests' pro-environmental behaviors, while examining the moderating role of past behaviors on these relationships, during their hotel stay.	Cognitive appraisal theory	Quantitative	This contribution indicates that there is scope for hoteliers to enhance their guests' environmental knowledge, as this can strengthen their social values, and lead them to engage in pro-environmental behaviors. It implies that policymakers and hotel operators should educate their guests with limited eco-friendly awareness.
Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	The research analyzes lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on global tourism. It makes reference to Germany's crisis management as a case study, to inform climate change mitigation strategies and to promote sustainable tourism governance amid ongoing environmental and economic challenges.	Stakeholder theory	Review	The contribution indicates that tourism's pandemic response revealed systemic vulnerabilities and missed opportunities for transformative change. It suggests that tourism stakeholders need to move beyond short-term planning to build resilient, equitable and sustainable tourism futures.
Grilli et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study investigates prospective tourists' willingness to pay for sustainable tourism in small islands developing states (SIDS). It analyzes trade-offs between environmental, social, and economic dimensions, and assesses how pro-environmental attitudes and beliefs influence preferences through integrated choice experiment and latent factor analysis.		Quantitative	This contribution informs targeted sustainable tourism strategies in SIDS by identifying visitor segments with higher willingness to pay for ecosystem preservation. It underscores the value of cultural access, eco-friendly accommodations, and tailored payment schemes that enhance environmental and socio-cultural resilience.
Hall et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study examines the transformative effects of pandemics on tourism by contextualizing COVID-19. It analyses its societal, economic and policy impacts. Moreover, it identifies factors influencing destination recovery, sustainability transitions and responses to nationalism versus global cooperation.	Institutional theory	Review	This contribution raises awareness on the importance of tourism resilience. It indicates that pandemic-driven transformations are uneven, contingent on institutional, political, and economic contexts. The authors report that sustainable recovery requires global coordination rather than local or short-term growth-focused solutions.

Herrera-Franco et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study analyzes geotourism-related scientific publications from 1984 to 2019 in the Scopus database by using bibliometric methods and VOSviewer software to evaluate its conceptual evolution, research structure, and emerging trends within this sustainable tourism discipline.		Review	This contribution offers a comprehensive, multidisciplinary mapping of geotourism's intellectual structure. It guides scholars toward enduring themes and emerging areas. Moreover, it provides strategic research agendas that integrate conservation, sustainability, and innovation in advancing the field's scientific and practical relevance.
Hysa et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study examines the frequency and patterns of social media usage across generations in travel planning. It analyzes generational differences in social media behavior and informs sustainable tourism marketing strategies that support the post-pandemic recovery and promotion of destinations.		Quantitative	This contribution highlights the critical role of social media and IT tools in shaping tourists' behaviors across generations. It enables targeted marketing strategies that support sustainable tourism recovery. It explains how to raise awareness about responsible travel.
Işık et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study tests the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) hypotheses for G7 countries. It examines how renewable energy consumption and international tourism receipts could have an effect on CO2 emissions. Hence, this research assesses the tourism industry's environmental impacts and outlines sustainable tourism policies.		Quantitative	This contribution sheds light on the need for country-specific sustainable tourism policies, especially in the Italian context. It reports about the positive role of renewable energy in reducing CO2 emissions in several G7 countries and indicates that the use of renewable energy in tourism can promote economic growth and environmental quality.
Işık et al., 2025	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "ESG"	This study develops the environmental, social, governance/International Tourist Arrivals (ESG/ITA) metric to evaluate tourism sustainability, assess its impact on real GDP per capita, and to examine how artificial intelligence (AI) moderates this relationship to enhance sustainable tourism and economic growth.		Quantitative	This contribution provides policymakers with a novel ESG/ITA metric to evaluate and enhance tourism sustainability. It highlights AI's positive moderating role, emphasizes tailored regional strategies, promotes AI-driven eco-tourism initiatives, and calls for expanded datasets and refined methods in future research.
