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Strategic Tourism Management for Sustainable, Inclusive and Digital Destination Transformation

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Abstract
Tourism has re-emerged as one of the most visible engines of post-pandemic recovery, but the return of visitor volumes has also intensified long-standing governance problems: carbon-intensive mobility, uneven local value capture, pressure on heritage and natural assets, precarious work, seasonality, congestion and weak measurement of destination-level impacts. This paper develops an integrated framework for strategic tourism management that connects destination competitiveness with sustainability, digital transformation and inclusive development. Using a conceptual and policy-oriented research design, the study synthesizes international literature on destination governance, sustainable tourism, smart tourism, resilience and community-based development, and triangulates it with recent policy standards from UN Tourism, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, the OECD and the World Travel & Tourism Council. The paper argues that tourism management should shift from promotional destination marketing toward stewardship-based governance in which public authorities, destination management organizations, firms, communities and knowledge institutions jointly manage value creation and impact control. The proposed framework identifies six managerial capabilities: strategic fit, sustainability measurement, digital readiness, community participation, climate resilience and local value capture. Results are presented through a causal ecosystem model, a destination governance model, an illustrative maturity profile and a policy prioritization matrix. The analysis shows that sustainable tourism outcomes depend not on single instruments but on coherent bundles of institutions, data, finance, standards, human capital and adaptive learning. The paper contributes to international debate by positioning tourism management as a development governance problem rather than merely a sectoral business function.

Keywords: Climate-Compatible Growth, Destination Governance, Digital Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Management

1. Introduction

Tourism has become a central field in contemporary development policy because it links production, consumption, mobility, culture, environment and place-based identity in a single economic system. Unlike sectors that are spatially concentrated in factories or offices, tourism is experienced directly in communities, streets, ecosystems, cultural landscapes and everyday life. Its benefits can be substantial: foreign exchange, employment, small-business creation, infrastructure upgrading, regional diversification and cultural valorisation. Yet its costs are also highly visible: congestion, social conflict, resource stress, real-estate pressure, informal employment, waste generation, carbon-intensive travel and the commodification of heritage. For this reason, tourism management is no longer adequately captured by the traditional language of promotion, arrivals and expenditure. It must be understood as a strategic governance field in which destination competitiveness, social legitimacy and ecological limits interact.

The urgency of this reframing has increased in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. Global tourism virtually recovered pre-pandemic levels in 2024, with around 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals, and UN Tourism's latest data indicate that 2025 set a new record for international arrivals. Recovery has brought renewed income opportunities, but it has also reactivated the pre-crisis problems that were never fully solved. Many destinations are again debating overtourism, infrastructure capacity, pressure on water and energy systems, tourism-resident tensions, short-term rentals and uneven distribution of tourism income. The recovery therefore cannot be treated as a simple return to normality. It is a policy window for redesigning destination management systems around resilience, climate action, digital intelligence, decent work and community well-being.

Tourism management is a relevant topic for the 22nd International Conference on Socio-economic and Environmental Issues in Development because it sits at the intersection of economic management, business administration, digital economy, climate-compatible growth and social-cultural development. Tourism is simultaneously an export activity, a local service economy, a platform for entrepreneurship, a cultural system and a source of environmental impact. This multidimensional nature makes it analytically rich but administratively difficult. A tourism authority may be responsible for marketing, licensing or visitor information, while the drivers of tourism outcomes often lie in transport policy, urban planning, land use, environmental regulation, workforce development, digital infrastructure, investment incentives and cultural heritage management. Effective tourism management is therefore not a single-agency task; it is an inter-sectoral governance challenge.

International frameworks increasingly reflect this broad interpretation. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council organizes destination standards around sustainable management, socio-economic impacts, cultural impacts and environmental impacts. UN Tourism's Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism, endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2024, pushes the field toward integrated measurement of tourism's economic, social and environmental dimensions. The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism calls for coordinated action through measurement, decarbonisation, regeneration, collaboration and finance. These frameworks indicate a consensus that destination policy should be evidence-based, climate-aware and community-sensitive rather than exclusively visitor-volume-oriented.

Despite this shift, many destinations remain locked into managerial routines inherited from an earlier tourism paradigm. Success is often measured by arrivals, hotel occupancy, tourism receipts and brand visibility, while less attention is given to leakage, resident welfare, carbon intensity, seasonality, informal work, ecosystem degradation and the quality of local participation. In developing and emerging destinations, this measurement imbalance is especially problematic because tourism is often promoted as a fast route to local development, but institutional capacity for impact management is weaker. The result can be a paradox in which tourism growth increases aggregate revenue while reducing destination liveability, undermining the very assets that make the destination attractive.

This paper addresses the following research problem: how can strategic tourism management be designed to support sustainable, inclusive and digitally enabled destination development? The paper does not test a single causal hypothesis with primary survey data. Instead, it develops a conceptual and policy framework grounded in international literature and contemporary standards. The goal is to provide a coherent analytical architecture for scholars, policymakers and destination managers who need to move from fragmented tourism interventions to integrated governance systems.

Three research questions guide the analysis. First, what are the core governance challenges facing tourism destinations in the current phase of recovery and transformation? Second, what capabilities should destinations develop to align competitiveness with sustainability, inclusion and resilience? Third, what policy instruments can translate these capabilities into practical destination management reforms? These questions are intentionally broad because tourism management operates at multiple scales, from firms and attractions to cities, regions and national systems.

The paper makes three contributions. Conceptually, it reframes tourism management as destination stewardship: a coordinated process of creating visitor value while protecting social, cultural and natural capital. Analytically, it proposes a systems framework linking external drivers, destination assets, institutional arrangements, managerial capabilities, value creation and impact governance. Practically, it offers a maturity profile and a policy prioritization matrix that can be adapted by destinations for self-assessment, strategic planning and capacity development. The core argument is that sustainable tourism performance emerges from coherent governance bundles, not from isolated promotional campaigns or stand-alone sustainability projects.

Table 1: Research Questions and Analytical Contributions

Research Question	Analytical Focus	Contribution
RQ1: Core governance challenges	Recovery volatility, overtourism, climate risk, platform power, weak measurement, uneven benefit distribution	Defines tourism management as a multi-level governance problem
RQ2: Required capabilities	Strategic fit, sustainability measurement, digital readiness, community participation, climate resilience, local value capture	Translates sustainability into destination management capabilities
RQ3: Policy instruments	Standards, data systems, visitor-flow management, SME upgrading, green finance, participatory planning	Supports practical sequencing and implementation

2. Method

The study adopts a conceptual and policy-oriented research design. This design is appropriate when the objective is not to estimate a narrow econometric relationship but to integrate dispersed knowledge into a usable framework for strategic analysis. Tourism management is an interdisciplinary domain involving economics, management, geography, sociology, environmental studies, public policy and information systems. A conceptual synthesis therefore enables the paper to connect theories and standards that are often discussed separately: destination competitiveness, sustainable tourism, smart tourism, collaborative governance, resilience and place-based development.

The review strategy was structured around four knowledge streams. The first stream concerns destination competitiveness and strategic management, including classical contributions on destination life cycles, resource-based views of competitive advantage, destination competitiveness indicators and strategic positioning. This stream helps explain why destinations require coherent value propositions, differentiated assets, skilled firms, service quality and market intelligence. The second stream concerns sustainable tourism and destination governance, including work on stakeholder collaboration, policy learning, carrying capacity, community participation and responsible tourism. This stream shifts attention from market success to the management of tourism's externalities and distributional consequences.

