



A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN TOURISM: INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Growth and development of urban tourism become a challenges before the policy makers and other stakeholders on the ground of sustainability. In order to maintain and achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs), it is needed to ensure the long term sustainability practices by each stakeholders of the tourism industry. This study developed a conceptual framework by integrating the three important dimensions of sustainability and suggested various measures to achieve the goals. The study mainly grounded on two significant theories such as Triple Bottom Line approach and Stakeholder Theory. The first one indicating that only economic factors alone cannot make any progress in the sustainability goals, but integrating the socio-cultural and environmental factors to economic activities and simultaneously it can contribute to the sustainable urban tourism development. The second theory suggested that all the stakeholders including government, businessmen, tourists, entrepreneurs, local community and other policy makers should act in a collaborative mechanism to achieve the sustainability goals. The present study will contribute to the existing literature and practical and policy implications by linking the three dimensions.

KEYWORDS: Urban Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Environmental Sustainability, Triple Bottom Line, Stakeholder Theory, Sustainability Dimensions.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism become a pivotal sector in all economies of the world. The movement of people from one corner of the world to the another corner is not only making the physical movement of people, at the same time the exchange of currency, culture, values and knowledge also happening. This socio-cultural and economic exchange significantly making impact on the tourism sectors of the nations. Developing countries like India with its rich mix of culture and values invites the foreign tourist without any hesitation. The foreign tourist visit to India is almost 20.57 million, indicating boom of 8.89% over the previous year and 14.82% compared to 2019 (India Tourism Data Compendium 2025).

In India, specifically, urban tourism getting more attention and attraction from the both domestic and international tourist. Cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Trivandrum are promoting tourist destinations within the cities as an urban tourism initiatives. Speedy urbanisation and complexities in the people management become a challenge for urban areas to promote and develop tourist destinations. Hence, the significance of sustainability also emerging for the preservation of destinations for the future without harming the environment.

The concept of sustainable urban tourism and its implementation should be studied and imparted. The different dimensions like environmental, socio-cultural and economic should be integrated with this concept. The concept of sustainable tourism evolved as an output of research on the links between tourism, environment and development. The basic concept of sustainable tourism is to attain accord between the needs of tourists, environment and local communities. Sustainable tourism refers to the practice of tourist development in an environment friendly way in tourist destinations (Zaręba D. 2006). Urban tourism is one of the important emerging type of tourism which is soon one of the significant factor of shaping economic advantages in many tourist destinations (Postma A., Buda D. M., Gugerell K. 2017).

The unplanned development of tourism interventions in cities has also created worry related to degradation of environment, shift in socio-cultural scenario, exhaustion of resources and injustice in the dispersion of financial benefits (Hinch, 1996; Aall & Koens, 2019). Therefore, the promotion and development of sustainability in urban areas become a key problem of government and other stakeholders. Urban tourist destinations reflect complexity where tourism promotion deals close with local people, develop environments, heritage sources, and financial outline. However urban centres gives different sights and enough economic opportunities, they are eventually coped with hurdles such as over tourism, environmental issues, climate concerns, and diminishing quality of life. These difficulties and concerns demands an integrated view that make sure that tourism activities contributes effectively to urban tourism sustainability (Aall & Koens, 2019).



Sustainable tourism helps to the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by encouraging economic development, environmental protection, and welfare of the society. The proper coordination of environmental, socio-cultural and economic dimensions helps to improve destination advantages, build adaptability, and enhance the quality of city life (Mohamadi et al., 2022). The integration of these dimensions expose the demand of selecting an integrated approach for sustainable urban tourism development (Grah et al., 2020; Nugraheni et al., 2020).

