

# **THESIS**

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**TITLE OF THESIS**

**Encouraging sustainable tourism development through local  
stakeholders: The case of Bangladesh**

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# Abstract

Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) is a critical construct in the global tourism industry, aiming to balance economic prosperity, environmental conservation, and social inclusivity. However, achieving this balance can be challenging. Existing literature highlights the importance of engaging stakeholders in the process. But what factors influence the attitudes of local stakeholders towards sustainability? This study, conducted through semi-structured interviews in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, explores this gap and provides some insightful answers. The research identifies economic, organizational, and knowledge-related factors that influence stakeholder attitudes. These factors include reducing expenses, enhancing brand reputation, improving employee morale, responding to stakeholder pressure, personal traits of managers, and awareness of environmental issues. By understanding these factors, we can foster positive attitudes toward sustainability and effectively implement sustainable practices in the tourism industry. These findings contribute to the sustainable tourism literature and offer practical implications for tourism businesses, especially hoteliers, tourism service providers, and transportation operators. By implementing sustainable practices, companies can not only achieve economic growth but also help preserve the environment and promote social inclusivity. Let's work together to create a sustainable future for the tourism industry and our planet.

**Keywords:** sustainability; sustainable tourism development; local actors; stakeholders; nature tourism

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# Encouraging Sustainable Tourism Development Through Local Stakeholders: The case of Bangladesh

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) is a crucial paradigm in the global tourism industry that aims to balance economic prosperity, environmental conservation, and social inclusivity (Connell et al., 2009; Tiwari et al., 2021; Van Vu et al., 2020). Sustainable tourism refers to a responsible and mindful approach that seeks to maximize positive economic, social, and environmental impacts while minimizing negative consequences (Tosun, 2001). Existing tourism literature suggests that to attain STD, it is required to attain environmental sustainability, social and cultural sustainability, and economic sustainability (Gössling, 2000; Sharma & Bhat, 2023). One perspective to ensure sustainability in all three aspects advocates active involvement and support from multiple actors in the tourism industry (Litheko & Potgieter, 2019). Practically, there are many stakeholders involved in the tourism industry, which include but are not limited to residents, small business owners, institutions, policymakers, transportation providers, and hoteliers. Acknowledging the significance of stakeholders contributions, a growing body of scholars has turned their attention toward understanding the diverse influences they exert on the sustainable tourism development trajectory (Bogale, 2023; Candrea et al., 2017; Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019).

Current tourism literature provides substantial evidence of the significance of the active participation of local stakeholders in sustainable tourism development of a particular tourism area. For instance, Hieu and Nwachukwu (2019) showed that the collaborative effect of local communities and tourism stakeholders can play a significant role in the realization of an effective STD strategy. A similar conclusion has been drawn by several tourism scholars who have studied STD in different empirical contexts, including developing and developed countries (see, e.g., Setokoe & Ramukumba, 2020; Cottrell & Cutumisu, 2006; Tiwari et al., 2021). These articles shows that tourism stakeholders contribute to STD through implementing various environmental protection activities, promoting authenticity of local culture, involving local people in economic activities, and pressurizing government authorities. While the benefits of local stakeholders active participation is evident in the existing literature, there has been controversial evidence of spontaneous participation of various stakeholders in a tourism industry. In line of this view, the existing tourism literature offers evidence that ensuring the active participation of local stakeholders and communities is challenging. The principal reasons



for the negligence of the local stakeholders in implementing STD strategies have been identified in the current literature. Among these reasons, corruption, lack of support from government authorities, lack of dynamic leadership, sociocultural elements, and lack of motivation to collaborate are the most significant (Bogale, 2023; Chili & Ngxongo, 2017; Dinica, 2008; Joseph et al., 2021). While these studies enhance knowledge on implementing an STD strategy, **knowledge of the factors that impact the attitudes of the local stakeholders is still limited.**

The attitudes of the local stakeholders should play a crucial role in shaping their views on the sustainability of the tourism industry (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005). Attitude is a construct used by scholars of psychology; it refers to a complex and multidimensional construct that encompasses an individual's beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies toward a particular object, person, group, idea, or situation (Schuman & Johnson, 1976). In their article, Schuman and Johnson (1976) suggested that the attitude of human beings shapes their behavior toward a specific thing, topic, or person. Thus, it can be argued that understanding the factors that shape the attitudes of local stakeholders in tourism industries can have a positive impact on facilitating the implementation of sustainable tourism development. Therefore, understanding the factors influencing the attitudes of local stakeholders in the tourism industry is significant. However, such knowledge is highly scattered and requires further attention from tourism scholars.

The existing literature discusses the factors influencing the attitudes of local stakeholders rather indirectly. Highlighting the attachment to the local community and environment, De Bruyn and Meyer (2022) suggested strategies for enhancing local community involvement. The role of economic factors such as costs, benefits, and profitability has been evidenced as an influential variable (Olya et al., 2018). Further, education on environmental sustainability, the maturity of the tourism industry, and supportive tourism policies can have an influence on the attitudes of the local stakeholders (Holden, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2018; Pezeshki et al., 2023). These studies offer knowledge of different factors that potentially have an impact on the attitudes of the local stakeholders, but there is a lack of enough studies that show a comprehensive framework of factors influencing the attitudes of local stakeholders.

To address these literature gaps, the objective of this thesis is to advance knowledge of the factors that influence the attitudes of local stakeholders toward STDs. To achieve this objective, the thesis answers two research 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, we adopt a

qualitative research approach. For this study, we have collected data through eleven (11) semi-structured interviews with local tourism actors from one of the most popular natural tourism destinations in Bangladesh, namely COXs Bazaar. Our data analysis suggests that economic factors, organizational factors, and knowledge-related factors can have a significant impact on the attitude of local tourism actors toward STD. Overall, we identified six individual factors that may shape the attitudes of local tourism stakeholders. These factors are identified as expense reduction, brand reputation, employee morale and productivity, pressure from stakeholders, personal traits of the managers and owners, environmental awareness of local stakeholders. The finding of this study contributes to the sustainable tourism development literature by showing how different factors can influence the attitudes of the local tourism stakeholders to develop a positive attitude towards sustainability. The thesis also has several practical significance for the managers and owners of tourism businesses who are trying to implement sustainable practices in their operations, especially for hotel managers and tourism service providers, and transportation providers.

The thesis is presented in the following manner. In Chapter One, a brief background of the research topic is provided, followed by a discussion of the research problem and research questions. Chapter Two provides an overview of relevant theories and literature, followed by a theoretical framework. Chapter Three presents details on the methodology followed in conducting the research study, including the validity, and reliability of the findings. In Chapter Four, the findings of this study are presented. In Chapter Five, we conclude the thesis with a discussion of the presented findings, the contribution of the study, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Background**

In this chapter, we provide brief details of the existing literature on sustainable tourism development and discuss the theoretical frameworks used in this thesis. First, we discuss the progression of sustainable tourism development literature and briefly what is known. Then, this thesis highlights several gaps in the existing literature. This chapter also defines key constructs and relevant concepts of this thesis.

### **2.1 Sustainable Tourism Development**

In recent years, tourism scholars have been emphasizing implementing sustainability in the tourism industries around the world (Tosun, 2001). Sustainable tourism development has been studied as a phenomenon since the early 90s, and the literature stream offers enough knowledge on different aspects of the phenomenon. A literature search on Scopus using the keyword “sustainable tourism development” shows a total of 268 articles, and the number of publications per year seems to be increasing every year since 2013. Sustainable tourism development aims to balance the needs of tourists with the needs of the local community by promoting economic well-being, preserving natural and cultural resources, achieving fairness in the distribution of costs and benefits, and ensuring self-sufficiency (Briassoulis, 2002). According to Tosun (2001), sustainable tourism development should be ‘accepted as all kinds of tourism developments that make a notable contribution to or, at least, do not contradict the maintenance of the principles of development in an indefinite time without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs and desires’ (p.290). Simply put, sustainable tourism development refers to the establishment of tourism in a controlled way so that it can benefit the local communities and the tourists without harming the environment, and it lasts for an indefinite time (Piner & Paradis, 2004). The existing literature confirms that sustainable tourism development has three dimensions, namely social and cultural sustainability, economic sustainability, and environmental sustainability (Connell et al., 2009; Gössling, 2000; Lee & Jan, 2019).

