

Stakeholders' Engagement in Tourism Development

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Abstract

This study investigates stakeholders' engagement in tourism development initiatives involving four key stakeholder groups: private-sector businesses (26), non-governmental organizations/POs (31), educational institutions (53), and community residents and leaders (56). The assessment of stakeholder engagement was based on the roles outlined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2017), which provide a framework for evaluating the contributions of various stakeholders in the tourism sector. A checklist questionnaire was administered to 166 respondents across four municipalities and two cities in Ilocos Norte: Paoay, Pagudpud, Bangui, Burgos, Laoag City, and Batac City—identified as the most visited areas from 2010 to 2017.

The findings reveal that stakeholders demonstrate a strong commitment to their assigned roles, which is evident in their active participation in tourism planning, resource management, and collaborative initiatives. This commitment indicates a viable pathway toward sustainable tourism development, as stakeholders are willing to invest time and resources in practices that promote environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and economic growth.

However, the study also highlights that community residents' engagement remains moderate. While there is a general willingness among community members to participate in tourism initiatives, barriers such as limited involvement in planning and decision processes, communicating local community interest, among others impede their full involvement. This moderate engagement suggests that although stakeholders recognize the importance of community participation, there is a significant gap in actively involving residents in tourism development discussions and activities.

To address this gap, there is a need to enhance community participation through capacity-building to equip community leaders with the necessary skills to enhance engagement in tourism planning. By fostering a more inclusive approach to tourism development, stakeholders can ensure that community residents feel valued and empowered, ultimately leading to more equitable and sustainable outcomes for all parties involved.

Keywords: tourism stakeholders, stakeholder engagement, stakeholder roles, sustainable tourism development

Introduction

Tourism is widely recognized as one of the fastest-growing industries globally, serving as a vital source of income for many countries. It serves as a significant contributor to job creation, income generation, and overall development of infrastructure and services. In the Philippines, tourism plays a critical role in national and local development. With its rich biodiversity, cultural heritage, and vibrant traditions, the country has become a prime destination for both domestic and international travellers. Ilocos Norte, one of the northern provinces, is renowned for its blend of natural beauty and cultural significance. Attractions such as Pagudpud's white sand beaches, the verdant landscapes of Paoay Lake, and heritage sites like Paoay Church are complemented by cultural festivals that celebrate the province's history and traditions. Alongside are man-made attractions that have been introduced to diversify the tourism offerings.

Local government units (LGUs) and other stakeholders have recognized the need for tourism development in Ilocos Norte. Programs such as local and international tourism promotions, enterprise development, environmental management, among others, have been launched to foster economic growth and cultural preservation. However, achieving the broader goals of sustainable tourism development requires the collaboration of various sectors. Stakeholders, such as private sector businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educational institutions, and local communities, play pivotal roles in ensuring that tourism remains a sustainable and inclusive driver of development.

The roles of these stakeholders are well-defined in tourism literature. Private sector businesses are instrumental in managing tourism services, creating market linkages, and driving investments that benefit local economies. NGOs serve as advocates for sustainable practices, offering expertise in planning and capacity-building efforts. Educational institutions contribute by generating knowledge, conducting research, and offering policy support that aligns tourism development with sustainability goals. Community leaders and residents are critical in decision-making processes, ensuring that tourism initiatives reflect local interests and lead to equitable benefit-sharing.

While stakeholder engagement in tourism development is widely recognized, there remains a gap in understanding how these engagements manifest in local contexts. Several studies highlight the importance of stakeholder collaboration in global tourism settings. For instance, Aslam et al. (2021) explored stakeholder collaboration in Europe, emphasizing the role of multi-sectoral partnerships in driving sustainable tourism, particularly through the integration of private sector businesses and local communities. Similarly, Hanafiah et al. (2019) demonstrated that in Southeast Asia, multi-stakeholder engagement, especially among NGOs and local governments, significantly contributed to the success of community-based tourism initiatives.

In the Philippines, research on sustainable tourism engagement has largely focused on policy frameworks and environmental concerns, as noted by Alegre et al. (2020), who examined national policies that promote eco-friendly tourism. However, these studies have paid less attention to the practical contributions of local stakeholders at the provincial level, leaving a gap in understanding the localized dynamics of stakeholder involvement in tourism development. This gap calls for further exploration of how local-level stakeholders, such as private businesses, educational institutions, and community leaders, engage in promoting sustainable tourism, particularly in the province of Ilocos Norte.