By integrating findings from existing studies and literature, this study helps to the improvement of theory in sustainable urban tourism and give a basis for further evaluation and investigation and helps in formulating policies for inclusive sustainable urban tourism development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find and integrate the key environmental, socio-cultural, and economic factors that affect the sustainability of urban tourism destinations.
2. To evaluate how the interdependence of sustainability dimensions contributes to the endurance of urban tourism interventions.
3. To develop a conceptual model that helps in making decisions for sustainable development of urban and tourist destinations.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research focused on framing conceptual framework on sustainable urban tourism by synthesising environmental, socio-cultural and economic dimensions. The study stressed on valid secondary data for integrating the dimensions. The data were acquired from journal articles, books, published reports of different government agencies. To ensure the reliability of the data, data was gathered from reputed journals and database. Thematic content analysis was used illustrate the connection between the three dimensions and sustainability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to understand the key dimensions and its integration with sustainable urban tourism, the literature reviews are organized in to following three areas.

Environmental dimensions

Competitive tourism and sustainable environment can be enhanced by the contribution of green urbanisation (Shen et al. 2024). A significant tourism management and capacity building is essential for the management of destinations in environment friendly and limiting the impact on the environment (Xu and Li 2025). But there are some environmental constrains which encumber the development of sustainable tourism in urban areas (Wu et al. 2025). These constraints can be crossed for the growth of urban tourism development, for that transportation quality and ecological resilience is important (Zhang et al. 2025). When tourism provides contribution to nation GDP and employment creation, it also involves hindrance to environmental conservation. Green Advocates (GA) and Green Learners (GL) reflecting the youngster's attitudes toward sustainable environment. The young tourists stressing on the significance of awareness on environment for sustainable tourism (Serio et al. 2025). There is a reciprocal evolution happening between tourism development and sustainable environment. This findings observed that some action is needed for getting the synergetic result between economic development and environmental protection (Cai et al. 2026). Construction of buildings also playing vital role in the context of urban tourism. Building-related factors will helps to observe the environmental impact in urban areas (Lerario & Di Turi 2018). For attaining long-term sustainability and facing the urban environmental issues nature based solutions are needed (Castellar et al. 2021).

Socio-Cultural Dimensions

Urban tourism encourage development of economy but is also a means to protect cultural aspects, and it helps to SDG 8.9 for sustainable tourism, a way to employment generation and cultural heritage protection (Ku & Samsurijan 2025). Perceptions of the tourist related to the preservation and protection of cultural sites and heritage are significant for proper sustainable planning (Tan et al. 2025). Tourism has played a role in the growth of local economy but it also demonstrated inequality in socio-economic condition and put strain on cultural legacy and the environment (Kumar and Mandal 2025). To attain sustainable tourism growth, it not possible to avoid the social dimension and stress only on the economic and environmental dimensions. (Prihanti et al. 2020). Sustainable tourism should make stability in economic, social and environmental affects when addressing the requirements of tourists and the society (UNWTO 2023). To address the challenges of over tourism and to ensure the social well-being resident centred sustainability model is needed (Yaprak et al. 2025). There are some challenges faced by sustainable urban tourism. Mainly is an issue between the life quality of urban people and the benefit of tourism (Aall & Koens 2019).

Economic Dimensions

Versatility and economic efficacy together contribute to the development of sustainable urban tourism economies (Guo and Liu 2024). Sustainable tourism helps in economic development, employment generation and strategies for limiting carbon emission rate (World Travel & Tourism Council 2024). Scientific activities and attraction related to tourism will helps to socio-economic development and job creation (Mdhluli 2026). There should need a flexible model for integrating economic benefits, quality environment and community satisfaction for sustainable destination management (Lyu et al. 2025). Apart from environment protection and socio-cultural safeguarding economic viability also a pillar of sustainable tourism (UNEP and UNWTO 2023). The



success variables of urban tourism affected by the great relationship of economic growth of small tourism enterprises with urban image and collaboration in the industry (Aydın et.al. 2018).

