

# Tourism Sustainomics: A New Application of Sustainomics in Tourism

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## Abstract

This short communication presents "Tourism Sustainomics", an adaptation of the scientific concept of Sustainomics, which was originally presented at the World Development Summit in Rio and is specifically tailored to the field of tourism. As an emerging meta-science, Tourism Sustainomics integrates the dimensions of sustainability, stakeholder well-being and the implementation of sustainability principles to provide a comprehensive approach to sustainable tourism development. This paradigm shift advocates for a holistic, interdisciplinary framework that not only recognises the complexity of sustainable practices, but also aims to redefine the science of sustainable tourism to make it fit for the 21st century. By exploring the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of this new paradigm, this communication aims to advance the academic discourse and promote an actionable science of sustainability in tourism. Tourism Sustainomics strives to influence universal sustainable tourism practices and contribute to a universally sustainable approach that applies to all forms of tourism throughout the physical realm of planet Earth and beyond.

**Keywords:** Tourism Sustainomics; Sustainable tourism paradigm; Sustainable Tourism Development; Ecological and Economic Sustainability; Stakeholders; Implementation; Tourism Challenges

## Introduction

In view of the disciplinary fragmentation and slow implementation of sustainability into tourism, the demand for a holistic and interdisciplinary approach is becoming increasingly urgent. Building on the concept of "Sustainomics", originally introduced at the World Development Summit in Rio, we adapt this term to the specific context of sustainable tourism, a significant area of academic research on conceptual and practical solutions. We refer to this adaptation as "Tourism Sustainomics", representing an emerging meta-science that integrates sustainability pillars, stakeholders and implementation dimensions to provide a comprehensive approach to sustainable tourism development. With the introduction of "Tourism Sustainomics", we aim to advance the academic discussion and enrich the intellectual landscape within the new category of tourism sustainability science. This short communication explores the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of "Tourism Sustainomics" and argues for a paradigm shift towards a more relevant, integrated and actionable science for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that makes travel and tourism sustainable.

## The Concept of Sustainomics

The term Sustainomics connect primarily to the sustainable development paradigm [1] and is defined as an integrative, balanced and practical framework aimed at improving sustainable development practices in various disciplines. First coined by Munasinghe [2] and reproduced by the Encyclopedia of the International Society of Ecological Economics (2024), Sustainomics seeks to address the complexity of sustainability dimensions through the following principles: promoting an equilibrium among social, economic and environmental factors, ensuring that all stakeholder viewpoints are considered, and emphasizing practical applications of sustainability in the real world.

## Tourism Sustainomics Defined

Tourism Sustainomics extends the principles of Sustainomics to the specific area of sustainable tourism. This approach embodies the synergy between the theoretical constructs of sustainability - what needs to be sustained - and the practical solutions of how

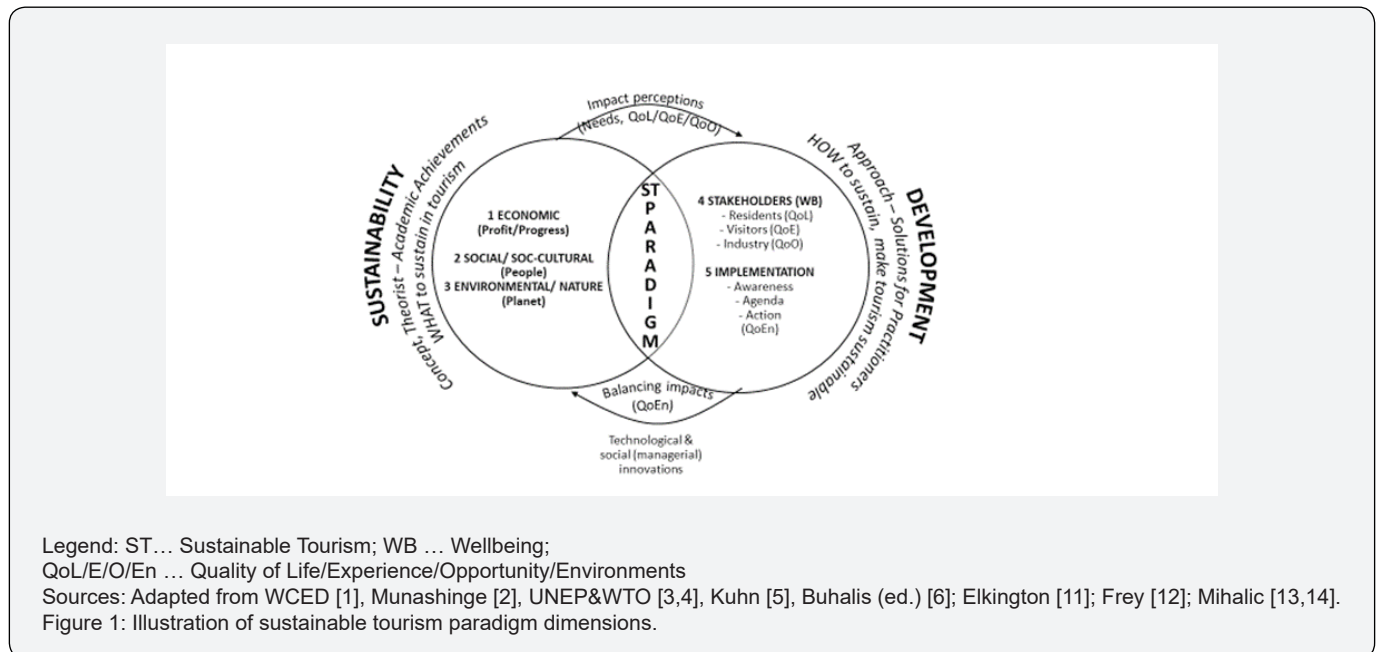
to sustain it. These practical solutions relate to the perception of well-being through tourism and development as well as the implementation of the sustainability dimension, including awareness, agendas, actions, strategies, policies, governance, leadership and especially destination management.