Ivars-Baidal et al., 2023	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This research critically examines how smart city and destination approaches influence the design, application, and validity of sustainable tourism indicators. It identifies weaknesses, opportunities and policy improvements to advance smart sustainability.	Stakeholder theory	Mixed-methods	This contribution urges policymakers and planners to redesign tourism indicators for scientific rigor and practical use. It implies that destination managers need to integrate sustainable tourism practices into smart city/destination agendas, fostering governance, stakeholder participation, and multi-scale coordination to enhance urban-tourism management effectiveness.

Joo et al., 2020a	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	The study investigates how residents perceived knowledge of tourism influences their psychological, social, and political empowerment. It clarifies how empowerment dimensions drive political action. Moreover, it tests Rocha's empowerment ladder theory within a sustainable tourism context.	Theory of empowerment	Quantitative	This contribution indicates that the residents' knowledge of tourism fosters their psychological, social, and political empowerment, which in turn encourages political participation. It implies that practitioners should prioritize education and transparent communication to promote resident engagement and sustainable tourism development.
Joo et al., 2020b	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study explores key factors that influence rural tourism tourists' behaviors by using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). It analyzes how social networking services (SNSs) affect tourists' intentions and decision-making in rural tourism and reveals how they can enhance sustainable tourism marketing.	Theory of planned behavior	Quantitative	This contribution implies that social norms strongly influence rural tourism intentions, while attitudes do not. It suggests that effective sustainable tourism marketing ought to focus on fostering a positive social atmosphere and should encourage experience sharing on social media in order to boost engagement and support.
Khan et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study explores the causal relationships between tourism, economic growth, capital investment, energy consumption and CO2 emissions in Pakistan. It evaluates tourism's environmental impact and provides policy recommendations for sustainable tourism development in emerging economies.		Quantitative	This contribution raises awareness on the need for integrated policies that promote sustainable tourism, green energy and environmental protection. The researchers postulate that such policies can result in economic growth and lower pollution levels. They urge increased investments in renewable energy, afforestation and eco-friendly tourism practices that support inclusive, low-carbon development in emerging economies.
Khan et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study examines the relationships between sustainable tourism policy, destination management, destination social responsibility and tourist value orientation, to understand their collective impact on sustainable tourism development in popular Malaysian destinations amid post-pandemic recovery.	Stakeholder theory	Quantitative	This contribution advances sustainable tourism theory by confirming the critical roles of sustainable tourism policy, destination management and destination social responsibility in promoting sustainable tourism development. It highlights the importance of integrated stakeholder collaboration, community support and of managing the tourists' environmental behaviors for effective destination sustainability.
Khuadthong et al., 2025	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "ESG"	This study examines how low carbon literacy; social and environmental awareness could influence sustainable tourism behavior among Thai elderly tourists. It investigates the relationships between these factors, guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior, to inform inclusive, ESG-aligned tourism policies.	Theory of planned behavior	Quantitative	This study implies that effective sustainable tourism strategies for elderly tourists should integrate low carbon literacy with social and environmental awareness, using holistic, experience-based interventions. Tailored policies and incentives, combined with digital literacy support, can enhance engagement and align with ESG and SDG goals in aging societies.

Kim et al., 2024	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "ESG"	The study aims to develop and test an extended norm-norm (EVBN) model to understand domestic tourists' public transport use, integrating ESG factors, air quality, climate change mitigation, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) dimensions for sustainable tourism behavior.	Value-belief-norm theory	Quantitative	This contribution implies that the integration of ESG factors, climate change mitigation and SDG dimensions in the EVBN model advances theoretical understanding on sustainable tourism behavior. It offers practical strategies for policymakers and marketers to promote public transport use among domestic tourists for environmental and ethical benefits.
Koens et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This research develops and illustrates the Smart City Hospitality Framework for destination-design-driven urban tourism governance. It aims to foster collaborative reflection to address overtourism issues and sustainability transitions in cities.	Stakeholder theory	Review	This contribution advances a smart city hospitality (SCITHOS) framework that fosters inclusive, participatory and design-oriented approaches for sustainable urban tourism. It is intended to enable stakeholders to address equity, resilience and environmental concerns while collaboratively exploring complex impacts and innovative solutions for destination development.