The social dimension of sustainable tourism development emphasizes the long-lasting benefits for society and its members, which can be realized from the tourism resources of a nation. The social dimension of sustainable tourism development encompasses various aspects related to the well-being, empowerment, and participation of local communities, indigenous populations, and other stakeholders within tourism destinations (Li et al., 2022). Scholars have emphasized the importance of considering social factors alongside environmental and

economic dimensions to achieve holistic and equitable tourism development (Zhang, 2016). The social dimension of sustainable tourism development encompasses various interconnected themes, including community participation, social equity, cultural preservation, and intercultural dialogue (Lasso & Dahles, 2023; Liburd et al., 2023). By integrating social considerations into tourism planning, policy-making, and management, destinations can promote inclusive and responsible tourism practices that benefit both residents and visitors alike (Holden, 2010).

The environmental dimension of sustainable tourism is concerned with minimizing negative environmental impacts and promoting conservation efforts within tourism destinations. Scholars emphasize the importance of adopting environmentally responsible practices to mitigate pollution, resource depletion, and habitat degradation associated with tourism activities (Akhtar & Najar, 2020). This involves implementing measures such as waste management, energy efficiency, water conservation, and biodiversity protection to reduce the ecological footprint of tourism operations (Akhtar & Najar, 2020; Ioncică et al., 2016). Sustainable tourism development requires a holistic approach that integrates environmental considerations into destination planning, development, and management processes, thereby ensuring the long-term preservation of natural resources and ecosystems (Wu et al., 2023). By prioritizing environmental sustainability, tourism stakeholders can contribute to the conservation of biodiversity, ecosystems, and cultural landscapes, while also enhancing the resilience and attractiveness of destinations for future generations (Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019).

The economic dimension of sustainable tourism involves maximizing socio-economic benefits while minimizing negative impacts on local economies and livelihoods. Scholars emphasize the importance of ensuring that tourism development contributes to economic growth, poverty alleviation, and sustainable livelihoods for local communities (Roberts & Tribe, 2005). This entails fostering linkages between tourism and other sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, handicrafts, and transportation, to create employment opportunities and stimulate local entrepreneurship (Akama & Kieti, 2007). Sustainable tourism development also requires equitable distribution of tourism revenues and benefits among stakeholders, including small-scale businesses, marginalized groups, and indigenous communities (Honey, 2008). By promoting responsible tourism practices and maximizing local participation in tourism value chains, destinations can enhance economic resilience, reduce dependency on external markets, and improve the quality of life for residents (Pranita et al., 2022).

## **2.2 Sustainable Tourism Development Strategies**

While the existing literature discusses various aspects of the phenomenon, understanding the strategies for implementing sustainable tourism development in an economy is highly significant (Sharma & Bhat, 2023; Zhu et al., 2019). Different aspects of strategies have been discussed at length in the existing literature on sustainable tourism development. For instance, including the local communities in the planning processes has a significant impact on developing and implementing a sustainable tourism strategy (Giampiccoli et al., 2020; Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019; Lasso & Dahles, 2023; Tiwari et al., 2021). Ensuring the active participation of tourism stakeholders such as tourists, small business owners, transportation service providers, entertainment service providers, etc., can have a significant positive influence on sustainable tourism development in a country (Cottrell & Cutumisu, 2006; Litheko & Potgieter, 2019). Diving deeper into the strategic management aspect of sustainable tourism development, Hieu and Vu (2019) evidenced that emphasizing environmental degradation and restricting activities that contribute to air, water, and soil pollution is an effective strategy. In addition to that, local marketing and promotion of tourism-centric products and services should uphold sustainability. However, a dedicated financial contribution to infrastructure development to ensure sustainable tourism is the most crucial strategy (Hieu & Vu, 2019). These studies not only discuss the strategies for implementing sustainable tourism in a location but also offer several frameworks for implementing sustainable tourism strategies. However, several challenges can hinder the implementation of sustainable tourism development policies and strategies. Thus, it is significant to understand these challenges to develop the most appropriate strategies. The next section of this chapter discusses the challenges associated with sustainable tourism development policies, strategies, and potential solutions.

## **2.3 Local Stakeholders and Policies: Challenges and Solutions**

The existing literature on sustainable tourism development (STD) advocates supportive policies, active participation of local communities and tourism stakeholders, and strategic planning to help a country ensure STD (Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019; Joseph et al., 2021; Yasarata et al., 2010). However, scholars have evidenced the presence of several challenges associated with each of these aspects. For instance, Setokoe and Ramukumba (2020) showed that local community participation is low in South Africa because of elitism, corruption, lack of government support, lack of language skills, and lack of financial support. In addition to mentioning the issues mentioned in Setokoe and Ramukumba (2020), the lack of dynamic

leadership and the excessive presence of political affiliation hinder the various stakeholders from promoting active local community participation (Chili & Ngxongo, 2017). The socio-cultural factor can also pose difficulties in attaining active participation from the local community. Socio-cultural elements such as religion, language, social values, etc., often create challenges for local people to participate in tourism development works (Kala & Bagri, 2018). Dependency on the government has also been evidenced as a barrier to community participation (Cottrell & Cutumisu, 2006; Dinica, 2008); this is more prevalent in developing regions around the world (Nguyen et al., 2022).

Support from policies is a crucial factor in implementing sustainable tourism development in a country. The existing literature provides evidence that policymakers need to make many hard decisions to ensure sustainable tourism development, especially in developing countries (Tosun, 2001). In such cases, the structure of a country's public administration also plays a key role in formulating a supportive, sustainable tourism development strategy (Tosun, 2001). Policies have been regarded as the vehicle of sustainable tourism development in the literature (Khan et al., 2021; Özgit & Abbasoğlu, 2021). However, formulating and implementing supportive policies are challenged by various factors, including cultural values, corruption by politicians, favoritism in infrastructure development, and political environments (Bogale, 2023; Khan et al., 2021; Nicholas et al., 2009). Lack of collaboration among the policymakers and tourism stakeholders is another reason for unsupportive policy formulation, which, in turn, negatively impacts sustainable tourism development strategy implementation (Nicholas & Thapa, 2010; Özgit & Öztüren, 2021).

Given the discussions above, solving the challenges is highly significant in implementing sustainable tourism development. The existing literature offers a wealth of knowledge to deal with issues of active participation of local communities and stakeholders (Lasso & Dahles, 2023; Litheko & Potgieter, 2019; Pramanik & Rahman, 2023; Tiwari et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2023). For instance, looking through the ecotourism and local stakeholders' lens, Lasso and Dahles (2023) evidenced that most of the ecotourism efforts failed in Indonesia. Moreover, they suggested that policies beyond protected areas are needed to empower local participation. Initiatives to enhance awareness of local stakeholders regarding their power to shape the tourism industry towards a sustainable future (Nguyen et al., 2022). This finding agrees with the empirical evidence presented by Pramanik and Rahman (2023). Initiatives for increasing the economic benefits of local residents, enhancing environmental protection through policies and structural development, and socio-cultural integrations in the tourism industry have a positive correlation with local community participation (Tiwari et al., 2021).

Signifying the strategic management aspects, Litheko and Potgieter (2019) suggested a framework for managing sustainable tourism development. Although the existing literature offers substantial knowledge on solving issues related to local stakeholders' participation and policy formation, we still need to have a better understanding of the factors that strengthen the local stakeholders' active participation in sustainable tourism development. More specifically, there is a need to understand the factors that influence the local stakeholder's attitude toward participating in sustainable tourism development.