The study aims to address the gap in understanding how local-level stakeholders contribute to tourism development, particularly in Ilocos Norte. By examining the roles of private businesses, educational institutions, and community leaders, this research sheds light on the localized dynamics of stakeholder engagement in promoting sustainable tourism development. The findings may not only provide valuable

insights for future extension programs of the Master of Arts/Master in Public Administration but will also offer practical guidance for LGUs. These results can inform policy formulation and strategy development, fostering stronger stakeholder collaboration through partnership-driven planning and implementation, thereby supporting sustainable tourism initiatives in Ilocos Norte.

Review of Literature and Studies

This section presents a synthesis of relevant literature, studies, and models that form the theoretical foundation for this research. It explores the concepts of stakeholders' participation and engagement, the specific roles that various stakeholders play in sustainable tourism development as well as the importance of stakeholders engagement. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, as effective stakeholder engagement can lead to more equitable and sustainable tourism practices, thereby ensuring that the benefits of tourism are distributed fairly among all involved parties.

The Concept/Theory of Stakeholders' Participation and Engagement

Stakeholder participation is a critical component in achieving sustainable tourism, as it facilitates balanced decision-making that considers the needs and interests of all relevant parties. Phanumat (2015) argued that while top-down tourism development policies can accelerate growth, they often fail to generate positive outcomes for host communities directly from tourism activities. This gap highlights the necessity for inclusive frameworks that prioritize local voices and concerns in tourism planning. A multi-stakeholder participatory approach implemented in community-based tourism in Thailand exemplifies this, demonstrating that such participation is essential for equitable benefit distribution. However, the findings also reveal that this approach is not yet widely practiced in many developing countries, suggesting a need for greater advocacy and institutional support to promote inclusive tourism governance.

Research by Sanja et al. (2018) emphasized that stakeholder engagement extends beyond mere participation. It requires active involvement in governance and public administration processes. Effective stakeholder engagement ensures that diverse groups—such as community leaders, the private sector, educational institutions, and civil society organizations—are involved in critical aspects of governance, including planning, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The lack of effective integration of stakeholders in the planning process can lead to disillusionment and missed opportunities for local communities, resulting in a disconnect between tourism initiatives and the needs of those most affected by them.

Furthermore, the Stakeholder Theory, developed by Freeman (1984), provides a foundational framework for understanding the dynamics of stakeholder engagement in tourism. This theory posits that organizations should consider the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders, in their decision-making processes. Applying this theory to tourism development emphasizes the importance of recognizing and balancing the diverse interests of different stakeholder groups, which can lead to more sustainable outcomes. A study by Eshun et al. (2020) supports this perspective, suggesting that effective stakeholder engagement can lead to increased trust and collaboration among parties, ultimately fostering a more resilient tourism sector.

In addition, the concept of Collaborative Governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008) underscores the importance of partnerships among stakeholders in achieving sustainable tourism. This model promotes joint decision-making processes where stakeholders work collaboratively to address common goals, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of tourism initiatives. A study by Liu et al. (2021) found that collaborative

governance frameworks in tourism foster inclusivity, enabling local communities to actively participate in decision-making, which is crucial for sustainable development.

Moreover, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) can be applied to understand the motivations and intentions of stakeholders to engage in tourism initiatives. This theory posits that an individual's intention to engage in a behaviour is influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Applying this framework in the tourism context can help identify factors that encourage or hinder stakeholder participation, providing valuable insights for designing effective engagement strategies.

Overall, enhancing stakeholder participation and engagement is essential for sustainable tourism development. The integration of diverse perspectives through multi-stakeholder approaches, grounded in theoretical frameworks such as Stakeholder Theory and Collaborative Governance, can lead to more equitable outcomes and greater community satisfaction. As demonstrated by the literature, fostering effective stakeholder engagement not only benefits individual stakeholders but also contributes to the overall sustainability and resilience of tourism systems.

The Role of Stakeholders in Delivering Sustainable Tourism

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) emphasizes that tourism is inherently a multi-faceted industry that requires the involvement of various stakeholders. Key stakeholders in this context include private sector businesses, local communities, NGOs, and educational institutions, each playing distinct roles in promoting sustainable tourism.