Leka et al., 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study advances a Tourism Carrying Capacity Index (TCCI) that utilizes the Pressure-State-Response framework to assess and monitor sustainable tourism development in Mediterranean island coastal areas. It focuses on environmental and manmade pressures to guide future tourism planning and development.	Stakeholder theory	Quantitative	This contribution highlights the critical role of Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC) as a decision-support tool for sustainable tourism stakeholders. It emphasizes the need for context-specific, integrated planning that balances environmental protection, local well-being and authentic visitor experiences in vulnerable coastal destinations.
Li et al., 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study critically reviews emerging literature on COVID-19's impact on travel and tourism. It explores the role of technological innovation in crisis management and proposes strategies for sustainable recovery and transformation in the post-pandemic tourism industry.		Review	This contribution emphasizes technology's critical role in transforming and revitalizing tourism. It offers strategic insights for sustainable recovery, improved crisis management as well as innovative practices that are intended to rebuild global travel and tourism sectors.
Liu et al., 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study investigates the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) relationship between tourism development and the ecological footprint in Pakistan. It examines the impacts of economic growth, energy consumption, trade openness and foreign direct investment on environmental quality.		Quantitative	This contribution implies that investments in sustainable tourism infrastructures, particularly those related to renewable energy can reduce the ecological footprint and encourage environmentally-friendly trade practices. It calls for stricter environmental regulations on foreign direct investment to prevent Pakistan from becoming a pollution haven, and to better balance its economic and environmental goals.

Mamirkulova et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment" / "Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal" / "Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	The study investigates how residents in southern Kazakhstan perceive New Silk Road tourism infrastructure. It explores its direct and indirect effects on sustainable tourism development and quality of life.		Quantitative	The contribution offers practical and policy implications for tourism planners and government officials. It highlights the residents' support for sustainable tourism under the New Silk Road Initiative and emphasizes community involvement, cultural heritage preservation, as well as infrastructure-driven economic opportunities that could improve the residents' quality of life.
Matsali et al., 2025	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "ESG"	The study empirically analyzes the impact of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) dimensions on financial performance (measured by Return on Assets), in listed tourism firms from 2017 to 2021.	Stakeholder theory	Quantitative	This contribution highlights that ESG practices may negatively affect short-term financial performance in tourism due to high costs and impacts of crisis. It promotes subsidies, certifications and regulatory frameworks to enhance sustainable business and long-term resilience. Moreover, it urges stakeholders to scrutinize ESG controversies.
Mdoda et al., 2024	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "ESG"	The study explores how hospitality businesses in Cape Town manage water to ensure efficiency and sustainability (SDG 6) by using ESG and SDG frameworks. It clarifies how hotels adopt waste management practices aligned with responsible consumption (SDG 12), to address environmental challenges in tourism.	Stakeholder theory	Mixed methods	The contribution implies that tourism and hospitality sectors must adopt both monetary and non-monetary strategies, such as partnerships, technology adoption and stakeholder education, to improve water and waste management, enhance sustainability, reduce costs and strengthen green market positioning.
Mtapuri et al., 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study puts forward a theoretical model that integrates community-based tourism (CBT) with strategic corporate social responsibility (Strategic CSR), to enhance local economic development, increase economic linkages, reduce leakages and address the destinations' carrying capacity for sustainable tourism growth.	Stakeholder theory	Review	This contribution implies that by adopting a sustainable CBT model that integrates strategic CSR, optimal local resource use and stakeholder collaboration can lead to reduced economic leakages and enhanced linkages, whilst protecting the destination's environmental and cultural assets.
Muhammad et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This study analyzes the effects of tourism, governance and of foreign direct investment (FDI) on CO2 emissions and energy use in 13 Muslim countries. It relies on advanced panel data techniques to inform sustainable policy recommendations.		Quantitative	The contribution suggests that tourism governance can be improved by enforcing environmental laws and promoting green tourism as well as clean energy investments that are essential to reduce CO2 emissions. The authors argue that this would support sustainable growth in Muslim countries, and balance economic development with environmental conservation.