## **2.4 Factors Influencing Local stakeholders' attitudes towards Sustainable Tourism Development**

Without the active participation of the local stakeholders, achieving sustainable tourism development (STD) is the most difficult task (De Bruyn & Meyer, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2018). Understanding the significance, scholars focused on assessing the potential influence of local stakeholders, including local residences, small business owners, institutions and policies, transportation providers, and hoteliers, among others (Bogale, 2023; Wu et al., 2023). Since the research focus has recently turned to the influence of various stakeholders on sustainable tourism development, there is limited knowledge of the factors that can influence the local stakeholders' attitudes towards STD. However, understanding these factors is highly significant because it can help in developing the theory of sustainable tourism development and assist practitioners in implementing their STD strategies. The following section discusses findings from the existing literature, which work as the basis of hypothesis formation for this thesis.

Highlighting the importance of support from the local community scholars offers evidence of the factors that might have a significant impact on their attitude toward STD. For instance, Lee (2013) showed that attachment to the community, involvement in the community, perceived benefits, and perceived costs can play a significant role in shaping the attitudes of local communities. His findings are supported by several other studies in different empirical settings (De Bruyn & Meyer, 2022; Olya et al., 2018). Education on environmental sustainability and tourism is also significant in improving local stakeholders' attitudes toward the STD (Hieu & Nwachukwu, 2019; Pezeshki et al., 2023). The maturity of the tourism industry of a specific area can be a significant factor because, in a mature industry, radical change in the stakeholder's value creation process is necessary (Holden, 2010). In such cases, Holden (2010) suggested a strong intervention of the policies and regulations. Environment for collaboration among private businesses, local residents, and local authorities (Li et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2018). By environment for collaboration, the authors referred to factors such as

opportunities for stakeholders to participate in policy planning, no presence of bureaucracy, limited conflict of interests among stakeholders, and positive attitude towards STD.

To measure the attitude of residents in a tourist area Choi and Sirakaya (2005) has developed a scale named SUS-TAS, which has been used frequently in tourism literature. In their model (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005), they identified seven factors that are: (1) environmental sustainability, (2) perceived social costs, (3) perceived economic benefits, (4) long-term planning, (5) ensuring visitors satisfaction, (6) maximizing community participation, and (7) community centered economy. While this model is effective in measuring the attitude of local residents towards STD, it has not been adopted to measure the attitude of other relevant stakeholders, such as policymakers, hoteliers, local businesses, and transportation providers. Adopting the model from a multi-factor perspective would have significant theoretical and practical implications for sustainable tourism development. However, such a study is highly needed in the literature on sustainable tourism development. In addition to that, most of the existing studies done on explaining the factors of stakeholders' attitudes toward STD have been implementing the social exchange theory (see, e.g., Nguyen et al., 2018; Pezeshki et al., 2023; Olya et al., 2023).



# Chapter 3: Research Methods

## 3.1 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to exploring the intricacies of tourism development in Bangladesh, particularly with regard to sustainability. Qualitative methods are chosen for their capacity to delve deeply into complex phenomena, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of tourism development and its sustainability implications (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Due to its exploratory nature, a qualitative approach was chosen for the study. However, the literature on tourism development in Bangladesh still needs to be explored, particularly regarding sustainability. Qualitative research provides a suitable platform for probing into new or emerging topics, enabling researchers to generate rich, contextualized data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Sustainable tourism development (STD) is a complex process involving various socio-cultural, economic, and environmental factors. **The aim of this research is to explore the factors that impact the attitudes of local tourism businesses.** To achieve this, it is necessary to understand the behavior of local tourism actors, which is highly complex in nature. Such complexities are best apprehended through qualitative methodologies, which facilitate the capture of nuanced relationships and interactions among various factors (Dredge & Jenkins, 2013; Hall, 2010).

Qualitative methods are also well-suited for acknowledging the subjective nature of human experiences and perceptions, which is particularly relevant to the current research objective. By engaging with stakeholders such as local businesses, local communities, and government organizations, qualitative research can illuminate diverse perspectives and contextual factors influencing tourism development and sustainability in Bangladesh (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The flexibility and adaptability inherent in qualitative research methodologies are further assets for this study. Given the dynamic nature of sustainable tourism development, where conditions may evolve rapidly, qualitative approaches allow researchers to adjust their methods based on emerging insights and evolving research contexts (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, sustainable tourism development encompasses not only economic growth but also social equity and environmental stewardship. Qualitative methods facilitate a holistic examination, enabling us to explore how different stakeholders perceive and prioritize sustainability dimensions, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that might influence the behavior of these stakeholders (Fletcher, 2013; Jamal & Stronza, 2009). Through techniques such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, qualitative

research facilitates in-depth data collection. These methods enable researchers to gather rich, detailed information about participants' experiences, attitudes, and behaviors related to tourism development and sustainability in Bangladesh (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The current study requires a qualitative research approach to provide detailed insights that can inform policy and practice for sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh. By adopting qualitative methods, this research aims to contribute nuanced findings that can lead to an understanding of the factors that positively influence the implementation of sustainable tourism development practices, especially in the context of mass tourism.

### **3.2 Research Context: The case of Cox's Bazaar**

Cox's Bazaar stands as a shining example of Bangladesh's flourishing tourism sector, making it an excellent choice for the study of sustainable tourism development. As the world's longest uninterrupted natural sea beach, it holds immense cultural, ecological, and economic value, attracting a consistent flow of both domestic and international visitors annually. Its rich assortment of plant and animal life, along with its vibrant local customs and historical relevance, offer a comprehensive representation of Bangladesh's tourism landscape. Cox's Bazaar is a unique place that highlights the challenges and potential in Bangladesh's tourism industry. In this region, there are many issues that need to be addressed, including environmental damage, poor infrastructure, and socioeconomic inequalities. These issues are prevalent throughout the tourism sector in Bangladesh. By focusing on Cox's Bazaar, this study can help to identify the current status of sustainable tourism development in the country and explain the reasons for such conditions.

Cox's Bazaar is a captivating tourist destination that caters to various interests. Travelers can revel in beach tourism, water sports, ecotourism, and cultural heritage tourism. Delving into Cox's Bazaar reveals valuable insights into the many facets of tourism development and their effects on sustainability. These discoveries can be applied to the tourism industries in Bangladesh and similar developing countries. Moreover, Cox's Bazaar serves as a hotspot for exploring the theoretical underpinnings of sustainable tourism. The region's dynamic ecosystem and intricate socio-cultural fabric offer a fertile ground for theoretical development and empirical investigation. By analyzing the views of various tourism stakeholders in the areas, it is possible to discover underlying factors that influence the implementation of sustainable tourism development activities. Cox's Bazaar is an excellent research context for studying sustainable tourism in Bangladesh. As a popular tourism destination, it offers a wide range of challenges and opportunities, making it an ideal place to

explore the complexities of tourism development and sustainability. My aim is to contribute not only to the existing knowledge on sustainable tourism but also to develop practical strategies for promoting sustainable tourism growth in Cox's Bazaar and other similar places.

### **3.2.1 Impact of Tourism in Cox's Bazaar**

Tourism in Cox's Bazaar significantly impacts the environment, local communities, and the economic conditions of the area's residents. Understanding these effects is essential to developing sustainable tourism practices that balance economic growth with environmental conservation and social equity. The coastal area of Cox's Bazaar is at risk due to the impacts of tourism. According to research by Hossain et al. (2018), unregulated tourism activities like building along the shoreline contribute to coastal erosion, leading to the loss of valuable beach areas. Moreover, the biodiversity of the region, which includes mangrove forests and coral reefs, is under threat from tourism-related activities such as overfishing, pollution, and habitat destruction (Khan et al., 2016). Tourism poses significant impacts on local communities beyond environmental concerns. The rapid development of tourism often commodifies local culture, leading to the erosion of traditional practices and identities (Rahman & Hossain, 2020). Additionally, large-scale tourism infrastructure projects may require land acquisition, which results in the displacement of indigenous populations and disrupts their livelihoods (Islam et al., 2019). These factors inevitably lead to social tensions and marginalization within the community.