RESEARCH GAP

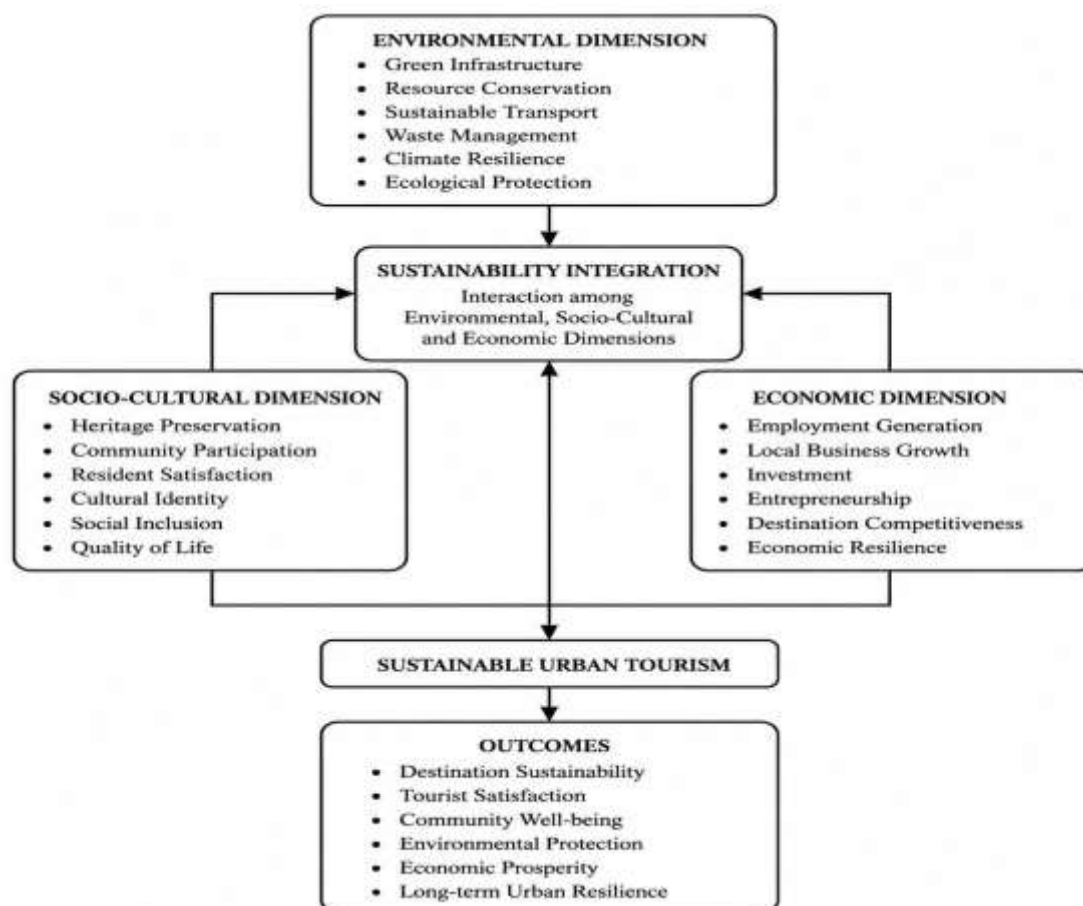
The literature synthesizes environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions as the foundations of sustainable urban tourism, some studies significantly evaluated these dimensions in alone or focus one over the others. This approach limits a comprehensive understanding of sustainable urban tourism and the integration among its major dimensions. Further, there is a lack of an integrated conceptual framework that organise these three dimensions into a unique model for understanding and directing sustainable urban tourism. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by developing an integrated conceptual framework that blend the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions, thereby suggesting a theoretical foundation for future empirical research and sustainable tourist destination planning.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded in the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory proposed by Elkington (1997), which says that sustainability should be examined by an approach of integrating environmental, social, and economic performance. Traditional model are mainly focused on the economic growth and its contribution. But Triple Bottom Line theory indicate that for attaining the long term sustainability it should be ensure the conservation of environment, welfare of the society and economic growth together.