Private sector businesses contribute to sustainable tourism by representing the tourism sector, operating tourism services, and establishing links to domestic and international markets. Their roles also encompass product development, investment, and improvement initiatives, as well as employment creation and local income generation. Moreover, they are instrumental in reflecting economic, social, and environmental sustainability in their operations.

NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) have increasingly expanded their roles in tourism governance and administration, specifically in fostering collaborations that promote sustainable tourism. These organizations represent diverse stakeholder interests by actively engaging them in strategic planning, and to contribute to tourism development initiatives through capacity building and the provision of technical expertise. Recent studies highlight how CSOs facilitate stakeholder engagement, foster sustainable practices, and support local communities in tourism development (Cheer & Lew, 2018). They also play a critical role in local governance by raising awareness, building capacity, and providing citizen-based monitoring and evaluation of tourism projects (World Bank, 2017). Furthermore, CSOs contribute to research and advocacy efforts that promote transparency, accountability, and sustainable tourism policies (Gössling et al., 2021).

Educational institutions also play a crucial role in developing local tourism programs by enhancing human capital through education and skills training. They act as advocates for sustainable tourism, designing and promoting research-based campaigns, and empowering local communities and organizations through targeted training programs. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2019), these institutions not only facilitate knowledge dissemination but also provide specialized expertise in policy formulation and strategic development. In addition, recent studies emphasize the growing role of academic institutions in promoting sustainable tourism practices through research and community-based projects (Dredge & Jamal, 2015; Scheyvens, 2020). Their role in fostering

innovation and capacity building continues to be instrumental in shaping sustainable tourism practices at the local and regional levels.

Finally, local communities are integral to tourism development as they engage in planning and decision-making processes, represent community interests, and ensure equitable benefit-sharing. Their interaction with tourists not only fosters cultural exchange but also allows for mutual benefit and the review of income derived from tourism activities.

The UNWTO emphasizes the critical roles of various stakeholders in sustainable tourism development, advocating for a balanced and inclusive approach. Stakeholders such as governments, private sector entities, local communities, NGOs, and tourists play distinct roles in promoting tourism sustainability. According to the UNWTO's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (2014), key stakeholders include: Governments, which establish policy frameworks to balance economic growth with environmental conservation and ensure legal compliance across the industry. They are also tasked with infrastructure development and regulatory measures that promote sustainability (UNWTO, 2017).

The private sector, particularly tourism enterprises in hospitality and travel, must adopt sustainable business practices, such as reducing environmental impacts, promoting fair employment practices, and partnering with local communities to support local economies (Font et al., 2019). Research has emphasized that sustainable business practices contribute significantly to the overall resilience of the tourism industry and help build sustainable supply chains (Bramwell & Lane, 2020).

Local communities are vital to sustainable tourism by providing authentic cultural experiences and preserving natural and cultural resources. They should be empowered to actively participate in decision-making processes, as their involvement is key to safeguarding their environment and ensuring equitable benefits from tourism (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). Recent studies highlight the importance of community-based tourism as a tool for enhancing local economies and preserving cultural heritage (Novelli, 2016).

Tourists themselves are essential stakeholders, as they must adopt responsible travel behaviours that reduce their environmental footprints, respect local cultures, and contribute to the well-being of host communities (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Engaging tourists in sustainable tourism practices—such as choosing eco-friendly accommodations and supporting local businesses—remains critical to the future of sustainable tourism (UNEP & UNWTO, 2022).

The UNWTO encourages collaboration among these groups to ensure tourism's benefits are widely shared and its negative impacts minimized. Each stakeholder's contribution to long-term sustainability is crucial to maintaining a healthy balance between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of tourism.

The Importance of Stakeholders Engagement and Participation

Stakeholders engagement is important in promoting sustainable tourism development across various countries and regions, such as Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Philippines. Several studies highlight the importance of stakeholder collaboration in global tourism settings, emphasizing how multi-sectoral partnerships contribute to sustainable tourism. For instance, Aslam et al. (2021) explored stakeholder collaboration in Europe, focusing on the role of multi-sectoral partnerships in driving sustainable tourism. Their research highlighted the integration of private sector businesses and local communities as a key to achieving balanced and sustainable growth in tourism. The study underscored that by involving a broad range of stakeholders—ranging from local government bodies to private enterprises—tourism initiatives were more likely to address environmental, social, and economic goals effectively. Aslam et al.

demonstrated that collaborations between local authorities, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and community organizations lead to increased investment in eco-friendly practices, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the empowerment of local communities to take ownership of tourism activities. The study also found that without active local participation, even the most well-intentioned sustainability projects could fail to generate long-term benefits.

