

Integrating Sustainability Principles into National Tourism Planning: A Bangladesh Perspective

Mohammed Mosaraf Hossain¹

Associate Professor
Department of International Tourism and Hospitality Management
Primeasia University, Bangladesh

Atiqur Rahman Khan²

Assistant Professor
Department of International Tourism and Hospitality Management
Primeasia University, Bangladesh

Abstract

This study examines the integration of sustainability principles into national tourism planning in Bangladesh through the perspectives of Sustainable Development Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Sustainable Tourism Governance Theory. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected from 450 tourism stakeholders through a structured survey and 30 semi-structured interviews with policymakers, tourism practitioners, entrepreneurs, academics, and tourism organization representatives. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The findings indicate that sustainability principles are increasingly incorporated into tourism planning; however, implementation remains constrained by governance challenges, limited stakeholder participation, and institutional fragmentation. The study provides theoretical and policy insights for strengthening sustainable tourism planning and governance in Bangladesh.

Keywords: *Sustainable tourism, tourism planning, sustainability integration, stakeholder participation, tourism governance, Bangladesh*

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I. Introduction

The integration of sustainability principles into tourism planning has become a central concern within tourism scholarship and policy discourse. While tourism continues to generate significant economic benefits through employment creation, regional development, and foreign exchange earnings, its rapid expansion has also intensified environmental degradation, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and socio-cultural pressures across many destinations (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005; Sharpley, 2020). Consequently, sustainable tourism has emerged as a dominant paradigm for guiding tourism development, emphasizing the need to balance economic growth with environmental stewardship and social well-being (Butler, 1999; Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

The growing prominence of sustainability has transformed the role of tourism planning. Contemporary planning approaches increasingly emphasize stakeholder participation, integrated governance, environmental protection, community well-being, and long-term destination resilience (Hall, 2008). Within this perspective, sustainability is not merely an outcome of tourism development but a guiding principle that should be embedded throughout planning and policy processes. As a result, scholars have increasingly examined how sustainability principles are translated into tourism policies, governance structures, and planning frameworks (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Despite these advances, significant gaps remain between sustainability rhetoric and planning practice, particularly in developing-country contexts where tourism is frequently promoted as an instrument of economic development.

Existing research suggests that the incorporation of sustainability principles into tourism planning is often constrained by institutional weaknesses, fragmented governance arrangements, competing development priorities, and limited stakeholder participation (Hall, 2008; Sharpley, 2020). While sustainability has become a widely accepted policy objective, the extent to which it is meaningfully integrated into tourism planning frameworks remains contested. This challenge is particularly relevant in developing countries, where tourism planning frequently prioritizes economic growth and destination promotion while environmental and social considerations receive comparatively less attention.

Bangladesh provides a particularly relevant context for examining this issue. The country possesses substantial tourism potential arising from its diverse natural, cultural, and ecological resources. Tourism destinations such as the Sundarbans, Cox's Bazar, wetlands, archaeological sites, and indigenous cultural landscapes offer considerable opportunities for economic development and regional diversification. Recognizing this potential, the Government of Bangladesh has adopted various tourism policies and strategic initiatives aimed at strengthening the tourism sector and enhancing its contribution to national development (Muneem et al., 2020). Recent policy initiatives have increasingly emphasized sustainability, reflecting broader international commitments to sustainable development and responsible tourism governance (Mosaraf, 2022).

Nevertheless, the sustainability of tourism development in Bangladesh remains a significant concern. Environmental vulnerability, climate change impacts, inadequate tourism infrastructure, governance challenges, and limited stakeholder engagement continue to affect tourism development outcomes. Ananya et al. (2020) identify substantial deficiencies in tourism facilities and destination services, while Muneem et al. (2020) highlight the need for stronger policy coordination and planning mechanisms. Similarly, Muneem and Avi (2017) demonstrate the importance of sustainable destination management for protecting ecological resources and supporting local livelihoods. Studies by Avi et al. (2019) and Avi et al. (2020) further reveal the growing importance of digital governance, stakeholder engagement, and destination promotion within Bangladesh's tourism sector. Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights into specific dimensions of tourism development; however, they offer limited understanding of how sustainability principles are embedded within national tourism planning frameworks.

This limitation reflects a broader gap in the literature. Existing tourism research in Bangladesh has primarily focused on destination development, tourism promotion, stakeholder engagement, and tourism potential. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining tourism planning itself as a mechanism through which sustainability objectives are institutionalized and implemented. Consequently, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding the extent to which environmental sustainability, social inclusion, economic resilience, and participatory governance are integrated into national tourism planning processes. This represents a significant research gap because planning frameworks ultimately shape tourism development priorities, resource allocation decisions, governance arrangements, and sustainability outcomes (Hassan & Kokkranikal, 2018; Islam, 2019).

Against this backdrop, this study examines the integration of sustainability principles into national tourism planning in Bangladesh. By analyzing tourism policies and planning frameworks through the dimensions of environmental, social, and economic sustainability, the study seeks to contribute to the growing literature on sustainable tourism governance in developing-country contexts. Specifically, the study advances existing knowledge by shifting attention from destination-level sustainability challenges to the policy and planning mechanisms through which sustainability is institutionalized at the national level. In doing so, it provides insights into the opportunities and constraints associated with embedding sustainability principles within tourism planning systems and offers evidence-based recommendations for strengthening sustainable tourism governance in Bangladesh.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the sustainability principles relevant to tourism planning and development.
2. To assess the extent to which sustainability principles are incorporated into national tourism planning frameworks in Bangladesh.
3. To identify the key challenges affecting the integration of sustainability principles into tourism planning.
4. To propose recommendations for strengthening sustainable tourism planning in Bangladesh.