On the economic front, tourism plays a significant role in income generation and employment creation. Studies have shown that tourism contributes substantially to the local economy through various sectors such as accommodation, dining, transportation, and recreational activities (Islam et al., 2017). However, there are concerns regarding income disparities and leakages of revenue. While tourism creates job opportunities, many of these jobs offer low wages and lack job security (Haque & Chowdhury, 2015). Additionally, a significant portion of tourism revenue may leak out of the local economy through foreign-owned businesses and imported goods (Rahman et al., 2018), limiting its potential to stimulate local economic development. In brief, tourism in Cox's Bazaar has complex and multifaceted impacts on the environment, local communities, and economic conditions. While it brings economic opportunities and cultural exchange, it also poses challenges such as environmental degradation, social disruption, and economic inequality. Thus, the implementation of STD in Cox's Bazaar is a crying need, and many local businesses are trying to incorporate STD

activities. Therefore, studying these local actors would help us unfold the factors that probably have significantly influenced the implementation of STD activities in this specific context.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

This study aims to understand the factors influencing the attitude of local tourism actors toward sustainable tourism development (STD). To achieve this objective, this study employs a case study method suggested by Yin (2003), and we select Cox's Bazaar as the case for this study. Since the case study method allows researchers to collect data from various sources (Eisenhardt, 1989), this study utilizes various sources for collecting data. The study intends to understand the attitudes of local tourism actors, which requires collecting data from multiple relevant parties involved in the tourism industry in Cox's Bazaar area. These relevant parties include but are not limited to hotels, restaurants, tour package providers, local government authorities, and transportation service providers. For the tourism industry to thrive, it is crucial that hotels, tour package providers, and transportation providers play their part in keeping the wheel of tourism turning. These three entities are the backbone of the industry, and their contribution is integral to the success of tourism in Cox's Bazaar. Thus, collecting data from these significant local actors would offer valuable insights for the current study.

In selecting the respondents, we followed the judgmental sampling techniques suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2013). In essence, we selected respondents who are potentially the most relevant sources of data to satisfy the theoretical underpinning of this study. For instance, we chose to interview the founders and top managers of hotels, tour package offering companies, and transportation companies. In these organizations, most of the critical and investment centric decisions are made by them. Implementing STD-related activities involves significant investments, which require decision-making at the top of a business organization. Thus, collecting data from the founders and top managers is the most appropriate approach for achieving the aim of this study. Moreover, it is also significant that the respondents who are selected for this study have substantial experience in implementing various STD activities. If the participants have no experience with STD-related activities, it is highly probable that their responses may not accurately represent the attitudes of local tourism actors toward STDs. In addition to these criteria, we also had to consider the time pressure for the study; since the study needed to be completed in a semester, it was not possible to employ an extensive data collection process. Thus, the number of interviews used in the study is limited to 11 interviews. The following table briefly describes the interviewees and their business organization.

Table 1: Details of the companies and respondents

SL	Company Name	Company Description	Interviewees
1	Alpha	A 3* hotel operating in the Cox's Bazaar. They have implemented several STD activities over the last five years. The hotel offers beds & breakfast for tourists, along with numerous amenities.	Two interviews were done: 1. Founder and CEO 2. General Manager
2	Beta	Highly renowned 4* hotel chain operating in different tourist destinations in Bangladesh. The hotel has implemented many STD activities since its inception and can be considered one of the pioneers in sustainable tourism initiatives.	Two interviews were done: 1. One of the founders 2. General Manager
3	Gama	A 3* hotel that promotes eco-tourism with environmentally friendly cottages and authentic cultural experiences in Cox's Bazaar. The hotel offers organic foods and an eco-friendly living experience with access to a private beach for visitors.	One interview is done: 1. General Manager
4	Delta Tourism	Tourism company that offers various tour packages within Bangladesh. Their offerings are open to both local and international tourists. The company has changed its tour packages drastically to adopt sustainable tourism practices.	Two interviews were done: 1. The founder 2. Manager
5	Adventure	Tourism company that offers tour packages within and outside Bangladesh. Their packages include several green tourism packages. Several STD activities are distinct in their operations.	One interview is done: 1. Founder and CEO 2. Tour supervisor
6	Theta	Transportation service providing company that offers vehicles and ship-based tours to different locations in the Cox's Bazaar region.	Two interviews are done: 1. Founder 2. Office Manager
<b>Total Number of Interviews</b>			11 Interviews

To collect interview data, first a comprehensive interview guide was developed based on the existing knowledge provided by the literature on STD. Following a semi-structured approach, every interview was conducted. While conducting the interview, the interviewees were asked to provide a general description of their responsibilities within the organization. Followed by questions regarding their understanding of sustainability and activities they have implemented to reduce various types of waste. When further clarity was required on a specific question, follow-up questions were asked for deeper insight. For instance, one of the respondents was asked about their opinion on the role of government organizations in implementing STD in Cox's Bazaar. The response from the respondent was rather overarching,

and I asked follow-up questions such as: what specific role do you think the police should play in ensuring the cleanliness of the beach area? Further, the researcher tried to engage in a discussion with the participants to have a better understanding of their feelings toward different aspects of STDs and their relevant activities.

The respondents were contacted via email or phone, and when they provided a positive response, an interview was scheduled. Most of these interviews were done online using Teams or Zoom, according to their preference. The interviews, which ranged from 30 to 57 minutes each, were recorded with prior permission from the respondents. The conversations were held in Bengali, which is the mother tongue of Bangladesh, and were transcribed word to word. The transcribed interviews generated approximately 149 pages of qualitative text, which was used as the primary data in this thesis. In addition to these interview data, information from secondary sources such as the company website, social media pages of the companies, published news articles, and published reports were used as data for supporting the findings of this study.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis guideline of Clarke and Braun (2017) is followed for analyzing the qualitative interview data. Data were coded in three different layers: namely first-order codes, second-order themes, and aggregate dimension. Firstly, the interview transcriptions were read thoroughly to have an overview of the responses from the respondents. Then several quotes and phrases were highlighted, which had the potential to become a theme. The selected quotes and phrases were saved as first-order codes, and the primary analysis led to the generation of 26 first-order codes. **Figure 1** provides an example of selecting first-order codes. Using the first-order codes, we tried to create several groups of codes that represented a specific theme, which represented a particular aspect of sustainable tourism development. For instance, saving of electricity bills, saving of water bills, and cost saving through food waste reduction are three first-order codes, which in general point towards operational cost savings for the company. Thus, we created the second-order-theme **expense reduction** bundling the three first-order codes. Similarly, this thesis could produce six second-order themes bundling 18 first-order codes, and rest of the eight first-order codes could not be grouped into a theme, and thus discarded. Using these six second-order themes, three aggregate dimensions are developed, which are essentially a higher level of abstraction of the second-order themes as suggested in Clarke and Braun (2017). For instance, **expense reduction** and **brand reputation** are two second-order themes that can be considered factors that are associated with the economic

benefits of the sample business. Thus, both these second-order themes were abstracted into **economic factors** as it seemed theoretically logical.

## Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, we present the findings of this study. The findings represent the factors that influence the attitudes of the local tourism actors toward sustainable tourism development. The findings present 15 factors that directly impact the attitudes of the local actors.

### 4.1 Sustainable Tourism Development Status in Coks Baazar

The analysis of qualitative data suggests that local tourism actors, especially hotel owners and managers, transportation providers, and tour package providers in Bangladesh, are engaged in sustainable tourism development (STD) related activities to a certain extent. Our findings show that local actors are mostly engaged in STD activities that are related to economic sustainability and a limited degree of environmental sustainability-related activities. For example, the founder of the hotel Alpha informed us that they mostly implement activities that help them become economically sustainable. One such activity is the use of chip-enabled key cards in guest rooms to save electricity when guests are not using the room. Similarly, transportation providers look for the maximum occupancy of their vehicles and ships before starting a journey/voyage to a specific destination. While this activity indirectly contributes to sustainability to a certain degree, the actors mainly engage in such activities for the underlying economic benefits. We also identified similar attitudes among the tour package providers; they are mostly interested in exerting economic benefits from their implemented activities, and some of these activities indirectly contribute to sustainable development.