The third stream concerns digital and smart tourism. Digital technologies shape tourism through online search, platform-mediated accommodation, mobile payment, social media, visitor-flow analytics, artificial intelligence, dynamic pricing and data-driven destination management. Digitalization can improve service quality and policy intelligence, but it can also generate platform dependency, data asymmetry, surveillance concerns and unequal access among small firms. The fourth stream concerns resilience and climate-compatible development. Tourism is exposed to pandemics, extreme weather, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, geopolitical conflict, aviation disruption and inflation in energy prices. Strategic tourism management must therefore integrate crisis readiness and climate adaptation into normal planning rather than treating them as exceptional issues.

The paper also draws on policy documents and standards from international organizations. These include UN Tourism data and sustainability measurement frameworks, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council standards, OECD work on tourism policy, and WTTC economic impact research. These sources were used not as primary empirical observations but as boundary conditions for international relevance. They show what issues are currently recognized in global tourism governance and provide a basis for aligning the proposed framework with contemporary policy discourse.

The analytical procedure involved three steps. First, recurring constructs were identified across the literature and policy documents: competitiveness, sustainability, stakeholder governance, digital readiness, local value capture, climate action, visitor experience, social inclusion and measurement. Second, these constructs were organized into a causal logic that links context, capabilities, governance instruments and outcomes. Third, the framework was translated into visual and tabular tools that can support planning: an ecosystem diagram, a governance platform model, a maturity profile and a policy prioritization matrix. The visual components are not empirical results from a survey; they are analytical devices designed to make the argument operational for destination managers.

This methodological choice has limitations. The paper does not produce destination-specific rankings, test measurement invariance or infer causal effects from microdata. It therefore cannot claim that one exact policy instrument will produce the same outcome across all destinations. Tourism systems are path-dependent and locally embedded; governance capacities differ across countries, regions and cities. However, a conceptual paper is valuable when policy practice needs integrative frameworks before reliable quantitative indicators can be applied. The proposed model should be understood as a diagnostic architecture that can be populated with local data in subsequent research.

Fig 1: Strategic Tourism Management Ecosystem

3. Results

The analysis suggests that contemporary tourism management must respond to four simultaneous transitions. The first is the recovery transition. After the collapse of international mobility during the pandemic, destinations have had to rebuild market confidence, restore business viability, rehire workers and stabilize transport connectivity. Recovery has not been uniform. Some destinations rebounded quickly because of strong domestic markets, regional travel corridors or distinctive outdoor attractions; others faced slower recovery because of air connectivity, geopolitical exposure or dependence on long-haul markets. Management under recovery conditions requires attention to liquidity, workforce reactivation, market diversification and crisis communication.

The second transition is the sustainability transition. Tourism growth can intensify pressure on water, land, energy, waste systems, biodiversity and cultural heritage. These pressures are not external to destination competitiveness; they affect visitor satisfaction, resident acceptance and asset quality. A destination with crowded attractions, polluted beaches, degraded heritage or hostile residents loses competitive advantage even if its marketing remains effective. Sustainable tourism management therefore means protecting the asset base of competitiveness. The managerial question is not whether sustainability is compatible with tourism growth, but what form of tourism growth preserves and renews the assets on which the destination depends.

The third transition is the digital transition. Tourism is one of the sectors most visibly shaped by digital platforms and data. Search engines, online travel agencies, short-term rental platforms, review systems and social media have changed how destinations are discovered, compared, booked and evaluated. Destination management organizations can no longer rely only on traditional campaigns; they must understand digital reputation, platform algorithms, real-time visitor flows, data privacy and the digital capabilities of local SMEs. The digital transition also changes governance because data are often controlled by private platforms rather than public institutions. This creates a public-management challenge: destinations need data for planning but may not own or control the most relevant data.

The fourth transition is the inclusion transition. Tourism can create jobs for youth, women, migrants and rural communities, but it can also reproduce low wages, seasonal employment, limited career paths and unequal bargaining power. Inclusive tourism management requires more than counting jobs. It requires attention to job quality, skills development, enterprise linkages, local procurement, accessibility, community consent and cultural dignity. The destination should not merely host visitors; it should improve the development prospects of residents. This is the central difference between tourism growth and tourism-led development.

These transitions reveal why tourism management should be viewed as a systems problem. A destination may improve marketing and attract more visitors, but if transport capacity, waste systems, heritage protection and community participation are weak, the result may be a lower-quality destination. Conversely, a destination may have excellent natural assets but fail to capture value locally because supply chains are externally controlled and SMEs lack digital capabilities. The unit of analysis should therefore be the destination system rather than the isolated tourism firm. Firms create experiences, but the destination system creates the conditions under which firms can be productive, responsible and innovative.

Fig 1 summarizes this ecosystem logic. External context, destination assets and institutional setting provide the conditions for tourism governance and destination capabilities. Governance and capabilities then shape two parallel processes: value creation and impact management. Value creation includes visitor experience, local enterprise development, branding and product innovation. Impact management includes carrying capacity, carbon reduction, cultural protection and equity. A learning system connects outcomes back to planning through indicators and feedback. The logic is deliberately circular rather than linear because tourism management requires continuous adaptation.

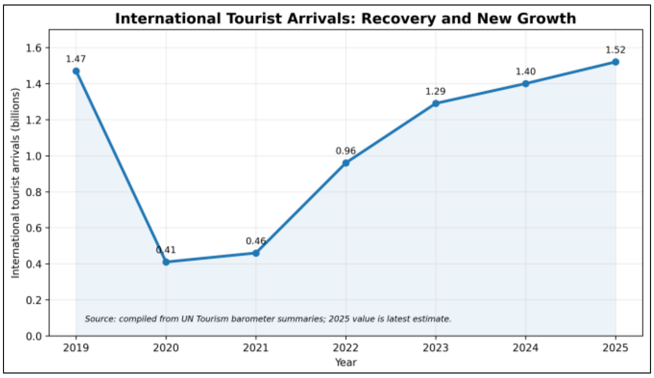

Fig 2: International Tourist Arrivals Recovery and Growth

The empirical context reinforces the urgency of this systems approach. International tourist arrivals fell sharply in 2020, gradually recovered and then returned close to pre-pandemic levels by 2024. The recovery chart in Fig 2 illustrates the volatility of global tourism and the scale of the rebound. Such volatility shows that tourism systems cannot be managed only for expansion; they must be managed for resilience. A destination that lacks financial reserves, diversified markets, crisis protocols and adaptive communication is vulnerable even if it performs well in normal years.

Tourism governance must also overcome fragmentation. Transport agencies manage mobility, environment agencies regulate ecosystems, culture agencies protect heritage, local governments manage public space, firms deliver services and residents bear many impacts. Without coordination, each actor optimizes a partial objective. Hotels may seek occupancy, platforms may seek transaction volume, transport operators may seek throughput, and local governments may seek tax revenue. Strategic tourism management creates mechanisms through which these objectives can be aligned with destination-level outcomes.