Research Questions

1. What sustainability principles are relevant to tourism planning and development?
2. To what extent are sustainability principles incorporated into national tourism planning frameworks in Bangladesh?
3. What challenges hinder the integration of sustainability principles into tourism planning?
4. How can the integration of sustainability principles into national tourism planning be strengthened?

II. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Tourism and Sustainability Principles

The concept of sustainable tourism emerged from the broader sustainable development discourse following the publication of the Brundtland Report, which emphasized development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). Since then, sustainable tourism has become a dominant paradigm within tourism scholarship and practice. Sustainable tourism

seeks to balance economic prosperity, environmental conservation, and social equity, commonly referred to as the three pillars of sustainability (Butler, 1999; UNEP & UNWTO, 2005).

Early tourism research largely focused on minimizing environmental impacts associated with tourism growth. However, contemporary scholarship recognizes sustainability as a multidimensional concept encompassing environmental stewardship, community well-being, cultural preservation, economic resilience, and institutional effectiveness (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Sustainable tourism therefore extends beyond conservation concerns and requires a holistic approach that integrates environmental, social, and economic objectives into tourism development processes.

Despite widespread acceptance of sustainability principles, scholars continue to debate their practical implementation. Sharpley (2020) argues that sustainability often remains a policy aspiration rather than an operational reality because tourism development frequently prioritizes economic growth objectives. Similarly, Hall (2008) emphasizes that achieving sustainable tourism outcomes depends largely on governance capacity, institutional coordination, and planning effectiveness. These observations suggest that sustainability should be examined not merely as a desired outcome but as a principle embedded within tourism planning and governance systems.

2.2 Tourism Planning and Sustainability Integration

Tourism planning has long been regarded as a critical mechanism for achieving sustainable tourism development. Planning provides the strategic framework through which tourism resources are managed, development priorities are established, and stakeholder interests are coordinated (Hall, 2008). Contemporary tourism planning increasingly emphasizes sustainability integration by incorporating environmental protection, social inclusion, economic development, and long-term destination resilience into decision-making processes (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

The literature suggests that sustainability integration requires tourism planning frameworks to balance economic growth with environmental conservation and community well-being. Environmental sustainability focuses on protecting biodiversity, ecosystems, and natural resources from tourism-related pressures. Social sustainability emphasizes community participation, cultural preservation, social equity, and local empowerment. Economic sustainability seeks to ensure that tourism generates long-term benefits while strengthening destination competitiveness and resilience (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005).

However, the effective integration of sustainability principles into tourism planning remains challenging. Previous studies have identified fragmented governance systems, inadequate stakeholder participation, weak institutional capacity, and policy inconsistencies as significant barriers to sustainable tourism planning (Hall, 2008; Sharpley, 2020). Consequently, researchers increasingly argue that tourism planning should be evaluated according to the extent to which sustainability principles are institutionalized within planning frameworks rather than merely articulated in policy documents.

2.3 Sustainable Tourism Governance and Stakeholder Engagement

Governance has become a central theme within sustainable tourism research because tourism development involves multiple stakeholders with diverse and often competing interests. Sustainable tourism governance refers to the structures, processes, and relationships through which tourism-related decisions are made and implemented. Effective governance requires collaboration among government agencies, private-sector organizations, local communities, civil society groups, and tourists (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

The governance literature emphasizes that sustainability cannot be achieved solely through regulatory interventions. Instead, sustainable tourism requires participatory decision-making, institutional coordination, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive management approaches (Hall, 2008). Community participation is particularly important because local communities often experience both the benefits and costs of tourism development.

Within the Bangladesh context, community participation significantly influences tourism development outcomes and destination sustainability. Similarly, Avi et al. (2020) demonstrated that social media platforms can facilitate stakeholder engagement and improve tourism administration by enhancing communication between tourism authorities and stakeholders. Shoeb-Ur-Rahman et al. (2020) further highlighted the role of communication and media in shaping tourist behavior and destination perceptions. Collectively, these studies suggest that stakeholder engagement and effective governance are essential components of sustainable tourism planning and implementation.

2.4 Tourism Development and Sustainability Challenges in Bangladesh

Tourism has been increasingly recognized as a strategic sector for economic development in Bangladesh. The country possesses significant tourism resources, including coastal attractions, ecological destinations, archaeological heritage sites, wetlands, and culturally diverse communities. Consequently, tourism has received

growing policy attention as a means of promoting employment generation, entrepreneurship, regional development, and foreign exchange earnings (Muneem et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, tourism development in Bangladesh faces numerous sustainability-related challenges. Ananya et al. (2020) argue that inadequate tourism facilities, limited infrastructure, insufficient visitor services, and weak destination management continue to constrain tourism competitiveness. Similarly, Muneem and Ananya (2020) identify multiple barriers to resort development, including infrastructure deficiencies, environmental concerns, policy limitations, and investment constraints.

Environmental sustainability represents another major concern. Muneem and Avi (2017) demonstrate that sustainable tourism management can support destination development while preserving ecological resources and enhancing community welfare. Likewise, Rahman et al. (2018) argue that rural tourism can contribute to sustainable development goals through local economic development, community empowerment, and poverty reduction when supported by appropriate planning frameworks.

Recent studies have also highlighted the importance of institutional effectiveness, entrepreneurship, and destination promotion. Muneem et al. (2018) identified limitations in the performance of tourism promotion institutions and emphasized the need for stronger strategic planning and governance mechanisms. Similarly, Avi et al. (2019, 2020) found that digital marketing and internet-based promotion can enhance destination competitiveness. Furthermore, Muneem et al. (2026) demonstrated that financial institutions play an important role in supporting tourism and hospitality entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to the economic sustainability of the tourism sector. These findings collectively suggest that achieving sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh requires integrated planning frameworks capable of addressing environmental, social, economic, and institutional challenges simultaneously.