Mou et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	The study uses the tourists' digital footprint data from online travel diaries to analyze the spatial patterns of their movements in Qingdao. The research integrates quantitative and social network analysis to reveal the influence of distance, attraction popularity and network structures on tourism distribution and development.		Quantitative	This contribution implies that Qingdao's destination marketers should enhance their connectivity to inland attractions. It offers a framework for ongoing monitoring and differentiated marketing strategies to support sustainable tourism development.
Musavengane et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This study explores the linkages between urban risks, governance and sustainable tourism in Sub-Saharan African cities. It clarifies how good governance can promote sustainable urban tourism development that is aligned with UN SDG 11.	Institutional theory	Qualitative	This contribution implies that poor governance, corruption and social exclusion can lead to unsustainable tourism. It urges integrated, community-inclusive planning and resilient institutions to promote sustainable, inclusive and safe urban tourism.
Palazzo et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	The study maps the evolution of sustainable tourism content on Instagram. It identifies different influencer types and examines their role in shaping urban and rural destinations.		Mixed methods	This contribution sheds light on sustainable tourism communications via Instagram. It outlines content trends, identifies influencer types and profiles. In addition, it analyzes their role in shaping urban and rural destination images, whilst promoting sustainable tourism awareness.
Partelow & Nelson, 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This study investigates how social networks enable the emergence of self-organized governance for sustainable tourism on the island of Gili Trawangan (in Indonesia) and clarifies how institutions can evolve amid increasing tourism and governance challenges.	Evolutionary governance theory / Stakeholder theory/ Institutional theory	Qualitative	The contribution indicates that strong social networks initially enabled effective informal governance on Gili Trawangan, but rapid tourism growth and diverse stakeholders may result in a number of challenges to such networks. The authors contend that formal, multi-level governance can address sustainability concerns and address environmental management issues.
Passafaro, 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study critically reviews the role of attitudes in tourists' sustainable choices by examining theoretical and empirical insights from social and environmental psychology. It proposes future research directions to better understand attitudes in sustainable tourism.		Review	This contribution raises awareness on the complexity of attitudes and of their crucial role in understanding sustainable tourism behaviors. It integrates attitudes within broader behavioral models and enhances interdisciplinary research for improved policy and theoretical development.
Purnomo et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This study explains how community empowerment via spatial, sectoral and human resource management as well as the adoption of technologies can support sustainable tourism in a rural Indonesian village.		Qualitative	This contribution reports that sustainable tourism development in villages can be effectively achieved through community empowerment, that combines spatial planning, Village-Owned Enterprises, human resource development, and the utilization of information technology. The authors imply that sustainability outcomes are driven by strong leadership, innovation, collaboration and good governance.

Putzer & Posza, 2024	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "ESG"	This research examines whether the rising popularity of the ESG framework may lead to the decline of CSR. It identifies key sustainability issues in tourism and analyzes how ESG complements or replaces CSR, by highlighting existing gaps and transition elements.		Review	This contribution explains that ESG is increasingly integrated into tourism's business strategies. It reports that ESG reporting is primarily focused on environmental sustainability, while social and governance aspects remain underdeveloped. The findings emphasize the need for tourism organizations to adopt comprehensive ESG policies, enhance transparency and build on CSR foundations to achieve more responsible, sustainable practices and long-term success.
Ramkissoon, 2023	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	The study examines how residents perceived social impacts of tourism and interpersonal trust could influence place attachment, pro-social and pro-environmental behaviors, support for tourism development and may ultimately enhance their overall quality of life. It also advances a multidisciplinary framework	Stakeholder theory	Review	This contribution implies that residents are key stakeholders in tourism planning. It urges policymakers and managers to foster trust, place attachment and pro-social behaviors, in order to promote socially responsible, sustainable tourism destinations and community well-being.
Rani et al., 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	The study advances sustainable tourism recovery theory and practice. It clarifies how design-based strategies and environmental value can foster tourist loyalty and may offer evidence-based guidance for bed and breakfast (B&B) operators and policymakers in post-crisis contexts.	Theory of interval-valued fermatean fuzzy set; Decision theory	Quantitative	This contribution introduces a novel decision-making methodology. It offers a new and reliable decision-making method that can accurately evaluate sustainable community-based tourism locations. This tool is intended to help researchers and practitioners handle uncertainty and incomplete information in multi-criteria decision-making.
Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal" / "Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	The study systematically reviews sustainable tourism indicators (STIs) based on their relevance to SDGs, governance and stakeholder involvement. It discusses the use of subjective versus objective indicators and identifies research gaps related to STIs.		Review	This contribution emphasizes the need for inclusive governance. The authors integrate subjective and objective measures that align tourism monitoring with SDGs across diverse global contexts.
Roxas et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This study reviews existing tourism stakeholder interaction frameworks. It describes stakeholder roles and synergies in sustainable tourism governance and proposes an enhanced framework that explains how stakeholders can collaboratively govern destinations in a sustainable manner.	Stakeholder theory	Review	This contribution highlights the need for inclusive stakeholder collaboration and governance frameworks that integrate tourists' roles and enable effective sustainable tourism. It guides policymakers and practitioners in fostering synergies for balanced economic, social and environmental outcomes that are aligned with SDG17.

Saarinen, 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This study critically examines the concepts of responsibility and sustainability in tourism. It explores their emergence in extant literature and outlines some of their differences. Moreover, it advances implications for tourism development and proposes ways that integrate both notions.	Structuration theory / Institutional theory	Review	This contribution suggests that sustainable tourism requires strong public regulations to manage environmental and social impacts. Moreover, it reports that responsible tourism emphasizes individual ethical behaviors. In any case, both approaches need to balance institutional governance and personal responsibility to effectively address tourism's long-term sustainability challenges.
Scheyvens & Cheer, 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	The study identifies challenges and opportunities related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the realms of tourism. It emphasizes the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to promote inclusive, equitable and sustainable tourism development.	Stakeholder theory	Review	This contribution indicates that effective, value-driven, multi-stakeholder partnerships are crucial for the advancement of sustainable tourism and SDGs. It reports that long-term collaboration, cultural respect, power balance, and trust-building are key factors to overcome challenges and achieving inclusive, resilient tourism development.
Scott, 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study assesses climate change challenges for sustainable tourism, evaluates sectoral preparedness, identifies key knowledge gaps, and highlights the need for strategic policy engagement, to support tourism's decarbonization and resilience.		Qualitative	This contribution outlines managerial implications for policy makers and practitioners to overcome sectoral unpreparedness. It calls for collective action to integrate climate science with tourism planning to safeguard destinations, livelihoods and sustainable development goals.
Sgroi, 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	The study analyzes the relationship between sustainable tourism models and natural resource management in mountain areas. It demonstrates how proper resource management can support local communities, environmental sustainability and may foster balanced regional development through tourism.	Stakeholder theory	Qualitative	This contribution implies that managing mountain destinations requires multifunctional, stakeholder-inclusive approaches. It indicates that sustainable tourism policy is a vital tool that balances ecosystem preservation and economic growth, thereby fostering long-term development and community collaboration.
Sharma et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This research evaluates COVID-19's impact on the global tourism industry. It advances a resilience-based policy framework that supports sustainable tourism and climate action. Therefore, it is intended to guide governments and stakeholders in post-pandemic recovery.	Stakeholder theory	Review	This contribution's resilience-based framework highlights how governments, market players, technological innovations and local communities are transforming tourism. It promotes sustainable tourism, climate action and societal well-being to revive the industry, to make it more inclusive and resilient.
Siakwah et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal" / "Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This research examines challenges in integrating sustainable tourism governance with mining and conservation within Africa's SDGs framework. It focuses on justice, trust, inclusion, power and collaboration for equitable development.	Stakeholder theory	Review	The contribution implies that sustainable tourism governance in Africa must prioritize trust, justice, inclusion and equitable power-sharing. It promotes stakeholder engagement to effectively achieve the SDGs.