Fig 3 presents an integrated governance model. At the centre is a destination stewardship platform, which may take the institutional form of a strengthened destination management organization, a public-private partnership, a regional tourism council or a multi-stakeholder observatory. Around it are six governance domains: public policy and regulation, private sector and SMEs, communities and workforce, data and analytics, finance and investment, and nature-culture-heritage systems. The model emphasizes reciprocal relationships because no single actor controls tourism outcomes. Destination stewardship is therefore a capability for alignment rather than command.

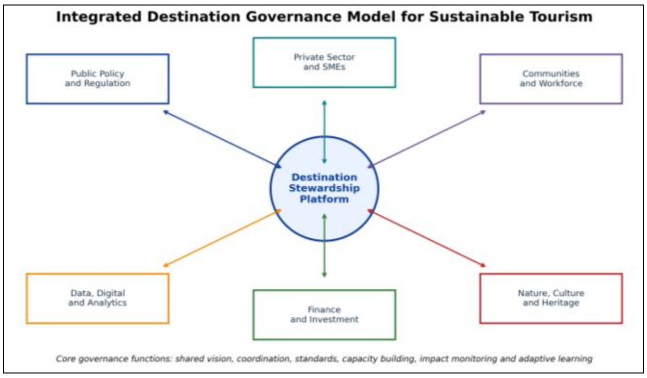

Fig 3: Integrated Destination Governance Model

The capability maturity profile in Fig 4 translates the model into diagnostic dimensions. Strategic fit assesses whether tourism policy is aligned with broader development strategy, spatial planning and brand positioning. Sustainability measurement assesses whether the destination monitors social, environmental and economic impacts using credible indicators. Digital readiness assesses data infrastructure, digital skills and platform governance. Community participation assesses the depth of resident involvement in decisions. Climate resilience assesses exposure analysis, adaptation planning and decarbonisation pathways. Experience quality assesses service standards and product coherence. SME and local value capture assesses whether tourism expenditure circulates through local supply chains.

The maturity approach is useful because many destinations do not fail from a lack of ambition; they fail from uneven capabilities. A destination may have strong marketing but weak impact measurement, or strong natural attractions but weak SME linkages. Maturity profiling helps managers identify bottlenecks. It also prevents sustainability from being treated as an abstract aspiration by translating it into organizational capabilities. The purpose is not to rank destinations for reputational competition but to support structured learning.

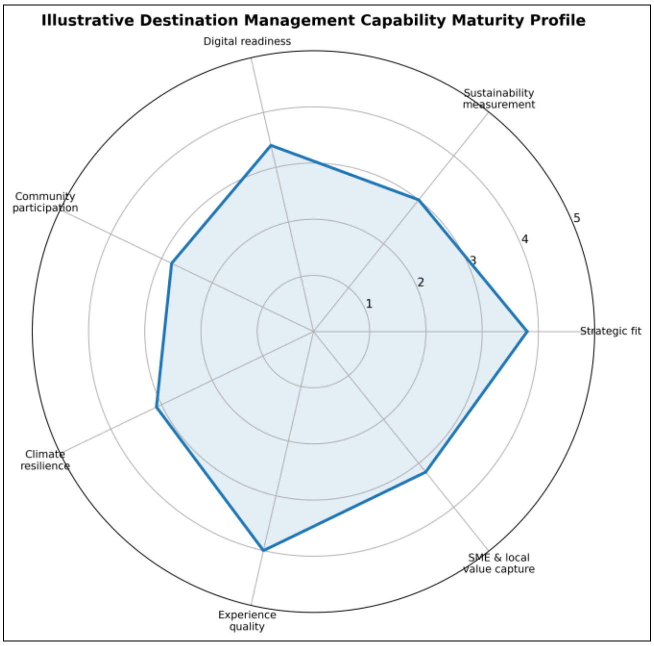

Fig 4: Illustrative Destination Management Capability Maturity Profile

Fig 5 provides a policy prioritization matrix. Some interventions, such as SME capability building and digital destination platforms, may offer relatively high feasibility and strategic impact. Others, such as green mobility or sustainability accounts, may be transformational but harder to implement because they require capital, institutional coordination and technical expertise. Visitor-flow management and heritage protection may be politically sensitive but essential in crowded destinations. The matrix can help policymakers sequence reforms rather than attempting all interventions simultaneously.

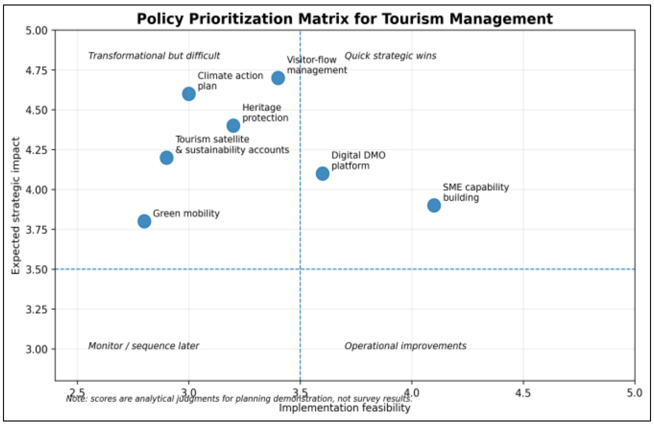

Fig 5: Policy Prioritization Matrix for Tourism Management

The tables deepen these results by showing the managerial implications of each domain. Table 1 links the research questions to the paper's analytical contribution. Table 2 presents strategic dimensions of tourism management. Table 3 maps governance instruments to risks and performance indicators. Table 4 summarizes digital tourism capabilities and safeguards. Table 5 offers a staged roadmap for destination transformation. Together, the tables show that tourism management should be evaluated through bundles of practices rather than single indicators.

Table 2: Strategic Dimensions of Contemporary Tourism Management

Dimension	Managerial Objective	Typical Risk If Mismanaged
Competitiveness	Quality experiences, differentiated products, brand coherence, service productivity	Overemphasis on arrivals, low value per visitor, weak innovation
Sustainability	Resource efficiency, carbon reduction, heritage protection, biodiversity stewardship	Greenwashing, fragmented indicators, underfunded conservation
Inclusion	Decent work, local procurement, SME participation, accessibility, gender and youth opportunities	Leakage, precarious work, exclusion of informal actors
Digital transformation	Destination analytics, platform visibility, smart mobility, digital skills	Data asymmetry, privacy risks, platform dependency
Resilience	Crisis planning, market diversification, climate adaptation, financial buffers	Reactive response, concentrated demand, infrastructure fragility

Table 2 shows that contemporary tourism management is multidimensional. Each dimension is linked to a distinct value logic but also to a distinct failure mode. Competitiveness without sustainability can generate overcrowding and asset degradation. Sustainability without competitiveness may lack resources and political support. Inclusion without productivity may create low-value employment, while digital transformation without governance can reinforce platform dependency. The task of destination managers is therefore to build coherent policy bundles rather than maximize one dimension in isolation.