In terms of environmental sustainability, various sustainable development activities are observed that vary according to the type of organization and services provided by the local tourism actors. The findings suggest that hotel owners and managers are implementing activities to reduce the consumption of electricity, water, and the amount of food waste produced in their kitchens. Transportation providers are trying to reduce carbon emissions by using vehicles that run on “clean natural gas (CNG)” and ensuring maximum occupancy and minimum number of journeys to a destination. Some instances of promoting public transportation have been identified in the data. While the tour package providers are offering eco-tourism to promote sustainability. A unique idea has also been found in the data: one of the sample tour providers is offering a tour package to offset carbon emissions. The carbon offsetting tourism involves the tourists taking part in reforestation activities and contributing to the promotion of renewable energy use. While the local actors are involved in some activities related to environmental sustainability and economic sustainability, the study found little



activity in enhancing social sustainability. Moreover, our findings also show a lack of understanding of sustainable tourism development. There could be several factors that might have influenced the current STD status in Cox's Bazaar. However, it was visible from the collected data that the attitude toward sustainable tourism development of the local actors is skeptical, which requires positive reinforcement. The next section of this chapter discusses the factors that can have a significant influence on the attitude of these local tourism actors.

## 4.2 Factors Affecting Attitudes of Local Tourism Actors

Analyzing the collected data, this study found that six factors can significantly influence the attitudes of local actors toward sustainable tourism development. These factors are categorized under three broader themes, namely **economic factors**, **organizational factors**, and **knowledge-related factors**. The findings of this study are summarized in **Figure 1**, which presents the overall data structure of our analysis. The following sections describe the identified factors that influence the attitudes of local tourism actors in the Cox's Bazaar area of Bangladesh.

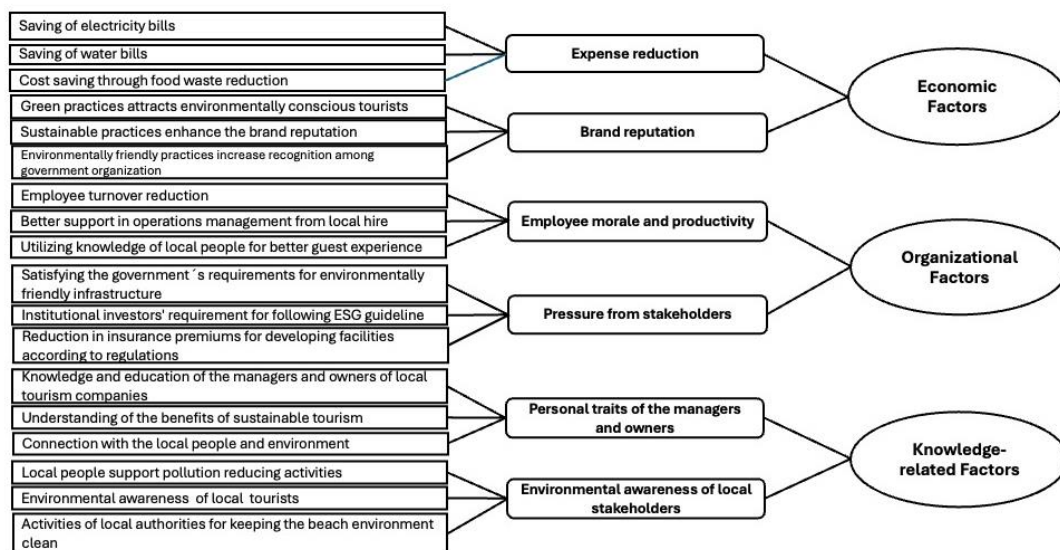


Figure 1: Data structure of factors affecting attitudes of local tourism stakeholders

### 4.2.1 Economic Factors

Local tourism actors are motivated to engage in sustainable tourism development-related activities due to the substantial economic benefits that arise from these activities. In this thesis, economic factors refer to the financial incentives or disincentives that influence individuals' decisions and actions. These factors include cost savings, access to resources, an increase in goodwill, access to new customer groups, and access to credit or financial support. We found

that many local actors implemented sustainable tourism development activities due to the benefits of **expense reduction** for the organization as a whole. In addition to reducing costs, **brand reputation** enhancement played a key role in the decision-making of the local tourism actors.

The respondents reported that when they found that it was possible to reduce operational expenses by employing certain things in their businesses, they implemented those activities. One such motivating factor was the saving of electricity bills; the managers and founders of local tourism businesses found that certain activities, such as the use of chip-enabled key cards in hotel rooms, the use of solar panels, and daytime traveling, could help substantially reduce their electricity bills. Thus, they invested in those technologies, which in turn helped them in implementing sustainable tourism. Comment from the founder of Hotel **Beta** provides a clear picture of this finding:

"At our hotel, we were facing soaring electricity bills, which were eating into our profits. So, we decided to take action. Implementing solar panels was a game-changer. Not only did it significantly slash our electricity expenses, but it also aligned perfectly with our commitment to sustainable practices. It's a win-win solution that benefits both our bottom line and the planet."

When saving costs became a motivating factor for managers, they started looking for ways to ensure *savings from water bills* along with electricity. The respondents suggested that especially respondents from local hotels and restaurants, they tried various approaches to reduce the consumption of water in their respective facilities. These ways include but are not limited to creating awareness among guests, limiting the amount of hot water for daily usage, and developing a work culture of responsible consumption. The manager of Hotel Alpha offers a better explanation of their water-saving initiatives:

"As a manager in the hospitality industry, I am constantly seeking ways to optimize resources without compromising guest satisfaction. To tackle our escalating water bills, we took some measures. By encouraging guests to be mindful of their water usage and implementing a 7-liter limit on hot water per use, we not only succeeded in reducing costs but also fostered a culture of responsible consumption. It is about balancing comfort and conservation, and many of our guests have embraced this eco-conscious approach wholeheartedly."

One interesting finding from the study is that the founders and managers of hotels became concerned about their food waste when they found it negatively impacted their profits. According to the respondents, implementing a system for calculating daily food waste, analyzing daily sales data, and encouraging guests to avoid wasting food were some of the measures they have taken to reduce food waste. Although the result of such activities is not substantial, it has helped the local hotels to limit food waste to some degree. The general manager of Hotel Gama clearly articulated about the matter:

“In six months of joining as a hotel manager, I discovered that we produce so much food waste in our kitchen, which is causing us to lose approximately BDT 1 million every year!! So, we started a system to understand what the wastage is and why we have it. We also analyzed the order history of several months and then changed our sourcing practices accordingly.”

While further discussing this, he mentioned that these initiatives helped him reduce food waste by 50% in a year. According to him:

“When I began monitoring the food waste regularly, our employees followed suit, and we can now see the impact of our efforts. Our food waste has decreased by 50% compared to last year, and we were able to achieve this in just two years of actively working towards it.”

Local tourism actors in Bangladesh are motivated to implement sustainable practices due to the enhancement of their **brand reputation**. It is an undisputed fact that a business organization's brand reputation has a significant impact on its revenue and profitability. The evidence provided by marketing literature is unequivocal, and it highlights the importance of maintaining a positive brand image. By investing in brand reputation, businesses can attract more customers, improve customer loyalty, and ultimately increase their bottom line. Local tourism actors in Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, have reported that the incorporation of some sustainable practices, such as the use of technologies to reduce food waste, electricity, and water consumption are helping them attract *environmentally conscious tourists*. In other words, green practices have helped them gain access to a new group of customers, which offers increased economic benefits for the actors. This finding is mostly applicable to the hotel and tour package offering organizations. For instance, the CEO of Adventure Tourism told us:

“... when we implemented those activities, we tried to promote that through our marketing campaign, and it actually started to bring some tourists who were willing to pay more money to ensure everything included in their tour package were environmentally harmless”

When the local hotel owners found that implementing and promoting activities that were less harmful to the environment was helping them by changing the customer's *perception of service quality*. *My perception of service quality, the respondents meant that customers perceived that the hotel services are of a high standard, which helped them charge extra from the customers.* The general manager of Hotel Alpha has articulated the situation quite clearly:

"We noticed that guests were leaving more positive reviews on Booking.com, so we decided to increase our prices to test the idea of higher perceived quality. To our surprise, tourists didn't complain about the price or the services we offered. Encouraged by this success, we started implementing more sustainable ideas to improve our business."