2.5 Research Gap and Conceptual Positioning

The literature demonstrates a growing recognition of sustainability as a guiding principle for tourism development and highlights the importance of planning, governance, stakeholder participation, environmental management, and economic resilience. Existing studies in Bangladesh have examined tourism infrastructure (Ananya et al., 2020), destination development (Muneem & Ananya, 2020), community participation (Avi & Muneem, 2020), tourism promotion (Avi et al., 2019; Muneem et al., 2018), sustainable destination management (Muneem & Avi, 2017), rural tourism and sustainable development (Rahman et al., 2018), stakeholder engagement (Avi et al., 2020), tourism entrepreneurship (Muneem et al., 2026), and tourism policy considerations (Muneem et al., 2020).

Despite these contributions, the existing literature remains fragmented and largely focused on specific tourism issues, destinations, or development challenges. Limited attention has been devoted to understanding how sustainability principles are systematically integrated into national tourism planning frameworks. There is insufficient empirical evidence regarding the extent to which environmental sustainability, social inclusion, economic resilience, and participatory governance are embedded within tourism policies and planning mechanisms in Bangladesh.

Addressing this gap is important because national tourism planning frameworks shape development priorities, governance structures, resource allocation decisions, and sustainability outcomes. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by examining the integration of sustainability principles into national tourism planning in Bangladesh and evaluating the extent to which sustainability considerations are embedded within tourism policies and planning frameworks.

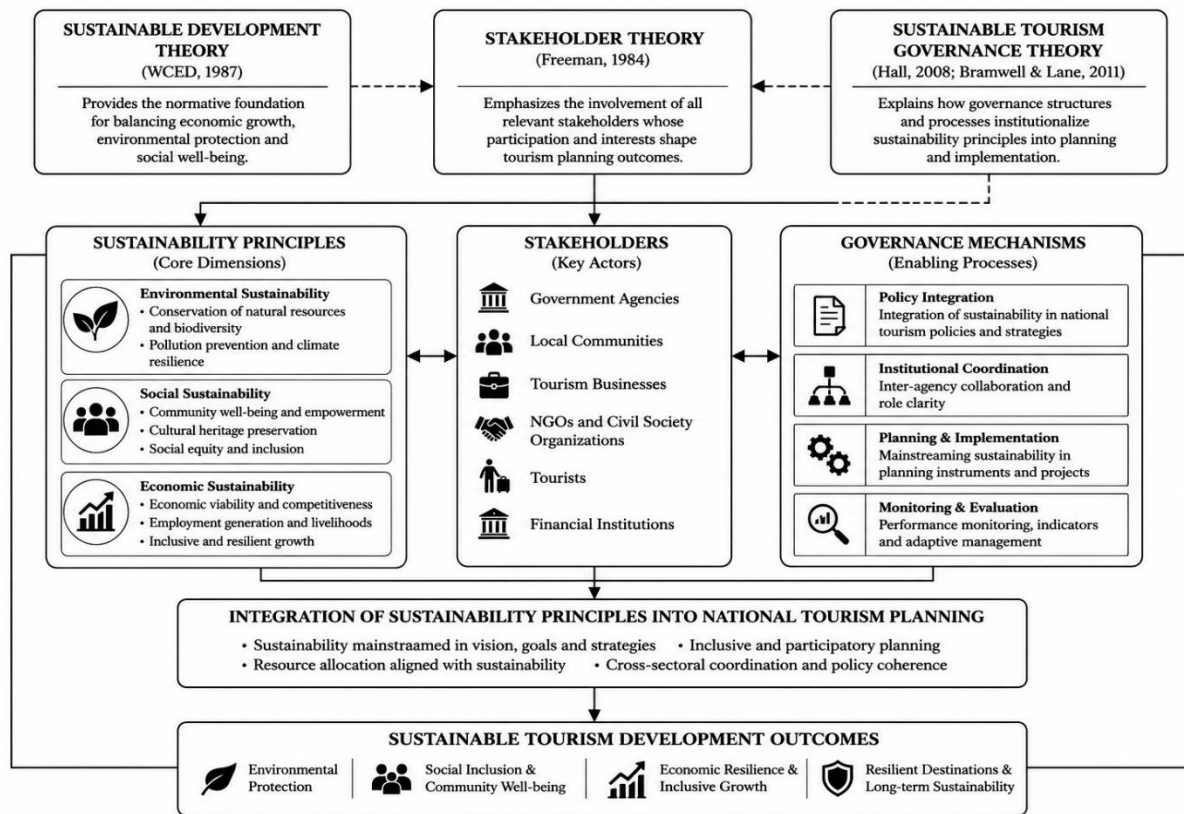


Figure: Conceptual Framework

2.6 Theoretical Foundation

2.6.1 Sustainable Development Theory

Sustainable Development Theory provides the overarching foundation for this study. Originating from the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), the theory advocates development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It emphasizes the integration of economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being as mutually reinforcing dimensions of sustainable development. Within the tourism context, the theory suggests that tourism planning should balance economic benefits with environmental conservation and social equity to ensure long-term sustainability (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). Accordingly, this study adopts environmental, social, and economic sustainability as the core dimensions for assessing sustainability integration within national tourism planning frameworks.

2.6.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, developed by Freeman (1984), emphasizes that organizational and policy decisions should consider the interests of all groups affected by those decisions. In tourism, key stakeholders include government agencies, tourism businesses, local communities, tourists, non-governmental organizations, and financial institutions. Sustainable tourism development depends on the active participation and collaboration of these stakeholders because tourism activities generate both benefits and costs across multiple groups. The theory therefore highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement, community participation, and collaborative decision-making in tourism planning. In the context of this study, Stakeholder Theory provides a lens for evaluating the extent to which national tourism planning incorporates stakeholder interests and participatory governance mechanisms.