Table 3: Governance Instruments, Risks and Indicators

Instrument	Main Mechanisms	Implementation Risk	Indicative Measures
Visitor-flow management	Reservation systems, timed entry, zoning, real-time crowd information	Congestion displacement or unequal access	Density, waiting time, resident complaints, site condition
Climate action plan	Emissions inventory, low-carbon mobility, energy standards, adaptation investments	Plans without finance or baseline data	Carbon intensity, renewable energy share, climate-risk exposure
Community participation	Resident councils, participatory budgeting, grievance mechanisms	Tokenistic consultation	Resident satisfaction, conflict cases, benefit-sharing indicators
SME upgrading	Training, digital onboarding, local procurement networks, microfinance	Unequal access to support	SME revenue share, digital adoption, local procurement ratio
Heritage protection	Conservation rules, interpretation, carrying capacity, reinvestment fees	Commercialization and cultural simplification	Heritage condition, local cultural participation, reinvestment amount

Table 3 emphasizes that instruments require risk-aware implementation. Visitor-flow management can protect fragile assets but may displace pressure to other sites. Climate action plans can remain symbolic if not linked to finance. Community participation can be tokenistic if residents lack influence over actual decisions. For this reason, each instrument should be connected to indicators and accountability processes.

Table 4: Digital Tourism Capabilities and Public-Interest Safeguards

Capability	Potential Contribution	Governance Risk	Safeguard
Destination data platform	Integrates visitor flows, accommodation, mobility and sentiment data	Privacy, data quality, unequal access	Open standards, anonymization, public-interest data sharing
Digital marketing intelligence	Matches segments with sustainable products and off-season offers	Algorithmic dependence on dominant platforms	Owned data strategy, diversified channels
Smart mobility tools	Guides visitors to lower-impact routes and reduces congestion	Exclusion of visitors without digital access	Offline alternatives and accessibility design
SME digital capability	Improves bookings, payments, reputation and productivity	Capability gap between large firms and small actors	Training, shared tools, cooperative platforms
AI-supported service design	Personalization, forecasting and language support	Bias, opacity and loss of human authenticity	Human oversight, ethical guidelines, auditability

Table 4 clarifies that digital transformation is both a capability and a governance risk. Data can help destinations become more adaptive, but it can also produce new inequalities. A public-interest approach to digital tourism must therefore combine innovation with transparency, privacy, inclusion and human oversight.

Table 5: Roadmap for Destination Transformation

Phase	Priority Actions	Expected Output
Phase 1: Diagnostic baseline	Map assets, stakeholders, visitor flows, impacts and governance gaps	Tourism system map and baseline dashboard
Phase 2: Strategic alignment	Define shared destination vision and align tourism with spatial, climate and economic plans	Integrated destination strategy
Phase 3: Capability building	Upgrade DMO functions, data skills, SME capacity and participatory mechanisms	Destination capability programme
Phase 4: Implementation	Deploy standards, finance, visitor management, product innovation and climate actions	Policy portfolio and investment pipeline
Phase 5: Learning and adaptation	Monitor, report, evaluate and revise policies using feedback loops	Annual sustainability and competitiveness report

Table 5 offers a staged roadmap because destination transformation cannot be achieved through a single project. The sequence begins with diagnosis, moves to strategic alignment, builds capabilities, implements instruments and institutionalizes learning. The roadmap can be compressed or expanded depending on destination size and institutional capacity.

A key finding from the synthesis is that destination competitiveness is increasingly conditional on sustainability performance. Earlier models of competitiveness emphasized resources, supporting factors, destination management, demand conditions and situational conditions. These remain important, but their meaning has changed. A beach destination does not compete only on scenic beauty; it competes on water quality, waste management, climate risk disclosure, mobility access, safety, community acceptance and the authenticity of local experience. A cultural destination does not compete only on monuments; it competes on conservation, interpretation, visitor dispersion, creative industries and respect for local identity. Competitiveness is therefore relational: it depends on how the destination manages the relationship between visitors, residents, firms and place-based assets.

This relational perspective helps explain the limits of volume-based tourism strategy. High arrival numbers can support economies of scale, but they can also reduce marginal value when infrastructure is congested and environmental quality declines. The central indicator should not be the number of visitors alone but net destination value: the long-term economic, social, cultural and environmental value created per unit of visitor pressure. A low-spending, high-impact visitor profile may be less desirable than a smaller number of visitors who stay longer, purchase local products, travel in lower-impact ways and engage respectfully with local culture. Tourism management must therefore shift from quantity maximization to value optimization.

Digital technology can support value optimization if it is governed well. Destination analytics can reveal seasonality patterns, visitor movements, congestion points, market segments, spending channels and sentiment trends. Smart ticketing and reservation systems can manage flows at fragile sites. Digital storytelling can connect visitors with local products and heritage narratives. Online training can upgrade SME capabilities. However, digitalization is not automatically inclusive. Small businesses may be excluded if they lack platform literacy, data access or online payment systems. Communities may also lose control over representation when destination images are produced mainly by influencers and algorithms. Digital tourism management therefore requires public-interest safeguards.

Climate action is another capability that must become mainstream. Tourism is both exposed to climate change and a contributor to emissions. Coastal tourism faces sea-level rise, storm damage and heat stress. Mountain tourism faces snow reliability problems. Nature-based tourism faces biodiversity loss, wildfire and extreme weather. Urban tourism faces heat islands, water stress and infrastructure pressure. Climate-compatible tourism management requires emissions measurement, low-carbon mobility, energy-efficient accommodation, circular waste systems, adaptation planning and regenerative investment in ecosystems. The Glasgow Declaration's pathways are useful because they connect measurement with practical action, collaboration and finance.

Community participation is not a procedural add-on; it is a condition of destination legitimacy. Residents provide labour, culture, hospitality and everyday tolerance for tourism activities. When they perceive that tourism raises living costs, crowds public spaces, damages culture or delivers limited local benefits, social licence declines. This can lead to protests, stricter regulations, reputational damage and lower visitor satisfaction. Participatory governance helps identify acceptable limits, distribute benefits, protect local identity and build trust. Effective participation must move beyond consultation after decisions are made. It requires community representation in planning, transparent reporting, grievance mechanisms and benefit-sharing arrangements.

Human capital is also central to tourism management. The quality of tourism experiences depends heavily on people: guides, hotel staff, transport workers, artisans, restaurant workers, park rangers, event organizers and public officials. Yet tourism labour markets often suffer from seasonality, low wages, high turnover and limited training. A strategic tourism system should build career pathways, skill certification, language and digital training, occupational safety and leadership development. This is especially important for youth and women, who often represent a large share of tourism employment. Decent work is not only a social objective; it is a productivity and service-quality condition.

Finance determines whether sustainability remains rhetorical or becomes operational. Many destinations announce sustainable tourism strategies but lack dedicated budgets, incentives or investment pipelines. Green infrastructure, heritage conservation, public transport, visitor management technology and SME upgrading require financing. Public budgets may not be sufficient, while private investors may underinvest in public goods. Destination governance must therefore mobilize blended finance, tourism taxes, conservation fees, public-private partnerships and green credit lines. The use of tourism revenues should be transparent to maintain resident trust.

Measurement is the final connective capability. Without credible indicators, tourism policy tends to default to arrivals and receipts because these are easy to communicate. However, sustainable tourism requires measures of resident satisfaction, job quality, leakage, carbon intensity, water use, waste, biodiversity impact, cultural heritage condition, accessibility and SME participation. The new statistical framework for measuring the sustainability of tourism is significant because it encourages the integration of tourism statistics with environmental-economic accounting and social indicators. Measurement should be designed not only for reporting but for decision-making: what should be limited, supported, taxed, protected or redesigned?