Another factor that has motivated the local actors to incorporate sustainable practices is better cooperation from various government organization. According to respondents, when they found that activities such as the use of CNG vehicles, events for cleaning beach areas, installing solar panels, and implementing advanced fire protection systems were changing the attitudes of various government organizations namely the environment protection burro, TAX and VAT authorities, and Local Pourosova, they started implementing many of the mentioned sustainable practices. The founder of transportation-providing company Theta informed that:

"I found that when company X began their operations with CNG-fueled buses, they were receiving better cooperation from the local police and VAT office. It made me introduced CNG-fueled buses in my fleet as well".

Overall, we find that the local actors have been highly motivated by the factors that offers substantial financial or economic benefits to their business organization. These local actors implemented activities which directly or indirectly offer them economic benefits either through cost savings, revenue increase, or facilities from government organizations.

#### 4.2.2 Organizational Factors

Organizational factors refer to the matters related to the local businesses that influenced the decision making of the owners and managers of the local tourism actors. Analyzing the qualitative interview data, we identify two organizational factors that motivated the respondents in implementing sustainable tourism development (STD) practices. One of the identified factors are **employee morale and productivity**, which are mostly influencing activities related to local economic sustainability. Another organizational factor is **pressure from stakeholders**, which influences the overall STD initiatives taken by the sample organizations. The following paragraphs provide detailed findings related to these organizational factors.

The sustainable economic development initiatives suggest that tourism related organization should contribute to the local economy, so that it can sustain for a long time. According to the literature, hiring local people can contribute to the economic pillar of the STD. Our findings suggest that, organization from Cox's Bazaar hire local employees because it provides them with several benefits related to the productivity of the businesses. According to the respondents, they experienced that local employees tend to stay in the organization for a long time compared to the employees coming from other districts in Bangladesh. The resulting *employee turnover reduction* is the principal motivators to the managers and founders of local tourism actors. The founder of Hotel Beta clearly stated when asked about the reason for hiring majority of their staff from local population:

“I noticed that the employees from Cox’s Bazaar area seldom leave their jobs compared to people I hired from other districts. So, now I actively try to hire local people, even when they lack required experiences”.

Moreover, a better support in operations management from local hire is observed by the managers of the local tourism businesses. The respondents reported that their local employees can become highly efficient in solving operational related issues such as liaising with transportation providers, day-tour providers, receiving guests from airports, and solving compliance issues. The manager of Hotel Alpha shed some light on the matter:

“In my opinion, many of local employees are great at solving operational issues we get along the way. For instance, last year there was a company registration renewal related issues, one of my local employees solved it in two days, which my assistant manager could not pull off in a week”.

Furthermore, the local actors are utilizing the *knowledge of the local employees for providing better guest experience*. The data suggest that the tourism companies hire local actors, so that they can help them in sourcing fresh local foods for hotel guests, provide better information for visiting local places, and in creating better supply chain for the companies. These trends are mainly observed in the hotel industry in the Cox's Bazaar area. The general manager of Hotel Beta provided a good description of this:

“...fortunately we have some local employees who make things easy for us and for our guests. They help us get the organic vegetables, freshly caught fishes from nearby villages, which contribute a lot to the authentic guest experience we offer”.

It has also come to light that due to ongoing **pressure from stakeholders**, the local tourism actors are trying to implement several STD activities. For instance, the hotel owners had to make their buildings environmentally friendly for satisfying the requirements of the government organizations namely Cox's Bazaar Purosova and Environment protection burro. The general manager of Hotel Gama articulated the matter quite directly:

“we had to restructure our buildings and facilities according to the requirement of purosova and the environment protection burro of Bangladesh, which was costly but we had to do it to continue our operations”.

The tour operators seems to have adopted STD practices and green tourism offerings by being influenced by the *requirements of institutional investors to follow ESG guideline*. Many of the tour operating companies and hotels are financed by multinational corporations, local large organizations, and American venture capitalists. These investors are increasingly pushing the tourism actors, especially tour operators and some hotels, to follow ESG guideline in daily operations to reduce their overall carbon emissions. The founder of Delta Tourism described the matter for us:

“Another reason for me to offer these green tour packages is the investors in my company; they are continuously asking me to adopt ESG reporting standards, which essentially made me think about green tourism.”

Interestingly, reduction in insurance premiums for following environmentally friendly buildings and infrastructure and CNG-driven vehicles were other organizational motivators for the local tourism actors. The respondents reported that their insurance providers suggested that

following environmentally friendly building codes would result in lower insurance premiums, which has motivated them to invest in green buildings. The founder of Hotel Alpha articulated this issue clearly when asked about the building infrastructure:

“The insurance agent told us that if we moved to a building that is green-certified by the respective authorities, then our insurance premium would be substantially lower than what we were paying. So when we started working on our own hotel building, we made sure it received a certificate of green building”

Overall, the sample companies have implemented the identified sustainable tourism development activities when it helped them achieve organizational efficiency, increased productivity, and provided opportunities to enhance organizational reputation.

#### **4.2.3 Knowledge-related factors**

Our analysis shows that the knowledge of various people involved in the tourism industry often works as a motivational factor for implementing STD activities. These factors are regarded as **knowledge-related factors** in this thesis. By knowledge, we refer to the participant's awareness of the global environmental conditions, understanding of different aspects of sustainability i.e., environment, economic, social, and realization of the role of a business organization in attaining sustainability of the tourism industry. Our analysis suggests that the knowledge of business managers, local people, and government authorities plays a significant role in the decision-making processes of local tourism actors in Cox's Bazaar, which in turn influences the STD activities implementation.

The study finds that several **personal traits of the managers and owners** of tourism businesses can have a significant influence on STD implementation in their respective businesses. Among these personal traits, the knowledge and education of the managers and owners play a vital role. A cross-comparison of data from different business organizations shows that managers/owners who are highly educated (either have an MBA or a master's degree) and possess better knowledge about sustainability have implemented more STD activities compared to the ones with lower levels of education. This specific insight was further confirmed when we asked the respondents about their understanding of sustainability and its importance in the long run for the world. Our analysis shows that individuals with higher levels of education realize the importance of sustainability better than individuals with relatively

lower levels of education. This could be the reason why business managers/owners with higher levels of education have implemented more STD activities than the ones with lower levels of education. The Manager of Delta Tourism, who has an MBA, quoted:

“I understand that if we fail to become sustainable, the entire tourism industry will vanish in the future, and it will not be a good thing for future generations...however, many of the tourism company owners, and hotel owners don't see it coming, and that's the sad part in our country”

Similarly, understanding the benefits of sustainable tourism often influences the decisions of investing in STD related activities. We find the respondents have somewhat mixed opinions regarding the potential benefits of sustainable tourism. Those who realize that sustainable tourism would help them have a long-lasting business, which would be beneficial for their children and grandchildren, are encouraged to adopt STD practices. For instance, the general manager of Hotel Alpha quoted:

“If we can become environmentally friendly, we might get more tourists from abroad. Also, we can get benefits from beach tourism for the next 500 years or more”.

However, many respondents do not see the benefits apart from a better promotion for their businesses. The founder of the transportation company Theta clearly stated:

“The Cost of implementing environmentally friendly transportation is higher than the benefits we receive from it...it could be helpful in promoting the business, I guess.”