Sustainable Urban Tourism concept aligned with the TBL approach. It provide a platform for the participants of tourism activities for understanding how influential is their activities in the environment, society and the economic sectors. The environmental area stress on the conservation of ecological resources, pollution control, promoting green transportation and favourable climate actions. Social factors consist of protection of heritage sites, community involvement, improving quality of life and cultural promotions. The economic side focus on employment generation, promotion of local entrepreneurship and tourism competitiveness.

Further, the framework is grounded with Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which states that for attaining the sustainable development it need the collective involvement of government, communities, tourists, businessmen and policy makers. In the sustainable urban tourism context, there are lot of stakeholders those different opinions and interest. Therefore, a collaborative stakeholder governance is significant for marinating the sustainable balance.





DISCUSSION

The conceptual framework of the study illustrates that sustainable urban tourism cannot be attained by only focusing on economic growth. There should be an integrated approach of the three dimension such as environmental, social and economic.

The findings from literatures shows that environmental sustainability develop the ecological foundation of urban tourism. Green transportation systems, environmental conservation, waste management and responsible resource utilization together improve destination quality while limiting the environmental degradation. At the same time, socio-cultural sustainability has a crucial role in developing destination authenticity. Community involvement, conservation of cultural heritage, local satisfaction, preservation of local traditions and create a supportive environment for tourism development.

Economic sustainability become a significant factor in this case. Because economic factor alone can't make any contribution to the sustainable environment but it plays a vital role in generating employment and income distribution. The significant part of the frame work is that it focus on the interdependence of the three sustainability dimensions. Rather than treating the dimensions individually. All three dimensions equally contribute to establish the sustainable urban tourism concept.

IMPLICATIONS

This study provides significant theoretical, practical and policy implication to the field of sustainable urban tourism. The study contribute to the existing literatures by integrating the three dimensions of sustainability such as environmental, social and economic through the Triple Bottom Line approach. The findings indicates that, interdependence of these three dimensions can create a foundation for achieving then long term sustainability in tourism sectors. The framework provides practical instructions for stakeholders such as destination managers, tourism officials, and government agencies, local authorities for designing an integrated tourism policy that leverage the concept of sustainability and encourage environment protection, socio-cultural preservation and economic development.

Urban developers and entrepreneurs in tourism sectors can integrate this concept in developing their plan. Local people may also benefit from policies promoting participatory decision-making, heritage conservation, and equitable distribution of tourism benefits. In order to ensure sustainability and maintain the sustainable culture the government should take and promote some sustainable practices as part of the urban tourism promotion such as green infrastructure development, green building, green transportation, responsible tourism practices, public – private collaboration in destination management. Such policy interventions will support the sustainable Development Goals (SDCs)'

CONCLUSION

The study highlighted the importance of integrating socio-cultural, environmental and economic aspects of tourism industry in to a broad concept in order to ensure the sustainability in the field. The rapid urbanization along with globalisation will leads to movement of people across the world for various purpose. Tourism is one of the major cause for the movement of people from one place to another place as part of recreation, refreshment, employment and for building businesses. This transformation creating concern over the environment regarding its sustainability. Most of the cities are facing challenges such as density issues, transportation issues, and waste management related problems, underutilisation of resources, energy scarcity and unemployment. This issues are greatly affecting the tourism sectors also. Therefore, the study emphasizes to strengthen the stakeholders awareness on sustainable practices in urban tourist destinations. A collaborative approach can eliminate the knowledge gap in this issue.

urban tourism success factors that have the strongest correlation with the economic performance of the STEs are the urban image and cooperation, respectively. Accordingly, it is necessary to focus on the urban image and cooperation in the sustainability of tourism urban tourism success factors that have the strongest correlation with the economic performance of the STEs are the urban image and cooperation, respectively. Accordingly, it is necessary to focus on the urban image and cooperation in the sustainability of tourism urban tourism success factors that have the strongest correlation with the economic performance of the STEs are the urban image and cooperation, respectively. Accordingly, it is necessary to focus on the urban image and cooperation in the sustainability of tourism.

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