2.6.3 Sustainable Tourism Governance Theory

Sustainable Tourism Governance Theory focuses on the institutional arrangements, policy mechanisms, and governance processes necessary for achieving sustainable tourism development (Hall, 2008; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). The theory argues that sustainability objectives can only be achieved when they are effectively embedded within tourism policies, planning frameworks, implementation processes, and monitoring systems. It emphasizes policy coordination, institutional effectiveness, stakeholder collaboration, accountability, and adaptive management as critical elements of sustainable tourism governance. For this study, the theory provides

a framework for assessing how sustainability principles are translated into national tourism planning policies and governance structures in Bangladesh.

III. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method research design to examine the integration of sustainability principles into national tourism planning in Bangladesh. Mixed-method research combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex research problems than either method alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Given the multidimensional nature of tourism planning, sustainability integration, stakeholder participation, and governance processes, a mixed-method approach is particularly suitable for addressing the research objectives of this study.

Specifically, the study employs a convergent parallel mixed-method design, whereby quantitative and qualitative data are collected during the same phase of the research process, analyzed independently, and integrated during interpretation. This approach facilitates methodological triangulation and enhances the credibility and validity of the findings. The study is guided by Sustainable Development Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Sustainable Tourism Governance Theory, which collectively provide a framework for understanding how sustainability principles are incorporated into tourism planning policies, governance structures, and stakeholder engagement processes.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population of this study consists of stakeholders involved in tourism planning, governance, and development in Bangladesh. Since sustainability integration in tourism planning involves multiple actors, the study focuses on stakeholder groups that directly influence or are affected by tourism policies and planning decisions. These groups include government officials, tourism entrepreneurs, tourism practitioners, tourism academics, destination managers, tourism consultants, and representatives of tourism-related organizations and associations.

A purposive sampling technique is employed for the quantitative survey because the study requires respondents who possess relevant knowledge and experience regarding tourism planning, policy implementation, and sustainable tourism development. Purposive sampling is widely used in policy and tourism research where respondents are selected based on their expertise and ability to provide relevant information (Etikan et al., 2016). The survey is distributed through tourism organizations, government agencies, academic institutions, professional networks, and tourism-related associations across Bangladesh.

A total of 450 valid responses are collected and included in the final analysis. The sample size exceeds the minimum requirements recommended for factor analysis and multivariate statistical techniques (Hair et al., 2019). Such a sample size is considered adequate for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), correlation analysis, and regression analysis, thereby enhancing the reliability and robustness of the findings.

For the qualitative component, purposive and snowball sampling techniques are employed to identify key informants with substantial knowledge and experience in tourism planning and sustainable tourism development. Snowball sampling enables the identification of additional participants through professional referrals and is particularly useful when targeting specialized experts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A total of 30 semi-structured interviews are conducted with policymakers, government officials, tourism entrepreneurs, tourism practitioners, tourism academics, tourism consultants, and representatives of tourism organizations. The distribution of participants is presented in Table 5.1.

Table 1. Sample Distribution

Stakeholder Group	Survey Respondents (n=450)	Interview Participants (n=30)
Government Officials	60	6
Tourism Entrepreneurs	90	6
Tourism Practitioners	80	5
Tourism Academics and Researchers	70	5
Tourism Association Representatives	50	4
Destination Managers and Consultants	100	4
Total	450	30

3.3 Instrument Development and Data Collection

The quantitative data are collected through a structured questionnaire developed based on an extensive review of the literature on sustainable tourism, tourism planning, stakeholder participation, governance, and sustainability integration (Hall, 2008; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). The questionnaire

consists of six dimensions: environmental sustainability, social sustainability, economic sustainability, stakeholder participation, governance mechanisms, and sustainability integration.

All measurement items are assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Prior to the main survey, a pilot study involving 30 respondents is conducted to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and reliability of the questionnaire items. Necessary modifications are made based on participant feedback and expert recommendations.

The qualitative data are collected through semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol developed from the study's theoretical framework and research objectives. The interviews explore issues related to sustainability integration, governance structures, stakeholder participation, policy implementation challenges, and opportunities for improving sustainable tourism planning in Bangladesh. Each interview lasts approximately 40–60 minutes and is recorded with participant consent before being transcribed for analysis.

In addition to primary data, documentary evidence is collected from tourism-related policy documents and planning frameworks, including the National Tourism Policy, Bangladesh Tourism Master Plan, national development plans, and relevant tourism strategy documents.

3.4 Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data are analyzed using IBM SPSS and AMOS software. Initially, descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, are employed to summarize respondent characteristics and examine overall response patterns (Field, 2018).

The reliability of the measurement scales is assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), values above 0.70 indicate acceptable internal consistency. Reliability analysis ensures that the measurement items consistently capture the intended constructs. Construct validity is established through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). EFA is conducted to identify the underlying factor structure of the measurement items and assess their dimensionality (Hair et al., 2019). Prior to factor extraction, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity are employed to determine the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation is used to extract factors, and items with low factor loadings or significant cross-loadings are removed.

Subsequently, CFA is conducted using AMOS to validate the measurement model and evaluate convergent validity, discriminant validity, and overall model fit. Convergent validity is assessed through standardized factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity is evaluated using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. Model fit is assessed using the Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Following measurement validation, Pearson correlation analysis is performed to examine the relationships among the study constructs. Multiple regression analysis is then conducted to investigate the influence of sustainability dimensions, stakeholder participation, and governance mechanisms on sustainability integration within national tourism planning.

3.5 Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data are analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process begins with data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts, followed by initial coding, theme generation, theme refinement, and interpretation. This method enables the identification of recurring patterns, stakeholder perspectives, and contextual factors influencing sustainability integration within tourism planning frameworks.

Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for exploring complex governance and policy issues because it facilitates the systematic interpretation of participants' experiences and perceptions. The resulting themes are subsequently compared with quantitative findings to identify areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence.

3.6 Policy Document Analysis

To complement the survey and interview findings, content analysis is conducted on key tourism policy documents and planning frameworks. Document analysis provides valuable insights into how sustainability principles are formally articulated within tourism policies and planning instruments (Bowen, 2009).

The analysis focuses on references to environmental sustainability, social sustainability, economic sustainability, stakeholder participation, governance arrangements, implementation mechanisms, and monitoring systems. Through this process, the study assesses the extent to which sustainability principles are embedded within national tourism planning frameworks in Bangladesh.

3.7 Validity, Trustworthiness, and Ethical Considerations

Several procedures are undertaken to ensure the rigor and quality of the study. Quantitative validity is established through pilot testing, reliability analysis, EFA, and CFA. The use of multiple data sources, including surveys, interviews, and policy documents, strengthens methodological triangulation and enhances the credibility of the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). For the qualitative component, trustworthiness is ensured through careful participant selection, systematic coding procedures, and continuous comparison of themes across stakeholder groups. These procedures enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. Ethical considerations are maintained throughout the research process. Participation is voluntary, informed consent is obtained from all respondents and interview participants, and confidentiality and anonymity are strictly protected. All collected data are used exclusively for academic purposes and stored securely in accordance with accepted research ethics standards.

IV. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Respondent Profile

A total of 450 valid responses were obtained from stakeholders involved in tourism planning and development in Bangladesh. The respondents comprised government officials (13.3%), tourism entrepreneurs (20.0%), tourism practitioners (17.8%), tourism academics and researchers (15.6%), representatives of tourism associations (11.1%), and destination managers and consultants (22.2%). In terms of educational attainment, 61.8% possessed a master's degree or higher qualification, indicating a relatively knowledgeable respondent base. Furthermore, approximately 68.4% of respondents had more than five years of professional experience in the tourism sector, suggesting that the survey captured informed perspectives regarding tourism planning and sustainability issues.

4.2 Sustainability Principles in National Tourism Planning

Descriptive analysis revealed that respondents generally perceived sustainability principles to be moderately integrated into national tourism planning frameworks. Economic sustainability received the highest mean score ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.69$), followed by environmental sustainability ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.71$) and social sustainability ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.76$). The overall sustainability integration score was relatively high ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.68$), suggesting a growing recognition of sustainability considerations within tourism planning.

The interview findings provided deeper insights into these perceptions. Most participants acknowledged that sustainability has become a key component of tourism policy discourse in Bangladesh, although implementation remains uneven.

A senior policymaker remarked:

“Compared to a decade ago, sustainability is now much more visible in tourism planning discussions. Environmental conservation, community welfare, and responsible destination management are frequently mentioned in policy documents. However, when planning decisions are made, economic considerations often receive priority because tourism is viewed as a tool for employment generation and economic growth. As a result, environmental and social dimensions do not always receive equal attention during implementation. (Interview–4)

Similarly, a tourism academic observed:

“The challenge is not the absence of sustainability language in tourism policies. The challenge lies in translating those commitments into practical actions. Many planning frameworks contain sustainability objectives, but implementation mechanisms, monitoring systems, and institutional accountability remain relatively weak.” (Interview–11)

These findings demonstrate strong convergence regarding the integration of sustainability principles into national tourism planning in Bangladesh. Both data sources indicate that sustainability has become an increasingly important consideration within tourism planning and policy discourse. However, interview participants emphasized that economic objectives continue to receive greater attention than environmental and social sustainability concerns during implementation. The qualitative evidence further highlighted challenges related to weak monitoring systems, limited institutional accountability, and inadequate policy coordination. These findings are consistent with Muneem et al. (2020), who identified governance and policy implementation challenges within Bangladesh's tourism sector, and Ananya et al. (2020), who highlighted institutional and infrastructural limitations affecting tourism development. Overall, the findings suggest that although sustainability principles are increasingly incorporated into tourism planning frameworks, significant gaps remain between policy commitments and implementation practices, supporting concerns raised within the sustainable tourism governance literature (Hall, 2008; Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

4.3 Stakeholder Participation in Tourism Planning

The survey results revealed a moderate level of stakeholder participation within tourism planning processes (M = 3.48, SD = 0.79). Approximately 71% of respondents agreed that stakeholder engagement is important for sustainable tourism development, while only 54% believed that current planning processes adequately incorporate stakeholder perspectives.

Interview participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of involving local communities, tourism businesses, and civil society organizations in planning decisions.

A tourism entrepreneur stated:

“Stakeholder participation is frequently discussed during policy consultations, but meaningful involvement is still limited. Communities are often invited to attend meetings, yet they rarely can influence planning outcomes. Sustainable tourism cannot be achieved unless stakeholders become active participants rather than passive observers. (Interview–13)

A representative from a tourism association explained:

“Tourism planning requires continuous dialogue among government agencies, businesses, and communities. When decisions are made without local consultation, implementation becomes difficult and resistance often emerges at the destination level.” (Interview–17)

The findings highlights the critical role of stakeholder participation in promoting sustainable tourism planning in Bangladesh. Both data sources indicate broad recognition of the importance of engaging local communities, tourism businesses, and civil society organizations in planning and decision-making processes. However, interview participants emphasized that stakeholder involvement often remains consultative rather than genuinely participatory, limiting the influence of stakeholders on planning outcomes. These findings are consistent with Avi et al. (2020), who emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement and communication in tourism administration. Overall, the findings suggest that while stakeholder participation is widely acknowledged as essential for sustainable tourism planning, more inclusive and collaborative governance mechanisms are needed to ensure meaningful stakeholder involvement and enhance the effectiveness of tourism planning initiatives.