The practical implication is that destination managers need a dashboard rather than a single performance target. A destination dashboard should include economic indicators, but also social and environmental indicators. It should distinguish between gross tourism growth and net contribution to development. It should also include early-warning indicators such as resident dissatisfaction, infrastructure overload, declining environmental quality and concentration of visitors in fragile sites. Such a dashboard would allow destination authorities to intervene before problems become crises.

The proposed framework can be applied at different scales. At national level, it can guide tourism strategy, investment priorities, training policy and international positioning. At regional level, it can coordinate clusters, transport corridors, product routes and ecological zones. At city level, it can manage public spaces, events, accommodation regulation and resident-visitor relations. At site level, it can support carrying capacity, interpretation, ticketing and conservation finance. The framework is thus scalable, but implementation must be adapted to institutional capacity and local context.

For emerging destinations, including many destinations in Southeast Asia, the framework suggests that tourism should be integrated into broader development planning. Tourism can support rural livelihoods, creative industries, food systems, heritage preservation and regional infrastructure, but only if it is connected to local supply chains and public services. Otherwise, tourism may generate enclaves where high-value activities are controlled externally while local communities receive low-wage work and environmental burdens. The goal should be embedded tourism development, where tourism strengthens local capabilities rather than extracting place-based value.

For mature destinations, the framework suggests a different challenge: managing saturation, upgrading quality and restoring legitimacy. Mature destinations may not need more visitors; they may need better visitor dispersion, higher local value capture, stricter environmental standards, improved labour conditions and resident-focused governance. In these cases, de-marketing, reservation systems, tourist taxes, zoning and mobility reform may be more important than promotion. This requires political courage because short-term business interests may resist limits, even when limits protect long-term destination value.

Tourism management must therefore balance three logics. The market logic asks how to attract visitors, generate revenue and support businesses. The community logic asks whether tourism improves resident well-being and cultural vitality. The ecological logic asks whether tourism stays within environmental limits and contributes to regeneration. Strategic management is the art of aligning these logics through institutions, incentives and learning systems. When one logic dominates, tourism development becomes unstable. Market-only tourism risks social and environmental backlash. Community-only tourism may lack investment and competitiveness. Ecology-only tourism may ignore livelihoods. The task is integration.

The proposed stewardship approach differs from traditional destination marketing in its theory of change. Traditional marketing assumes that better promotion brings more demand, which brings more revenue, which supports development. Stewardship assumes that destination quality, legitimacy and resilience are produced by coordinated management of assets, impacts and relationships. Promotion remains important, but it is subordinate to the strategic question of what kind of tourism the destination wants, for whom, at what scale, under what rules and with what benefits. This is a more demanding but more sustainable managerial logic.

An important governance risk is institutional tokenism. Many destinations establish committees, strategies or sustainability labels without changing incentives or accountability. A committee without data, budget, enforcement power or community representation will not alter destination trajectories. Similarly, a sustainability certification may improve reputation but have limited effect if it is not linked to investment, procurement, training and monitoring. Effective governance requires hard mechanisms: standards, reporting, financing, legal authority, procurement rules, licensing, spatial planning and transparent evaluation.

Another risk is technological solutionism. Digital dashboards and smart tourism platforms can improve decision-making, but they cannot substitute for political choices. Data may reveal congestion, but policymakers must decide whether to limit access, raise fees, redistribute flows or invest in infrastructure. Data may reveal low local procurement, but firms and governments must redesign supply chains. Data may reveal resident dissatisfaction, but authorities must negotiate acceptable rules. Technology is therefore an enabling infrastructure, not a governance solution by itself.

The same caution applies to branding. Sustainable tourism branding can attract responsible visitors and differentiate destinations, but it can become greenwashing if the destination lacks credible practices. International visitors and investors increasingly expect evidence of climate action, community benefit and environmental protection. A destination brand should therefore be an expression of real governance capability. The stronger the gap between brand promise and lived experience, the greater the reputational risk.

The proposed policy roadmap begins with diagnosis. Destinations should map assets, stakeholders, markets, visitor flows, infrastructure capacity, environmental pressures and community concerns. The next stage is alignment: defining a shared destination vision and integrating tourism into spatial, climate, cultural and economic development strategies. The third stage is capability building: investing in data systems, professional skills, SME support and institutional coordination. The fourth stage is implementation: applying standards, finance, visitor management and product development. The final stage is learning: monitoring indicators, publishing reports, adjusting instruments and institutionalizing feedback.

This staged approach recognizes that destinations have different starting points. A small rural destination cannot implement the same data system as a global city. A fragile heritage site requires different governance from a coastal resort region. A post-conflict destination requires different risk management from a mature urban destination. However, all destinations can ask the same strategic questions: What assets must be protected? What value should tourism create? Who benefits and who bears costs? What data are needed? What institutions can coordinate action? What limits must be respected? What capabilities are missing?

The international relevance of this framework lies in its compatibility with global standards while remaining adaptable to local realities. It uses the language of sustainable management, socio-economic impacts, cultural impacts and environmental impacts found in destination standards. It aligns with climate action pathways and sustainability measurement frameworks. It also incorporates business strategy and digital transformation. The framework therefore bridges international policy discourse and practical destination management.

A final finding concerns the need to redefine success. A successful destination in the next decade should not be defined simply as one that attracts more visitors. It should be one that creates high-quality experiences, supports decent livelihoods, strengthens local enterprises, protects culture, regenerates nature, reduces climate risk, distributes benefits fairly and learns continuously. This definition is more complex, but it is more consistent with the development challenges facing tourism.

A deeper interpretation of strategic tourism management begins with the concept of destination value chains. Tourism value is not produced only at the point where the visitor pays for accommodation, transport or an attraction. It is produced through a chain of pre-trip information, booking, access, arrival, mobility, interpretation, consumption, interaction, memory and post-trip sharing. Each stage involves different actors and different risks. If pre-trip information is misleading, visitor expectations become misaligned. If access infrastructure is weak, the destination loses competitiveness. If local products are not integrated into the visitor journey, expenditure leaks out. If post-trip narratives are negative, reputation declines. Destination management should therefore map the whole visitor journey and identify where sustainability and local value can be built into each touchpoint.

Product development is a crucial part of this value-chain approach. Many destinations rely on a small number of iconic attractions, which creates concentration and congestion. Strategic product development should diversify experiences across space, time and market segment. Cultural routes, culinary tourism, wellness tourism, rural tourism, creative tourism, educational tourism and nature-based tourism can distribute visitors and create opportunities for smaller communities. However, product diversification must not become superficial packaging. It requires interpretation, capacity building, quality standards, logistics and community consent. A destination route that is promoted without local readiness can overload small places and damage authenticity.

Seasonality is another core management issue. Tourism demand often concentrates in specific seasons, holidays or events. Seasonality creates unstable income, underused infrastructure, temporary employment and pressure on ecosystems during peak periods. Destinations can respond through event calendars, off-season pricing, product diversification, domestic market development, business tourism, wellness and learning products, and improved climate-sensitive scheduling. However, managers must distinguish between useful smoothing and harmful extension. Some ecosystems and communities need low seasons for recovery. The purpose is not necessarily year-round maximum utilization but a rhythm that supports economic stability and ecological renewal.

