

Thesis Summary

This thesis delves into the importance of Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) as a vital component of the global tourism industry. STD aims to strike a balance between economic growth, environmental preservation, and social inclusivity. Achieving STD requires the active participation of stakeholders, but this can present challenges. Local stakeholders' attitudes are instrumental in shaping their perceptions of the sustainability of the tourism industry. However, a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence these attitudes is currently lacking in the literature. This thesis proposes to address this gap by conducting a qualitative research study to explore the factors that shape local stakeholders' attitudes toward STDs. The primary objective of the thesis is to answer the following questions:

1. What factors influence the attitude of local stakeholders toward sustainable tourism development?
2. How can these factors be conceptualized in a framework?

To answer these research questions, this thesis first consults the existing literature on sustainable tourism development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Summary

The literature suggests that STD aims to harmonize the interests of tourists and local communities while promoting economic prosperity, environmental conservation, and social equity. As Tosun (2001) articulates, it involves tourism developments that contribute positively to development principles without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The three dimensions of sustainable tourism development—social and cultural sustainability, economic sustainability, and environmental sustainability—are widely acknowledged in the literature (Connell et al., 2009; Gössling, 2000; Lee & Jan, 2019). The

social dimension underscores the enduring benefits for society, emphasizing community well-being, empowerment, and cultural preservation (Li et al., 2022; Zhang, 2016). Likewise, the environmental dimension emphasizes minimizing negative impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity through responsible practices such as waste management and biodiversity protection (Akhtar & Najar, 2020; Ionci  et al., 2016). Finally, the economic dimension aims to maximize socio-economic benefits while ensuring equitable distribution of tourism revenues among stakeholders (Roberts & Tribe, 2005; Akama & Kieti, 2007).

Implementing sustainable tourism development requires strategic planning and active involvement of various stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, policymakers, and transportation providers (Giampiccoli et al., 2020; Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019). However, several challenges hinder effective implementation, including elitism, corruption, and lack of government support (Setokoe & Ramukumba, 2020; Chili & Ngxongo, 2017). Policy support is crucial, but policymakers face obstacles such as cultural values and political environments (Bogale, 2023; Khan et al., 2021). Overcoming these challenges requires initiatives to empower local communities, increase awareness, and foster collaboration among stakeholders (Lasso & Dahles, 2023; Pramanik & Rahman, 2023). Understanding the factors influencing local stakeholders' attitudes toward STD is essential for successful implementation. Factors such as attachment to the community, perceived benefits, and education on environmental sustainability play significant roles (Lee, 2013; Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019). Moreover, studies often employ the social exchange theory to explain stakeholders' attitudes, highlighting the importance of reciprocity and mutual benefit (Nguyen et al., 2018; Pezeshki et al., 2023).

Chapter 3: Methodology

The methodology section outlines a qualitative research approach to explore tourism development in Bangladesh, focusing on sustainability. Qualitative methods are chosen for their ability to deeply investigate complex phenomena and generate rich, contextualized data. The study aims to understand the factors influencing the attitudes of local tourism businesses toward sustainable tourism development (STD). Cox's Bazaar is selected as a case study due to its significance in Bangladesh's tourism sector. The impact of tourism in Cox's Bazaar is discussed, highlighting environmental, social, and economic effects. Data collection involves interviews with key stakeholders, including hoteliers, tour operators, and transportation providers. A total of 11 interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, and data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and themes related to sustainable tourism development in Cox's Bazaar. Following the thematic analysis methodology of Braun and Clarke (2006), the study seeks to contribute insights into sustainable tourism practices and their implications for policy and practice in Bangladesh.

Chapter 4: Findings

The findings from the analysis of sustainable tourism development (STD) activities in Cox's Bazaar indicate a mixed engagement among local tourism actors. While there is notable involvement in activities related to economic sustainability, such as cost-saving measures like chip-enabled key cards to reduce electricity usage, there is relatively less emphasis on environmental and social sustainability initiatives. Transportation providers, hotel owners, and tour package providers primarily prioritize economic benefits, with only indirect contributions to sustainability. For instance, efforts to reduce carbon emissions through the use of CNG vehicles are motivated by economic incentives rather than environmental concerns.

However, there are signs of progress in environmental sustainability, with initiatives like reducing electricity and water consumption and offering eco-tourism packages. Notably, one tour provider offers carbon-offsetting tourism, involving tourists in reforestation activities and promoting renewable energy use. Factors influencing local tourism actors' attitudes towards sustainable development include economic incentives, organizational factors like employee productivity and stakeholder pressure, and knowledge-related factors such as education levels and environmental awareness. For instance, the potential for cost savings and brand reputation enhancement drives the adoption of sustainable practices, while local hiring practices and pressure from stakeholders, including government organizations and institutional investors, also play a significant role.

Moreover, the level of environmental awareness among local stakeholders, including tourists and authorities, influences businesses' decisions to implement STD activities. Initiatives from local authorities, such as beach clean-ups and biodiversity protection measures, also contribute to shaping businesses' attitudes towards sustainability. Overall, while there is progress in economic and environmental sustainability, there remains room for improvement in enhancing social sustainability and fostering a deeper understanding of sustainable tourism development among local actors in Cox's Bazar.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The thesis contributes significantly to the theoretical understanding of sustainable tourism development (STD), particularly within the context of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. By examining the perspectives and behaviors of local tourism actors, the study provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing sustainable practices at the grassroots level. Through a comprehensive analysis grounded in a tripartite sustainability

framework encompassing economic, organizational, and knowledge-related factors, the thesis elucidates the determinants shaping sustainable tourism initiatives in the region.

Key theoretical contributions include highlighting the pivotal role of economic incentives and organizational dynamics in driving sustainability efforts among tourism businesses. The study underscores how factors such as cost-saving measures, brand reputation enhancement, and stakeholder pressures influence the adoption of sustainable practices. Moreover, the thesis emphasizes the importance of knowledge dissemination and stakeholder engagement in promoting sustainable tourism development, demonstrating how education, awareness, and local community involvement serve as catalysts for behavioral change.

Practically, the research findings offer actionable insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and practitioners involved in sustainable tourism initiatives. Policymakers can utilize the insights to formulate targeted policies and regulations aimed at promoting environmentally and socially responsible tourism practices. For tourism industry stakeholders, including hotel owners, transportation providers, and tour operators, the findings provide guidance on implementing sustainable practices in their operations, leveraging sustainability as a branding tool, and engaging in community-driven initiatives. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of knowledge dissemination and awareness-raising efforts in fostering a culture of sustainability within the tourism sector.

Despite its contributions, the thesis acknowledges certain limitations, including contextual constraints, methodological biases, and cultural considerations. Suggestions for further research include addressing these limitations through methodological refinements, interdisciplinary approaches, and longitudinal studies to enrich our understanding of sustainable tourism practices and their implications for local communities, economies, and environments.