4.4 Governance Mechanisms and Policy Integration

Governance mechanisms emerged as one of the strongest dimensions influencing sustainability integration. Respondents reported relatively high perceptions of governance importance (M = 3.88, SD = 0.71), with 85% agreeing that institutional coordination and policy integration are critical for achieving sustainable tourism development.

The qualitative findings strongly reinforced this result.

A government official explained:

“Sustainable tourism planning involves multiple ministries, local government institutions, tourism authorities, environmental agencies, and private-sector actors. While policy objectives are generally aligned, coordination among these actors remains inconsistent. Effective governance requires not only policies but also mechanisms that ensure collaboration and accountability.” (Interview–18)

Another participant noted:

“The problem is not the lack of policies. Bangladesh has several policy documents that acknowledge sustainability. The challenge is to ensure that those policies are coordinated, adequately funded, and implemented consistently across destinations. (Interview–21)

Table 2. Quantitative findings

Measure	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.892
Bartlett's Test Chi-Square	4623.51
df	325
Sig.	<0.001

The KMO value exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.80, indicating excellent sampling adequacy, while Bartlett's Test is statistically significant, confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis.

These findings highlight the central role of governance structures in translating sustainability principles into practical tourism planning outcomes. The quantitative and qualitative findings consistently highlight governance as a key driver of sustainability integration in tourism planning. Participants emphasized that policy coordination, institutional collaboration, and implementation capacity remain critical challenges. These findings align with Muneem et al. (2020) and support sustainable tourism governance literature emphasizing effective governance as essential for translating sustainability objectives into practice.

4.5 Challenges to Sustainability Integration

Respondents identified several challenges affecting sustainability integration within national tourism planning. The most significant barriers included institutional fragmentation, insufficient stakeholder participation, limited financial resources, inadequate monitoring systems, and weak implementation capacity. The overall mean score for perceived challenges was 3.53 (SD = 0.75).

Interview participants consistently emphasized implementation-related concerns.

A tourism consultant observed:

“Many sustainability initiatives remain at the planning stage because institutions often lack the resources and technical expertise required for implementation. Monitoring systems are also weak, making it difficult to evaluate whether sustainability objectives are being achieved. (Interview–24)

Similarly, an academic respondent stated:

“There is often a gap between policy aspirations and practical realities. Sustainability principles are widely accepted but translating them into operational planning decisions remains challenging due to bureaucratic constraints and limited institutional capacity.” (Interview–27)

These findings suggest that sustainability integration is constrained less by policy intent and more by governance and implementation limitations.

4.6 Reliability and Validity Assessment

The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. All constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha
Environmental Sustainability	0.84
Social Sustainability	0.81
Economic Sustainability	0.87
Stakeholder Participation	0.79
Governance Mechanisms	0.85
Sustainability Integration	0.88

The results confirm that the measurement scales are reliable and suitable for subsequent analysis. The reliability analysis demonstrates that all study constructs possess satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.79 to 0.88. These values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the measurement items consistently capture their respective constructs and provide dependable results (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Among the constructs, Sustainability Integration exhibited the highest reliability, while Stakeholder Participation showed the lowest, although still within acceptable limits. Overall, the findings confirm the robustness and stability of the measurement scales, providing confidence in the quality of the data and supporting their suitability for subsequent exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses.

4.7 Exploratory Factor Analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.892, while Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 4623.51$, $p < 0.001$), indicating the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Five factors emerged from the analysis, corresponding to environmental sustainability, social sustainability, economic sustainability, stakeholder participation, and governance mechanisms. Together, these factors explained 77.8% of the total variance, providing strong evidence of construct validity.

4.8 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was conducted to validate the measurement model. The model demonstrated satisfactory fit across all evaluation criteria ($\chi^2/df = 2.21$, CFI = 0.946, TLI = 0.938, RMSEA = 0.052, SRMR = 0.047). Composite Reliability values exceeded 0.70, while Average Variance Extracted values exceeded 0.50 for all constructs, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also established based on the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

4.9 Correlation and Regression Analysis

Correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among all study constructs. Sustainability integration exhibited the strongest correlations with governance mechanisms ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.01$) and stakeholder participation ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$).

Multiple regression analysis further demonstrated that governance mechanisms ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$) and stakeholder participation ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$) were the strongest predictors of sustainability integration. Environmental sustainability ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$), social sustainability ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$), and economic

sustainability ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$) also exerted significant positive effects. The model explained approximately 63% of the variance in sustainability integration ($R^2 = 0.63$).

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals strong convergence across the study dimensions. The survey results identified governance mechanisms and stakeholder participation as the most influential determinants of sustainability integration. These findings were consistently reinforced by interview participants, who emphasized institutional coordination, stakeholder engagement, and implementation capacity as critical factors influencing tourism planning outcomes. Furthermore, while respondents generally perceived sustainability principles to be increasingly incorporated within tourism planning frameworks, interview participants highlighted persistent implementation challenges. This suggests that sustainability integration in Bangladesh is progressing at the policy level but remains constrained by governance weaknesses, institutional fragmentation, and limited stakeholder participation.

Overall, the findings indicate that sustainability principles are increasingly recognized within national tourism planning; however, their successful implementation depends largely on effective governance mechanisms, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and stronger institutional capacity. These findings support Sustainable Development Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Sustainable Tourism Governance Theory by demonstrating that sustainable tourism planning requires not only sustainability objectives but also collaborative governance structures and effective implementation mechanisms.