Spatial management is equally important. Tourism is place-based, but tourism policy is often administratively fragmented. Visitors do not experience administrative boundaries; they experience routes, landscapes, neighbourhoods and networks. Strategic tourism management should use spatial tools such as zoning, corridor planning, heritage buffers, mobility nodes, visitor dispersion strategies and local-area management plans. In urban destinations, this may include regulating short-term rentals, protecting public space and managing event impacts. In rural and natural destinations, it may include trail management, habitat protection, community access rights and landscape-scale planning. Spatial intelligence turns abstract strategy into operational rules.

Tourism management also requires a sophisticated approach to markets. Not all visitors generate the same value or pressure. Segment analysis should consider length of stay, spending patterns, mobility mode, interest in local products, sensitivity to environmental standards, cultural behaviour and seasonal distribution. A destination may choose to prioritize segments that support strategic objectives, such as longer-stay visitors, low-impact nature tourists, cultural learners, conference visitors, domestic family markets or regional repeat visitors. This does not mean excluding other visitors unfairly; it means aligning marketing with carrying capacity and development goals. Market selection is an ethical and strategic decision.

Brand governance becomes more complex under this approach. A destination brand should communicate not only attractiveness but also norms of responsible visitation. Branding can encourage visitors to respect heritage, reduce waste, use public transport, support local businesses and visit less crowded areas. The brand narrative should be co-created with communities because residents are part of the destination identity. When branding is imposed externally, it may simplify or commercialize culture. When branding is participatory, it can strengthen pride, identity and local entrepreneurship. Destination brands should therefore be treated as governance instruments, not only promotional assets.

Quality management is another bridge between business administration and public policy. Tourism quality includes accommodation standards, guiding quality, safety, interpretation, accessibility, cleanliness, customer service and authenticity. Low quality reduces repeat visitation and price premiums. Yet quality is not solely a firm-level issue. Public toilets, signage, transport, safety, streetscapes, heritage conservation and environmental quality are public or collective goods. Destination quality systems should combine firm certification, public infrastructure standards, workforce training and visitor feedback mechanisms. This shared quality architecture is especially important for destinations with many small and micro-enterprises.

Local value capture requires deliberate supply-chain design. Tourism expenditure often leaks through imported food, external tour operators, foreign-owned accommodation, platform commissions and non-local labour. Leakage is not always avoidable, but it can be reduced through local procurement, farmer-hotel linkages, craft networks, community enterprises, destination marketplaces and training for small suppliers. Local value capture also depends on finance and business capability. Small producers may not meet quality, volume or delivery requirements without support. Destination management should therefore link tourism strategy with agricultural policy, creative industries, vocational training and SME development.

Food tourism illustrates the potential of integrated value capture. Food experiences connect agriculture, culture, health, creativity and hospitality. A well-managed food tourism strategy can support local farmers, restaurants, markets, festivals and culinary heritage. It can also reduce carbon intensity if supply chains are localized and food waste is managed. However, food tourism can become extractive if local cuisine is standardized for external tastes or if small producers cannot participate. The management challenge is to create quality and safety standards while preserving local identity. This requires collaboration among tourism agencies, food safety authorities, chefs, farmers and cultural actors.

Cultural tourism requires special caution because culture is not simply a product. Heritage sites, rituals, crafts and local knowledge carry meaning for communities. Tourism can finance conservation and create pride, but it can also create performance pressure, cultural simplification or unequal control over narratives. Ethical cultural tourism management should protect community agency, intellectual property, language, sacred spaces and local interpretation. It should also reinvest tourism revenue in conservation and cultural transmission. The strongest cultural destinations are those where tourism supports living culture rather than converting culture into a static display.

Nature-based tourism faces a similar tension. Protected areas, landscapes and wildlife can generate revenue and environmental awareness, but increased visitation can disturb ecosystems, create waste, fragment habitats and increase carbon emissions. Management tools include carrying capacity assessment, trail design, visitor education, zoning, guide certification, conservation fees and biodiversity monitoring. The destination should avoid treating nature as an unlimited attraction. The purpose of nature-based tourism should be to finance and legitimize conservation, not to consume ecological capital. Regenerative tourism goes further by asking tourism to restore ecosystems and strengthen human-nature relationships.

Urban tourism introduces additional governance problems. Cities are multi-use spaces where tourists share infrastructure with residents, commuters, students and businesses. Short-term rentals can affect housing affordability. Cruise tourism can concentrate flows in historic centres. Events can generate revenue but disrupt neighbourhoods. Night-time tourism can support culture but create noise and safety concerns. Urban tourism management therefore requires coordination with housing policy, mobility planning, public safety, cultural policy and neighbourhood governance. The city should remain liveable for residents; otherwise tourism success becomes politically fragile.

Rural tourism is often promoted for poverty reduction and regional development, but it is not automatically inclusive. Rural communities may lack transport access, marketing capability, language skills, sanitation, digital connectivity and investment finance. They may also be vulnerable to cultural intrusion or land speculation. Rural tourism policy should therefore be gradual and capacity-based. It should invest in local leadership, cooperative models, infrastructure, product design and environmental safeguards. The goal is not to turn every village into a tourist site, but to enable communities that choose tourism to do so on fair and sustainable terms.

Risk management is now a permanent part of tourism strategy. Destinations face shocks from disease outbreaks, extreme weather, economic downturns, political instability, security incidents and reputational crises. A resilient destination has diversified markets, clear communication protocols, emergency response coordination, business continuity plans, insurance mechanisms and social protection for workers. Resilience also depends on trust. Visitors need reliable information; firms need predictable rules; communities need confidence that authorities can manage risks. Crisis management should therefore be institutionalized through regular drills, scenario planning and inter-agency coordination.

The governance of accommodation deserves particular attention. Accommodation is a major source of employment, energy use, water use and local spatial impacts. Hotels, resorts, homestays and short-term rentals operate under different regulatory regimes, which can create unfair competition and uneven standards. Destination authorities should ensure that accommodation growth aligns with land-use planning, labour standards, taxation, energy efficiency, waste management and community acceptance. The expansion of short-term rentals should be monitored carefully because it can benefit households but also contribute to housing pressure and neighbourhood change.

Mobility is another decisive field. Tourism depends on mobility, but mobility is often carbon-intensive and spatially disruptive. Strategic tourism management should coordinate aviation access, rail connections, buses, walking routes, cycling infrastructure, electric mobility, parking policy and last-mile transport. Destinations cannot control all emissions from long-haul travel, but they can reduce emissions within the destination and encourage longer stays, public transport and lower-impact itineraries. Mobility planning also improves inclusion because residents benefit from better transport systems. Sustainable mobility is thus both a visitor service and a public good.

Governance capacity must be professionalized. Destination management organizations need skills in strategy, analytics, stakeholder facilitation, sustainability, finance, crisis communication and digital systems. Many DMOs were historically designed for marketing and events, not for integrated stewardship. Their mandates, budgets and staffing should be updated. A modern DMO should be able to convene stakeholders, interpret data, support SMEs, communicate responsible visitor norms, monitor impacts and advise policymakers. It should have legitimacy with both industry and residents. Without such professionalization, strategic documents will not translate into operational change.