Tranter et al., 2022	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This study is focused on Indonesia's fisheries and the marine tourism landscape. It aims to promote sustainable tourism through area-based conservation and by raising awareness on resilient marine protected areas (MPAs).		Review	This contribution underscores the need for diversified community-based governance, improved coordination between fisheries and MPA management, sustainable tourism development and future-focused planning, in order to enhance Indonesia's marine protected areas' resilience and to support the sustainability of marine environments.
Wang & Zhang, 2025	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "ESG"	This study investigates how generative artificial intelligence (AI) impacts digital supply chain innovation and collaboration in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector. It reveals how these factors, along with customer involvement, could enhance ESG performance to support sustainable development goals in tourism.	Resource-based view theory; Dynamic capabilities theory	Quantitative	This contribution theoretically advances understanding of how generative AI enhances ESG performance in tourism SMEs via digital supply chain innovation, collaboration and customer involvement. Practically, it guides enterprises to leverage AI-driven supply chain management and customer engagement to achieve sustainable development goals.
Wu et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study investigates the extent to which pro-environmental intentions formed during a tourism experience could influence the guests' actual pro-environmental behaviors when they return back at home. It examines how contextual factors may affect this behavioral transfer.	Attitude-behavior-context (ABC) theory; Theory of planned behavior	Quantitative	This contribution highlights that pro-environmental behaviors (PEBs) are highly context-dependent. It emphasizes the need for policymakers and tourism managers to focus on enhancing their guests' pro environmental education as well as improving their physical infrastructures to foster responsible behaviors.
Xu et al., 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	The study identifies innovative methodological approaches, that involve big and small data techniques, to advance sustainable tourism research. It seeks to address methodological gaps by integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. The rationale is to better understand tourism's socio-ecological impacts.	Stakeholder theory	Review	This contribution underlines the importance of integrating big and small data methods in sustainable tourism research, to enhance understanding of complex impacts, to address ethical concerns and to promote interdisciplinary approaches. It encourages methodological innovation and pluralism to better capture diverse stakeholder perspectives and address sustainability challenges.
Yachin & Ioannides, 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study explores how rural tourism micro-firms use entrepreneurial and spatial bricolage to create value from local resources and advance theoretical understanding of sustainable tourism entrepreneurship through qualitative insights from Swedish micro-firm owner-managers.		Qualitative	This contribution advances the theoretical understanding of spatial bricolage. It raises awareness on its role in sustainable rural tourism by linking resource transfer, community involvement and local resource reinterpretation. Therefore, it offers entrepreneurship support strategies as well as insights for policy makers and destination managers.
Yang & Wong, 2020	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Social" OR "Societal"	This study explores how perceived discrimination during COVID-19 affects tourists' travel-induced well-being through anxiety and depressive responses, while examining the moderating roles of pandemic-related worries and social media participation in shaping psychological outcomes and coping mechanisms.	Social identity theory / Stakeholder theory	Quantitative	This contribution highlights the urgent need for tourism stakeholders to address pandemic-related discrimination, to protect tourists' psychological well-being. It advocates crisis-informed management, promotes the dissemination of accurate information and social media engagement as key strategies to buffer

Zhan et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Environment"	This study uses the Quantile Autoregressive Distributed Lag model to examine the impact of renewable energy, tourism, institutional quality and GDP on Pakistan's ecological footprint. It validates the Environmental Kuznets Curve and advances practical implications for policy makers.	Institutional theory	Quantitative	anxiety and support sustainable, resilient tourism recovery. This contribution underlines the importance of renewable energy, tourism and institutional quality in reducing ecological footprints in Pakistan. It posits that policy makers ought to focus on promoting sustainable energy use, corporate governance and investments in responsible tourism infrastructures to balance economic growth with environmental protection.
Zhu et al., 2021	"Sustainable Tourism" AND "Governance"	This study empirically examines how environmental competitiveness influences tourism growth. It relies on the resource-based theory to compare developed with less developed destinations' sustainable tourism practices.	Resource-based theory	Quantitative	This contribution implies that environmental competitiveness strongly drives tourism growth in developed destinations, thereby supporting UNWTO's sustainable tourism goals. It reports that less developed regions require targeted investments including in infrastructures to strengthen their tourism industry in a sustainable manner.

(Sorted in alphabetical order.)