It is highly probable that the connections with local people of business owners and managers play a significant role in influencing their attitude towards STD activities. Cross-comparison of interviews from different respondents suggests that when the founders/managers have family ties with Cox's Bazaar, they are more concerned about the environment and local communities than those who are not from the districts. The manager of Hotel Beta articulated the matter rather clearly:

“As a local from Cox's Bazaar, I have seen how things have changed drastically during the last 15 years. The pollution is increasing, more people



are coming, and the place is becoming unhealthy. We should control our activity to save the beach and the hills”.

**Environmental awareness of the local stakeholders** seems to be a significant factor that motivates the local businesses to implement STD activities identified in this study. Local stakeholders such as local people, local government offices, and tourists from various areas in Bangladesh can play a significant role in influencing the STD implementation activities in the area. According to the respondents, when local people support pollution-reducing activities such as beach cleaning and plastic collection from beaches and disagree with deforestation, they sponsor such activities. However, the initiatives should be coming from local communities and social service organizations. The manager of Hotel Gama offers insights in this regard:

“If some people come to us for support for an activity such as cleaning the beach or raising awareness for beach protection, we try our best to support them. However, we can’t take such initiatives on our own as it requires both manpower and money”.

Similarly, the level of environmental awareness of local tourists has an impact on the decision-making processes of the managers/founders of the businesses. Our analysis suggests that the sample hotels have implemented food waste-reducing activities when they were receiving requests from tourists. For instance, hotels Alpha and Beta both started garbage sorting policies and reduced the amount of food served to customers when they received complaints from tourists that their restaurants served way too much food to guests, which often turned into waste. Moreover, tourists were also encouraging the hoteliers not to change the bedsheets daily, as it does not get too dirty in a single day of stay. It also came up in the discussion that the hoteliers should not provide toiletries such as soaps, shampoos, and other amenities daily, as the guests often cannot finish the given toiletries in a single day. The manager of Hotel Beta articulated it quite clearly for us:

“We mostly have tourists from Bangladesh...they have helped us change many activities in the hotel operations. For example, many of our guests started to say that we do not need to give them soap, shampoos, and paste every day; it’s a waste...so now we installed big jars of soap, shampoo, and body wash, and refill those when they are empty. It has helped us reduce plastic and chemical waste in the hotel”.

In addition, activities from local authorities to keep the beach environment clean have influenced the attitudes of the local businesses. Local authorities such as Pourosova, police, and environment protection burro often take initiatives for cleaning the beach, updating the infrastructure, and changing the laws to protect the biodiversity of the beach area. Thus, the awareness level of the local authorities has made the businesses adopt STD-related activities.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

In this chapter, we discuss the significance of the findings of this study and show how they relate to the existing literature on sustainable tourism development. The section also proposes a framework to show how the identified factors can influence the attitude of stakeholders and how they are related to STD in the tourism industry. Further, the thesis discusses the theoretical and practical contributions of this study. Finally, the thesis concludes with limitations of the study and avenues for future research on the topic.

### **5.1 Discussion and Framework**

The first objective of the study was to identify the significant factors that influence the attitude of local tourism stakeholders toward sustainable tourism development. To fulfill the objective, this study implemented a qualitative case study approach and collected data from six local stakeholders from Cox's Bazaar, a renowned natural tourism place in Bangladesh. Before diving deep into identifying the factors that may impact the attitude of the stakeholders, it was necessary to identify if the local stakeholders are implementing any sustainable tourism development (STD) related activities. Otherwise, the conclusion derived from the study would lose its significance. Looking from the three-dimensional lenses of STD, namely environmental, economic, and social sustainability, this study analyzed the collected qualitative interviews. The findings suggest that local stakeholders, such as hotels, tour package providers, and transportation providers, are implementing STD-related activities to a limited extent. To be more specific, the implemented STD activities are mostly related to economic and environmental suitability. The study did not find any activities implemented by the sample local stakeholders that contribute to social sustainability. These findings are consistent with the findings of Lasso and Dahles (2023), Setokoe and Ramukumba (2020), and Kala and Bagri (2018). The study also identified activities implemented by the local actors to ensure environmental sustainability, and many of these activities aim to reduce waste. For instance, the study found that the actors are actively trying to reduce food waste, water waste, and electricity waste. Such findings support the study of Chili and Ngxongo (2017), Hieu and Nwachukwu (2019), Hieu and Vu (2019), and Nguyen and Dinh Su (2021). Overall, the study finds STD activities toward economic and environmental sustainability are being implemented in the tourism industry in Cox's Bazaar. Thus, it offers us the ground to go deeper to understand the factors that motivated the local actors to pursue these STD activities.

From the data analysis, it is found that three different types of factors motivate the local stakeholders to implement STD activities. These factors are **economic factors, organizational factors, and knowledge-related factors**. The economic factors refer to the financial benefits or incentives that can be realized by implementing some particular STD activities. Economic factors such as reduction of organizational expenses, and enhancement of the brand reputation were the principal sources of motivation for the managers and owners of the local tourism businesses. This discovery complements the findings of Choi and Sirakaya (2005), as they hypothesized that perceived economic benefits can motivate local people to participate in STD. The second type of influential factor is organizational factors, which essentially refer to factors related to the operations management of local stakeholders. Factors such as employee morale and productivity and pressure from stakeholders seem to have influenced the managers and owners of the local businesses to implement several STD activities identified in this study. This finding refers to the fact that when people within the organization favor sustainable practices, the managers and owners are more likely to adopt STD practices. This finding partially agrees with Lee (2013) and Olya et al. (2018). The third type of factor is regarded as knowledge-related factors, which refers to the knowledge level of people involved in the tourism industry. The study discovered that the personal traits of managers and owners and the environmental awareness of the local stakeholders play significant roles in influencing the implementation of STD activities in the local tourism business. This finding suggests that emotional connection with the environment and local communities makes the local actors more caring, influencing them to implement STD initiatives in their organization. This discovery extends the findings of Nguyen et al. (2018), Holden (2010), and Pezeshki et al. (2023). Based on the findings of this study, we propose the following framework (Figure 2) to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the attitudes of local tourism stakeholders.

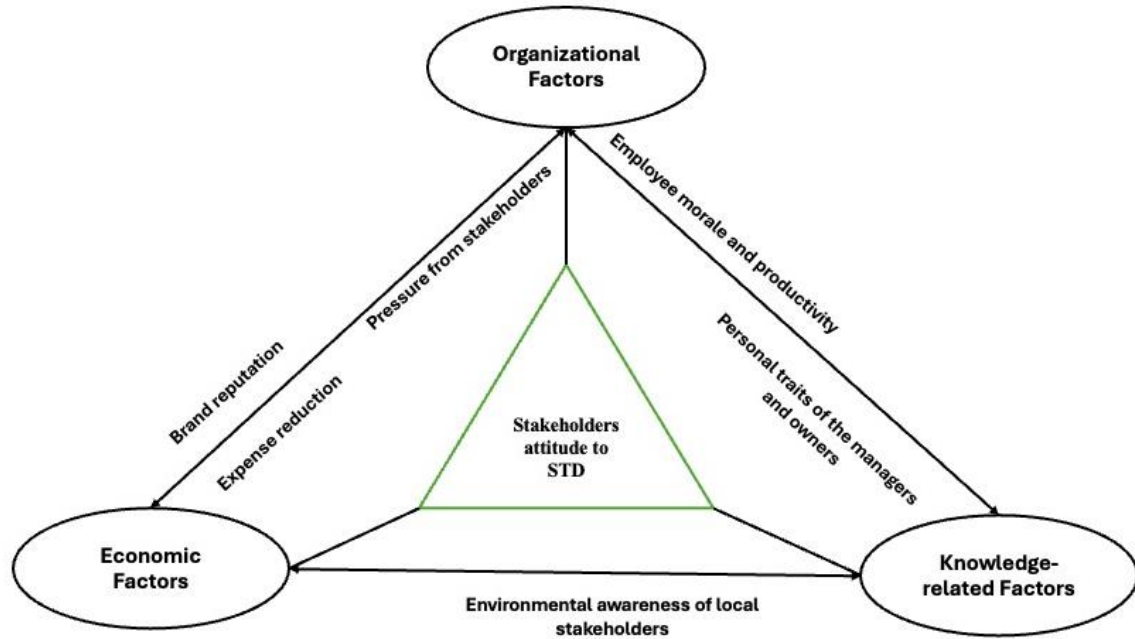


Figure 2: Conceptual framework for understanding factors affecting stakeholders' attitude