The concept of sustainable tourism has been extensively researched and has resulted in numerous academic papers, common guides, strategies, policies, declarations and agendas that collectively define the sustainable tourism paradigm. The "Making Tourism More Sustainable Guide" [3], for example, outlines sustainability in terms of principles (the 'what') and tourism management practices (the 'how'). These principles relate to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural dimensions of tourism development and emphasize the need for balanced integration without one of these dimensions taking a predominant position.

In addition, the guide addresses stakeholder involvement and describes the need to fulfil the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. Other dimensions include strong political leadership, community participation, consensus building, monitoring through indicators and the implementation of preventive or corrective measures.

However, despite the widespread adoption of these principles by organizations such as the UNWTO Sustainable Development Web Portal [4], there is still a major challenge in this area. Researchers from different disciplines such as geography, anthropology, psychology, political science and economics often use different terminologies and have different understandings, which can hinder effective communication and translation between these fields. Here, Sustainomics offers an integrative and holistic solution to this general problem of translatability, a concept discussed by Kuhn [5].

The different dimensions of sustainable tourism are coherently presented in Figure 1, which illustrates a dual framework published in the recent Tourism Encyclopedia [6]. This framework organizes sustainable tourism into five dimensions and presents a coherent model that follows the paradigmatic theory of the psychology of science [5]. The model presented represents a clear departure from traditional paradigms, which often isolate the environmental, economic and socio-political dimensions of sustainability, and it criticizes the overemphasis on theoretical sustainability without adequate consideration of practical application. It is the intersection between the two circles, i.e. the consensus and agreement between the two sides, that constitutes a paradigm.



### Paradigm Shift in Tourism

The term 'paradigm', which comes from the Greek and Latin and means "to show side by side," aptly describes the multi-layered complexity of the sustainomics. Historically, paradigms in tourism have evolved from being strongly characterized by singular

perspectives such as economic profitability or environmental conservation to a more nuanced understanding that incorporates stakeholder well-being and the effective implementation of agendas, actions, management and governance through multiple perspectives and interdisciplinary approaches.

## Historical Context and Evolution

Pioneering work in the 1960s and 1970s laid the foundations for sustainable tourism as a subject of study by incorporating concepts from geography, anthropology, sociology and economics, among others. The seminal texts such as those by Young [7], Turner and Ash [8] and Krippendorf [9] in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century challenged the prevailing models of mass tourism development and paved the way for alternative tourism paradigms. The Brundtland Report [1] on sustainable development was the general trigger that initiated the first breakthrough in tourism planning through the sustainable development approach [10]. Since then, numerous researchers have explored different concepts and approaches to sustainability in tourism. The traditional debate has emphasized the interconnectedness of economic, social and environmental sustainability, the responsibility for effective implementation of sustainability in tourism is becoming increasingly important and research on the how complements academic thinking on the what of sustainability. More specifically, the paradigm is continuously validated and adapted through academic research on theoretical and practically applied solutions. However, the resilience of the paradigm is challenged by the vagueness of the dimensions of sustainable tourism caused by the different semantics and understanding of tourism researchers as well as new technologies and the tourism and travel phenomena of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the progress that the concept of sustainability in tourism has made, there are some challenges, particularly in integrating the various components into coherent policy frameworks and implementable strategies while maintaining sustainable values and commitments. Future research should address these integration challenges by fostering interdisciplinary collaboration to develop and implement effective approaches to promote sustainable tourism. Furthermore, new phenomena of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as digital and immersive technologies that extend tourism realities into digital, metaversal spaces, together with astronaut journeys that reach into the cosmos, pose significant challenges to the existing sustainable tourism paradigm that was conceived in the previous century [1] and focused mainly on the physical realms of the Earth. These emerging trends require a re-evaluation of the what and how of the sustainability models in use today to ensure that the paradigm remains relevant and effective in a rapidly changing world [11-15]. Advocating for the establishment of a new scientific concept requires transformative changes in tourism curricula. Courses that currently focus on 'Sustainable Tourism' should be expanded to include a broader range of disciplines to fully embrace the complex nature of sustainability within the framework of Sustainomics principles. It is noteworthy that the 'Sustainomics in Tourism' course has been successfully accredited at a European university [16], which represents a pioneering step in the development of academic and pedagogical discourse in tourism.

## Conclusion

Tourism sustainomics marks a significant evolution in both the conceptualization and practical application of sustainable tourism. By advocating an integrative approach that simultaneously considers the pillars of sustainability, stakeholder well-being and the corresponding implementation dimensions, this new paradigm seeks to redefine the science of sustainable tourism - and improve its robustness, inclusiveness and effectiveness. This field is constantly evolving and promises to reshape future theories, practices and beliefs related to sustainable tourism. Ultimately, Tourism Sustainomics aims to contribute to a universally relevant tourism paradigm that transcends the planetary boundaries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century societal paradigm of sustainable development.

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