V. Discussion

This study examined the integration of sustainability principles into national tourism planning in Bangladesh through the lenses of Sustainable Development Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Sustainable Tourism Governance Theory. The findings reveal that sustainability principles are increasingly recognized within tourism planning frameworks; however, their implementation remains uneven and constrained by governance and institutional challenges. The results suggest that sustainability integration is influenced not only by the inclusion of sustainability objectives within policy documents but also by the effectiveness of governance structures and stakeholder participation mechanisms.

The findings demonstrate that economic sustainability receives greater attention than environmental and social sustainability within tourism planning processes. This result is consistent with previous studies suggesting that tourism planning in developing economies frequently prioritizes economic growth, employment generation, and destination competitiveness (Sharpley, 2020). In Bangladesh, Muneem et al. (2020) similarly observed that tourism development agendas have historically focused on economic development objectives, infrastructure expansion, and destination competitiveness. While such priorities contribute to tourism growth, Sustainable Development Theory emphasizes the need to balance economic objectives with environmental conservation and social well-being (WCED, 1987). The findings therefore suggest that although sustainability principles are increasingly reflected within tourism planning, a more balanced approach is required to achieve comprehensive sustainability outcomes.

The study further found that stakeholder participation constitutes a significant determinant of sustainability integration. Respondents and interview participants consistently emphasized the importance of involving local communities, tourism businesses, civil society organizations, and destination-level actors in tourism planning processes. These findings support Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which argues that sustainable outcomes are more likely to emerge when the interests and perspectives of multiple stakeholders are incorporated into decision-making processes. Similarly, Avi et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of stakeholder communication and engagement in tourism administration, suggesting that participatory planning processes are essential for achieving sustainable tourism development.

Governance mechanisms emerged as the strongest predictor of sustainability integration within tourism planning. Quantitative findings identified governance effectiveness as the most influential factor, while interview participants repeatedly highlighted institutional coordination, implementation capacity, and policy coherence as critical determinants of sustainable tourism outcomes. These findings strongly support Sustainable Tourism Governance Theory (Hall, 2008; Bramwell & Lane, 2011), which argues that sustainability objectives can only be achieved when they are embedded within effective governance systems and planning mechanisms. The findings also align with Muneem et al. (2020), who identified policy coordination and institutional effectiveness as critical requirements for sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh. Consequently, governance should be viewed not merely as an administrative function but as a central mechanism through which sustainability principles are translated into practice.

The findings further reveal a persistent policy–implementation gap within tourism planning. Although sustainability objectives are increasingly incorporated into tourism policies and planning frameworks, implementation remains constrained by institutional fragmentation, resource limitations, and insufficient monitoring mechanisms. Similar challenges were identified by Ananya et al. (2020), who reported deficiencies in tourism facilities, destination management, and tourism-support infrastructure. Likewise, Muneem, Uchinlayen,

and Ananya (2020) highlighted the structural and institutional challenges affecting resort development in Bangladesh, emphasizing the need for stronger planning and governance systems. These findings suggest that sustainability integration requires more than policy commitment; it also requires institutional capacity capable of supporting implementation and evaluation processes.

The study also contributes to the growing literature linking tourism development with broader sustainable development objectives. Rahman et al. (2018) argued that tourism, particularly rural tourism, can contribute significantly to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals through local economic development, poverty reduction, and community empowerment. The present findings support this argument by demonstrating that sustainability integration is strengthened when tourism planning incorporates social inclusion, community participation, and local development objectives alongside economic priorities.

An additional contribution of the study concerns the role of entrepreneurship and innovation in sustainable tourism development. Recent research by Muneem et al. (2026) demonstrates that financial institutions play an important role in supporting tourism and hospitality entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. The findings of the present study complement this perspective by suggesting that economic sustainability within tourism planning should extend beyond visitor growth and infrastructure development to include entrepreneurial support, local business development, and inclusive economic opportunities.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of communication, destination promotion, and stakeholder awareness in supporting sustainability objectives. Previous studies by Avi et al. (2020) and Shoeb-Ur-Rahman et al. (2020) demonstrated the role of digital platforms and media in influencing tourism promotion, stakeholder communication, and tourist behavior. The present findings suggest that communication strategies can also serve as governance tools by facilitating stakeholder engagement, sustainability awareness, and collaborative planning processes.

Overall, the findings indicate that sustainability integration within national tourism planning is a multidimensional process involving sustainability principles, stakeholder participation, governance effectiveness, and institutional capacity. The study contributes to the tourism planning literature by demonstrating that sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh depends not only on policy commitments but also on participatory governance systems capable of translating sustainability objectives into practical planning outcomes.

5.1 Policy Implications

The findings of this study generate several important policy implications for tourism planning and governance in Bangladesh.

First, policymakers should strengthen the integration of environmental and social sustainability considerations within tourism planning frameworks. Although economic development remains a critical policy objective, tourism planning should adopt a more balanced approach that simultaneously promotes environmental conservation, cultural preservation, community welfare, and social inclusion. Such an approach would be consistent with Sustainable Development Theory and the broader objectives of sustainable tourism development.

Second, greater emphasis should be placed on institutionalizing stakeholder participation within tourism planning processes. Formal mechanisms should be established to facilitate the active involvement of local communities, tourism entrepreneurs, civil society organizations, and destination-level stakeholders in planning, implementation, and monitoring activities.

Third, stronger governance structures and inter-agency coordination mechanisms should be developed to improve policy implementation. The Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh Tourism Board, local government institutions, environmental agencies, and private-sector organizations should establish collaborative planning platforms to reduce policy fragmentation and improve implementation effectiveness. This recommendation is consistent with the policy considerations identified by Muneem et al. (2020) and the institutional performance concerns highlighted by Muneem et al. (2018).

Fourth, tourism planning should incorporate comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems. Sustainability indicators relating to environmental conservation, community benefits, stakeholder participation, resource management, and destination resilience should be integrated into tourism planning frameworks. Regular monitoring would facilitate evidence-based decision-making and strengthen accountability within tourism governance systems.