The framework suggests that stakeholders' attitudes toward STDs are influenced by organizational, economic, and knowledge-related factors. These three factors not only influence the stakeholders' attitudes but are also interconnected. For instance, organizational factors such as pressure from the stakeholders are connected to economic factors as well as knowledge-related factors. The stakeholders, such as the investors and owners of the business organization, pressure the managers to implement STD activities when they possess sufficient knowledge about the economic benefits it would bring to the company. When the stakeholders' knowledge is limited about the potential benefits of implementation of STD activities, they are less likely to put pressure on the managers. For instance, the manager of Hotel Gama did not feel any pressure from their stakeholders. The probable reason for that is that the owner of the hotel does not possess much knowledge about STD. While the connection between the knowledge-related and economic factors is not as strong, the environmental awareness of the local stakeholders is somewhat connected to economic factors. For instance, when the local stakeholders are highly knowledgeable about environmental protection, they put more value on a business that implements STD activities, which in turn impacts the brand reputation of the company.

## 5.2 Theoretical Contribution

The thesis makes significant theoretical contributions to the literature on sustainable tourism development (STD). By examining the perspectives and behaviors of local tourism actors in

Coxs Bazaar, Bangladesh, the thesis offers valuable insights into the complexities of implementing sustainable practices at the grassroots level. Through the application of a tripartite sustainability framework encompassing economic, organizational, and knowledge-related factors, the thesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the determinants shaping sustainable tourism initiatives within the region. It underscores the significant role of economic incentives and organizational dynamics in driving sustainability efforts, highlighting how cost-saving measures, brand reputation enhancement, and stakeholder pressures influence the adoption of sustainable practices among tourism businesses.

Moreover, the thesis emphasizes the importance of knowledge dissemination and stakeholder engagement in promoting sustainable tourism development, showcasing how education, awareness, and local community involvement serve as catalysts for behavioral change. By contextualizing sustainable tourism practices within the socio-cultural and environmental dynamics of Coxs Bazaar, Bangladesh, the thesis offers nuanced insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by local tourism actors in advancing sustainability agendas. These theoretical contributions have practical implications for sustainable tourism policy and practice, informing policymakers, industry stakeholders, and practitioners about effective strategies for promoting sustainability within the tourism sector. Overall, the thesis enriches the broader discourse on sustainable tourism and provides actionable insights for designing interventions and initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable tourism practices in Coxs Bazaar, Bangladesh, and beyond.

### **5.3 Practical Significance**

The research findings provided in the thesis offer practical usefulness across various domains within the sustainable tourism sector. The insights garnered from the research can inform policymakers about the specific drivers and barriers to sustainable tourism development in Coxs Bazaar, Bangladesh. This information can aid in the formulation of targeted policies and regulations aimed at promoting environmentally and socially responsible tourism practices. For instance, policymakers can incentivize the adoption of sustainable practices through financial incentives, regulatory frameworks, and capacity-building initiatives.

The findings provide valuable guidance for tourism industry stakeholders, including hotel owners, transportation providers, and tour operators, on implementing sustainable practices in their operations. By understanding the economic benefits and organizational factors that influence attitudes toward sustainability, businesses can make informed decisions about investing in environmentally friendly technologies, adopting green certifications, and

engaging in community-driven initiatives. Further, the research highlights the significance of sustainability as a branding tool for attracting environmentally conscious tourists. Tourism businesses in Coxs Bazaar can leverage the findings to develop marketing strategies that emphasize their commitment to sustainable practices, thereby appealing to a growing segment of eco-conscious travelers. This can enhance their competitiveness in the market and contribute to the long-term viability of the tourism industry in the region.

The findings highlight the role of knowledge dissemination and awareness-raising in promoting sustainable tourism practices. Tourism businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations can collaborate to develop educational programs, workshops, and training sessions aimed at building capacity among local stakeholders. By equipping individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge, these initiatives can facilitate the adoption of sustainable practices and foster a culture of sustainability within the tourism sector. Finally, the research supports the tourism industry's sustainability in Coxs Bazaar, Bangladesh, and beyond. By advocating environmentally responsible behavior, preserving cultural heritage, and backing community growth, tourism stakeholders can establish an all-encompassing, robust, and eco-friendly tourism ecosystem. This is advantageous not only for the local economy but also for the conservation of natural resources and cultural identity, ensuring that future generations can relish them.

## **5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

While the research significantly contributes to the theory of sustainable tourism development and offers several practical benefits, it is not without limitations. The research was conducted within a time limit, which limits our capacity to collect more data. Thus, the findings presented in this might be context-specific and more relevant to the tourism industry of Bangladesh. The reliance on qualitative data collected through interviews may introduce biases or limitations inherent to qualitative research methods. For instance, the subjective interpretation of interview responses or the potential for social desirability bias among participants could impact the credibility of the findings.

The study on sustainable tourism development in Coxs Bazaar focused on local tourism actors but may have overlooked broader factors that also influence sustainability initiatives. These include global market trends, macroeconomic policies, and geopolitical dynamics. Further research could enhance knowledge on the topic. Note that findings are dependent on socio-economic and environmental conditions and may not be applicable to contemporary sustainable tourism practices in Coxs Bazaar. Despite efforts to maintain objectivity and

neutrality, the researcher's own biases, perspectives, and preconceptions may have influenced the study's design, data collection, and interpretation of results. Awareness of these potential biases is essential for interpreting the findings accurately. The study's reliance on English-language sources and Western theoretical frameworks may limit its applicability or relevance within the local cultural and linguistic context of Coks Bazaar, Bangladesh. Cultural nuances, language barriers, and divergent worldviews may impact the interpretation and implementation of sustainable tourism practices in ways not fully captured by the study.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a valuable foundation for future research endeavors exploring sustainable tourism development in Coks Bazaar, Bangladesh, and beyond. Addressing these limitations through methodological refinements, interdisciplinary approaches, and longitudinal studies can further enrich our understanding of sustainable tourism practices and their implications for local communities, economies, and environments.



# 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; Ionciă 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.

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# Appendix

## Interview Guide

1. Could you tell me about your roles and responsibilities in the organization?
2. What do you know about sustainability?
  - a. How would you define sustainability?
  - b. What do you know about different dimensions of sustainability?
3. Did you implement any activities within the organization to implement sustainable practices?
4. What types of waste management practices do you have in the organization?
  - a. How do you reduce food waste?
  - b. How do you make sure low amount of water wastage?
  - c. How do you reduce electricity consumptions?
  - d. Is there any specific waste produced by the organization?
5. How do you think your organization contributes to the local economy?
  - a. What percentage of your employees are locals?
  - b. How does it help your company?
6. How do you promote local culture to the tourists?
  - a. What's your opinion on representing local culture to the world?
  - b. Do you have any activities to protect and promote the social norms of Cox's Bazaar?
7. As you mentioned some activities for protecting the environment, is there anything specific that motivated you to implement those activities?
8. What role do government institutions play in your organizational practices?
  - a. Do government authorities require you to follow any specific activities towards environmental protection?
9. How is the infrastructure development influencing the environment in Cox's Bazaar?
10. In your opinion, what should be done to promote sustainable tourism development in Cox's Bazaar?

## DECLARATION

### The public access and authenticity of the thesis

Student's name: **Meem Farjana Akter**

Student's Neptun code: **JB3GXZ**

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Name of consultant's department: Tourism and Catering

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## DECLARATION

**MEEM FARJANA AKTER, JB3GXZ**

As a consultant, I declare that I have reviewed the final thesis and informed the student of the requirements, legal, and ethical rules for the correct handling of literary sources.

**I recommend** the final thesis to be defended in the final examination.

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