Intergovernmental coordination is essential in countries where tourism authority is divided across national, provincial and local levels. National agencies may set brand strategy and visa policy, while local governments manage land use and public services. Regional authorities may coordinate transport and investment. Fragmentation can produce contradictory incentives: national campaigns may increase demand while local infrastructure remains underfunded. A coherent system requires vertical coordination, fiscal mechanisms and shared indicators. Tourism growth should not be promoted at one level while costs are transferred to another.

The legal framework should also support sustainable tourism. Laws and regulations can define licensing, environmental standards, heritage protection, taxation, labour conditions, consumer protection, data sharing and platform accountability. Yet excessive bureaucracy can discourage small businesses and innovation. The challenge is smart regulation: clear, enforceable and proportionate rules that protect public interests while enabling entrepreneurship. Regulatory design should involve stakeholders and be reviewed periodically as markets and technologies change.

Education and research institutions can strengthen tourism management by providing evidence, training and innovation support. Universities can help destinations design indicators, conduct resident surveys, analyse visitor flows, evaluate policies and train future managers. Vocational institutions can improve service quality and career pathways. Research partnerships can support experimentation in climate adaptation, digital tools and community-based tourism. A knowledge ecosystem reduces dependence on short-term consultants and helps destinations learn over time.

Finally, destination ethics should be explicit. Tourism involves encounters between people with different income levels, cultures and mobility rights. Ethical tourism management asks who has power, who benefits, who is represented, who is displaced and whose environment is affected. It also asks whether visitors are encouraged to behave responsibly. Ethics should not be separated from economics; unethical tourism is unstable because it erodes trust and legitimacy. A destination that protects dignity, fairness and ecological responsibility is more likely to maintain long-term competitiveness.

Implementation also requires attention to political economy. Tourism reforms often redistribute costs and benefits, which means they can create resistance. Limits on visitor numbers may be opposed by firms that depend on high volume. Short-term rental regulation may be resisted by property owners and platforms. Conservation fees may be criticized by operators if the use of funds is not transparent. Labour standards may raise short-term costs for businesses with low margins. Destination managers should therefore combine technical design with negotiation, compensation, transition support and clear communication of long-term benefits. Sustainable tourism is not only a planning exercise; it is a process of building coalitions for change.

Communication strategy should be directed at residents as well as visitors. Many destination authorities communicate extensively with target markets but communicate poorly with the local population. Residents need to know how tourism revenues are used, what impacts are being monitored, what rules apply to businesses and how complaints are addressed. Transparent communication can reduce misinformation and increase trust. It can also help residents see tourism as a shared development project rather than an external pressure imposed by government and investors. Annual destination reports, public dashboards and community meetings are practical instruments for this purpose.

The management of indicators should avoid excessive complexity. International frameworks may include a large number of possible indicators, but local authorities often have limited data capacity. A destination can begin with a compact indicator set that covers economic value, employment quality, resident sentiment, visitor satisfaction, carbon and energy, water and waste, heritage condition and local enterprise participation. The indicator set can then be expanded as capacity grows. The important principle is consistency over time. A smaller set of credible indicators is more useful than a very large set that is not measured regularly.

There is also a need to connect indicators to decision rules. Measurement by itself does not change behaviour. Destinations should define thresholds or triggers for action: for example, when visitor density exceeds a certain level, when resident satisfaction falls below a benchmark, when water stress increases, when waste systems are overloaded or when heritage condition deteriorates. Decision rules make governance more predictable and reduce the risk that data are ignored for political convenience. They also signal to firms and visitors that sustainability standards are operational, not merely symbolic.

Tourism taxation and fees should be designed carefully. Well-designed tourism taxes can fund infrastructure, conservation, data systems and community benefits. Poorly designed taxes can reduce competitiveness or create perceptions of unfairness. The legitimacy of tourism fees depends on transparency, proportionality and visible reinvestment. For example, a conservation fee is more acceptable when visitors and residents can see improvements in trails, waste management, biodiversity protection or heritage maintenance. Fee revenue should not disappear into general budgets without accountability. Fiscal governance is therefore part of destination stewardship.

The role of the private sector should not be reduced to compliance. Firms are sources of innovation, employment, investment and market intelligence. Strategic tourism management should encourage firms to co-create products, upgrade standards, share data responsibly, train workers and invest in sustainability. However, voluntary action alone is insufficient because firms face competitive pressures and may underinvest in collective goods. The best approach combines regulation, incentives, recognition and collaboration. Responsible firms should not be disadvantaged by competitors that externalize social and environmental costs.

Small and medium-sized enterprises deserve particular support because they are central to local value capture. SMEs often provide authentic experiences and local employment, but they may lack digital skills, finance, quality systems and access to distribution channels. Destination authorities can support SMEs through shared booking platforms, training, mentorship, cooperative marketing, simplified licensing, microcredit and procurement networks. Support should be inclusive of informal and household-based enterprises where legally possible, because these actors often represent the entry point for disadvantaged groups. Formalization should be gradual and supportive rather than punitive.

Accessibility should be incorporated into tourism management. Sustainable tourism is not only about environmental protection; it also concerns the right of different groups to participate in travel and leisure. Accessible tourism benefits people with disabilities, older visitors, families with children and residents with mobility needs. It requires attention to physical infrastructure, information design, staff training, transport, digital accessibility and emergency procedures. Accessibility also has business value because inclusive design expands markets and improves overall service quality. A destination that is accessible is often more comfortable and navigable for everyone.

Security and safety are part of destination competitiveness, but they must be managed without creating hostile environments. Visitors need confidence in health, transport, food safety, emergency response and crime prevention. Residents need protection from disorder, exploitation and overcrowding. Safety management should be integrated with hospitality, urban design, public health and crisis communication. The pandemic showed that health security can reshape tourism demand quickly. Destinations that can communicate credible safety protocols without panic have a competitive advantage in uncertain environments.

The internationalization of tourism also raises questions of dependency. Destinations that rely heavily on a few source markets, tour operators or transport connections are vulnerable to external shocks. Market diversification is therefore a resilience strategy. Domestic tourism can provide a stabilizing base, especially during international crises. Regional markets can reduce dependence on long-haul travel. Niche segments can reduce exposure to mass-market volatility. However, diversification should be strategic; chasing every market can dilute brand identity and strain resources. Destination managers should prioritize markets that align with sustainability and value objectives.

Monitoring resident well-being is especially important because residents are not only stakeholders; they are part of the destination product and governance system. Resident attitudes influence hospitality, political support and the quality of visitor-resident interactions. Indicators might include perceived crowding, housing pressure, employment benefits, pride in local culture, trust in tourism authorities and perceived fairness of benefit distribution. Resident surveys should be repeated and publicly reported. When resident concerns are ignored, tourism management loses legitimacy and may face abrupt political backlash.

A final practical implication concerns institutional memory. Tourism agencies often change leadership, strategies and branding campaigns, which can disrupt continuity. Sustainable tourism transformation requires long time horizons. Institutional memory can be strengthened through data archives, standard operating procedures, annual reporting, professional staff development and legally embedded planning requirements. Destination stewardship should not depend solely on charismatic leaders or temporary projects. It should become a durable institutional capability.