Fifth, tourism entrepreneurship should be explicitly incorporated into national tourism planning strategies. Access to finance, business development support, innovation incentives, and entrepreneurial training programs should be expanded to strengthen the economic sustainability of the tourism sector. Such measures are supported by the findings of Muneem et al. (2026), which demonstrate the contribution of financial institutions to tourism and hospitality enterprise development.

Sixth, tourism planning should prioritize sustainable destination development at both urban and rural levels. Rural tourism destinations, ecotourism sites, and community-based tourism initiatives should receive greater policy attention because of their potential contribution to local development and Sustainable Development

Goals (Rahman et al., 2018). Likewise, destination-specific planning frameworks should address the development challenges identified by Muneem, Uchinlayen, and Ananya (2020), particularly in relation to infrastructure, environmental management, and investment facilitation.

Finally, digital governance and communication strategies should be strengthened to improve stakeholder engagement and destination management. Digital platforms, social media, and tourism information systems can facilitate stakeholder communication, improve transparency, and support sustainability awareness among tourists and local communities. This recommendation is supported by the findings of Avi et al. (2020), Avi et al. (2019), and Shoeb-Ur-Rahman et al. (2020), which highlight the growing importance of digital communication in tourism administration and destination promotion.

Collectively, these policy recommendations provide a strategic roadmap for strengthening sustainability integration within national tourism planning and enhancing the contribution of tourism to sustainable development in Bangladesh.

VI. Conclusion

This study examined the integration of sustainability principles into national tourism planning in Bangladesh through the theoretical lenses of Sustainable Development Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Sustainable Tourism Governance Theory. As tourism continues to emerge as an important driver of economic growth, employment generation, and regional development in Bangladesh, ensuring the sustainability of tourism planning and development has become increasingly important. Against this backdrop, the study sought to investigate the extent to which sustainability principles are embedded within national tourism planning frameworks and to identify the factors influencing their effective integration.

The findings reveal that sustainability principles are increasingly recognized within tourism planning and policy frameworks in Bangladesh. Environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability have gained greater prominence within tourism discourse, reflecting growing awareness among policymakers and stakeholders regarding the need for more balanced and responsible tourism development. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that sustainability integration remains uneven across these dimensions. Economic sustainability continues to receive greater emphasis than environmental protection and social inclusion, suggesting that tourism planning remains strongly influenced by growth-oriented development priorities. While this focus contributes to employment creation, investment promotion, and destination competitiveness, it also highlights the need for a more balanced planning approach capable of addressing long-term environmental and social sustainability concerns.

The study further demonstrates that stakeholder participation plays a critical role in sustainability integration within tourism planning. The findings indicate that local communities, tourism entrepreneurs, government agencies, tourism organizations, and civil society actors all contribute to shaping sustainable tourism outcomes. However, stakeholder participation remains relatively limited in practice, with many planning processes characterized by consultation rather than meaningful collaboration and shared decision-making. These findings support previous research emphasizing the importance of community engagement and stakeholder involvement in achieving sustainable tourism development (Avi & Muneem, 2020; Avi et al., 2020).

Among the study's most significant findings is the central role of governance mechanisms in facilitating sustainability integration. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings consistently identify governance effectiveness, institutional coordination, policy coherence, and implementation capacity as key determinants of sustainable tourism planning. Although sustainability principles are increasingly reflected within tourism policies and strategic planning documents, their successful implementation remains constrained by institutional fragmentation, resource limitations, insufficient monitoring systems, and weak inter-agency coordination. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of governance effectiveness and policy coordination in tourism development and planning in Bangladesh (Muneem et al., 2020).

The study also contributes to the broader literature on sustainable tourism development by demonstrating that sustainability integration should not be viewed solely as a policy objective but rather as a multidimensional process involving sustainability principles, stakeholder engagement, and governance effectiveness. By integrating Sustainable Development Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Sustainable Tourism Governance Theory into a unified analytical framework, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how sustainability principles become embedded within national tourism planning systems. In doing so, it extends existing tourism planning research in Bangladesh, which has traditionally focused on individual issues such as tourism promotion, destination development, community participation, entrepreneurship, or policy implementation.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that strengthening governance structures, institutional capacity, stakeholder participation mechanisms, and monitoring systems is essential for advancing sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh. While policy frameworks increasingly acknowledge sustainability objectives, effective implementation requires stronger institutional arrangements capable of translating policy commitments into practical planning outcomes. Consequently, sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh

will depend not only on policy formulation but also on the effectiveness of governance systems responsible for implementation, coordination, and accountability.

Overall, the study concludes that Bangladesh has made notable progress in incorporating sustainability principles into tourism planning frameworks. However, achieving genuinely sustainable tourism development requires moving beyond policy commitments toward stronger implementation mechanisms, inclusive governance structures, and effective stakeholder engagement processes. By strengthening these dimensions, Bangladesh can enhance the contribution of tourism to economic development while simultaneously promoting environmental conservation, social inclusion, and long-term destination resilience.

6.1 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that create opportunities for future research. First, cross-sectional design captures stakeholder perceptions at a single point in time and may not fully reflect the evolving nature of sustainability integration in tourism planning. Second, the study focuses solely on Bangladesh, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Third, the findings are largely based on stakeholder perceptions, which may be subject to individual bias. Future research could address these limitations by adopting longitudinal and comparative approaches, incorporating objective sustainability indicators, and conducting destination-specific studies in locations such as Cox's Bazar, the Sundarbans, and Saint Martin's Island. Further investigations may also explore the role of digital governance, tourism entrepreneurship, and advanced analytical techniques in enhancing sustainable tourism planning and development.

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