For international conference audiences, the broader message is that tourism management can provide a laboratory for sustainable development. It forces policymakers to confront the interdependence of economy, society and environment in concrete places. It shows how digital transformation can create both opportunities and governance risks. It reveals the importance of local participation in development strategy. It also demonstrates the limits of GDP or arrival-based indicators. Tourism is therefore not a peripheral service sector. It is a practical field in which the next generation of sustainable, inclusive and climate-compatible development governance can be tested.

The proposed model should be read as an invitation to empirical application. Researchers can adapt the maturity profile to specific destinations, collect stakeholder data, compare governance arrangements and test links between capabilities and outcomes. Policymakers can use the framework to structure strategy workshops. Destination managers can use it to organize dashboards, identify gaps and communicate priorities. Businesses can use it to align their practices with destination-level goals. Communities can use it to demand transparency and benefit-sharing. In this sense, the framework is both analytical and practical.

In operational terms, the framework can be converted into a practical assessment cycle. The first step is to establish a baseline through document review, stakeholder interviews, spatial mapping and data compilation. The second step is to score destination capabilities through a participatory maturity assessment involving government, firms, residents and experts. The third step is to identify gaps where low capability coincides with high strategic importance. The fourth step is to design interventions with responsible agencies, budgets, timelines and indicators. The fifth step is to publish progress reports. This cycle transforms tourism strategy from a static document into a living management process.

The framework also encourages destinations to distinguish between symptoms and root causes. Congestion at a heritage site may appear to be a visitor-behaviour problem, but its root causes may include weak ticketing systems, concentrated marketing, limited alternative routes, poor public transport and lack of real-time information. Low local income from tourism may appear to be a demand problem, but it may result from supply-chain leakage, weak SME finance, poor product design and platform commissions. Strategic management requires diagnosis at the system level rather than quick fixes at the symptom level.

Ethical data governance should become a formal part of tourism policy. Visitor analytics, mobile data, platform data and AI tools can support better decisions, but they also raise questions about privacy, consent, ownership and unequal bargaining power. Public authorities should define rules for anonymization, data-sharing agreements, cybersecurity and the acceptable use of predictive analytics. They should also ensure that small firms and communities benefit from data insights rather than being excluded from them. Data should serve destination stewardship, not only commercial extraction.

Another implication concerns regional cooperation. Many tourism systems operate across clusters rather than within single destinations. Visitors combine cities, rural areas, beaches, heritage sites and transport corridors. If one destination applies sustainability standards while neighbouring areas do not, pressure can shift rather than decline. Regional cooperation can harmonize standards, coordinate marketing, share data, develop multi-destination routes and distribute visitors more evenly. This is particularly relevant for cross-border tourism corridors and for regions where ecological systems do not follow administrative boundaries.

Ultimately, the paper's central proposition is that tourism management must become anticipatory. Reactive management waits until overcrowding, environmental degradation or resident conflict becomes visible. Anticipatory management uses scenarios, indicators and stakeholder dialogue to identify risks before they become crises. This anticipatory capacity is what differentiates a mature destination from a destination that merely responds to events. In a volatile world of climate change, technological disruption and shifting travel behaviour, anticipatory governance is not optional; it is the foundation of long-term destination competitiveness.

This anticipatory perspective also changes how success is narrated to investors and citizens. Instead of presenting tourism as a simple promise of more visitors and more spending, authorities can present it as a managed development portfolio that protects assets, upgrades enterprises, improves public services and strengthens cultural identity. Such a narrative is more honest and more durable. It acknowledges trade-offs, but it also shows that disciplined governance can convert tourism from a volatile consumption flow into a long-term source of territorial capability. This is the managerial foundation for tourism that is competitive, responsible, adaptive and socially legitimate across different destination contexts, especially where tourism is expected to contribute to structural transformation rather than short-term consumption growth alone and where public trust depends on visible, measurable and fair outcomes.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion returns to the central argument: tourism management should be treated as development governance. This argument challenges a narrow interpretation of tourism as a promotional sector. Promotion is necessary, but it is insufficient when destinations face climate risk, digital platform power, social tensions and ecological limits. The future of tourism management lies in the ability to coordinate stakeholders, measure impacts, regulate visitor pressure, upgrade local capabilities and align tourism with sustainable development strategies.

The proposed framework contributes to theory by integrating destination competitiveness and sustainable tourism governance. These literatures have sometimes developed in parallel. Competitiveness research asks why destinations attract demand and generate economic value. Sustainable tourism research asks how tourism can reduce harm and support communities. In practice, these questions cannot be separated. A destination that undermines its natural and cultural assets will lose competitiveness; a destination that lacks competitiveness will not generate the resources needed for sustainability. The framework therefore treats competitiveness and sustainability as mutually constitutive rather than competing objectives.

The framework also contributes to the debate on smart tourism by positioning digital technology within governance rather than treating it as a stand-alone modernization agenda. Digital systems can improve market intelligence, visitor-flow management, service quality and transparency. Yet their public value depends on data governance, inclusion of SMEs, privacy protection and institutional capacity. This is especially important because digital platforms can shift power away from destinations toward global intermediaries. Smart tourism should therefore be destination-smart and community-smart, not only technology-smart.

Policy implications are substantial. National governments should integrate tourism into climate strategies, infrastructure plans, skills policy and digital transformation agendas. Regional authorities should coordinate product development, transport, conservation and investment across administrative boundaries. Local governments should manage land use, public space, community participation and service standards. Destination management organizations should evolve from marketing agencies into stewardship institutions with analytical, convening and monitoring capabilities. Firms should adopt responsible business practices and participate in local value chains. Communities should be recognized as co-producers of destination value rather than passive hosts.

The paper also implies that financing mechanisms must change. Sustainable tourism requires investment in public goods that markets may underprovide: conservation, interpretation, public transport, training, waste systems, destination data and emergency preparedness. Tourism taxes, conservation fees and public-private funds can be legitimate if revenues are transparent and linked to visible improvements. International development finance can support destinations that connect tourism with climate adaptation, biodiversity protection and inclusive livelihoods. Without finance, strategies remain aspirational.

For research, the framework suggests several future directions. First, scholars can operationalize the maturity dimensions through survey instruments and destination-level indicators. Second, comparative case studies can examine how stewardship platforms function under different institutional arrangements. Third, quantitative research can test whether destinations with stronger sustainability measurement and community participation achieve better resilience, resident acceptance and value capture. Fourth, digital tourism research can investigate how data-sharing arrangements between platforms and public authorities affect destination management. Fifth, longitudinal research can examine whether post-pandemic recovery leads to structural transformation or merely restores pre-crisis vulnerabilities.

The study has limitations. It is conceptual and therefore does not provide destination-specific empirical estimates. It relies on secondary literature and international standards, which may reflect global consensus but cannot fully capture local political economy. The maturity scores and policy matrix are illustrative rather than measured. The framework should therefore be tested, localized and refined through empirical work. Nevertheless, conceptual frameworks are necessary when practice is fragmented and when destinations need a common language for strategic reform.

In conclusion, tourism management is entering a phase in which volume recovery is no longer enough. The sector's future legitimacy depends on whether destinations can convert tourism into sustainable development. This requires stewardship-based governance, credible measurement, digital capability, climate action, community participation and local value capture. The proposed framework offers a structured way to connect these elements. It argues that destinations should manage tourism not as a flow of visitors to be maximized, but as a complex system of relationships to be governed for long-term public value.

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6. References

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