Similarly, Hanafiah et al. (2019) examined the role of multi-stakeholder engagement in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives. The study revealed that collaboration between NGOs, local government units, and grassroots communities was instrumental in ensuring the success of CBT projects. In regions like Malaysia and Indonesia, these partnerships helped build the capacity of local communities to manage tourism resources effectively, providing them with both economic opportunities and the skills needed to preserve their cultural and natural heritage. Hanafiah et al. emphasized that NGOs, in particular, played a critical role in facilitating communication between local communities and government authorities, advocating for policies that supported sustainable practices and providing technical assistance for local tourism operators. The study concluded that stakeholder collaboration fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among local residents, which is crucial for the long-term sustainability of tourism initiatives.

In the Philippines, research on sustainable tourism engagement has largely focused on policy frameworks and environmental concerns. Alegre et al. (2020) conducted an extensive review of national policies aimed at promoting eco-friendly tourism practices, highlighting the government's efforts to encourage sustainable tourism through regulatory measures and incentives. Their study examined key policy interventions, such as the Tourism Act of 2009 and the National Ecotourism Strategy, which set a foundation for balancing economic growth with environmental protection. However, Alegre et al. noted that while these policies provided a solid framework, the role of local stakeholders, particularly at the provincial level, was underemphasized in the actual implementation and success of sustainability initiatives.

Recent studies have further emphasized that while national policies set overarching sustainability goals, the effectiveness of these policies often depends on how well they are adapted to local contexts. For instance, Dacanay (2021) pointed out that local governments play a crucial role in ensuring that national policies are translated into actionable local strategies. However, the engagement of private businesses, educational institutions, and community leaders at the provincial level, such as in Ilocos Norte, remains underexplored. Their participation is essential for addressing specific local needs and capitalizing on opportunities for sustainable tourism development.

Understanding how these local stakeholders contribute to promoting sustainable tourism is essential for developing more targeted and effective strategies. Recent work by Manzano et al. (2022) has stressed the need for stronger multi-stakeholder collaboration at the provincial level, involving not just government entities but also local communities, tourism businesses, and academic institutions, to foster sustainable tourism initiatives that are locally relevant and impactful.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design to assess the levels of stakeholder engagement in sustainable tourism development across key areas in Ilocos Norte. Descriptive research was chosen as it allows for a comprehensive analysis of stakeholder involvement by capturing their roles, contributions, and interactions based on the framework proposed by the UNWTO (2017). The descriptive approach

facilitates an accurate representation of how different stakeholders contribute to sustainable tourism efforts in the province.

Four main stakeholder groups were evaluated: private-sector businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educational institutions and local communities. These groups were selected for their vital roles in sustainable tourism, as highlighted in various tourism development models and policies (UNWTO, 2017; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). The research explored their involvement in decision-making, resource management, capacity building, and policy advocacy within the tourism sector.

Data collection was conducted in four municipalities and two cities in Ilocos Norte, identified by the Department of Tourism (2017) as top tourist destinations: Paoay, Pagudpud, Bangui, Burgos, Laoag City, and the City of Batac. These areas were chosen due to their significant tourism activities and prominence in the provincial tourism landscape. Their inclusion provides a representative understanding of stakeholder engagement across a range of tourist destinations, from coastal areas to cultural heritage sites.

Data sources included both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through surveys and semi-structured interviews with representatives from each stakeholder group, ensuring diverse perspectives on their contributions to sustainable tourism. Secondary data were collected from government reports, tourism development plans, and relevant literature on sustainable tourism in the Philippines.

The study provides insights into the specific roles and challenges faced by stakeholders in implementing sustainable tourism practices, offering a localized view of stakeholder engagement that contributes to broader national and global tourism sustainability goals.

The respondents were categorized into four stakeholder groups:

Private Sector Businesses. These are owners, managers, or staff from tourism-related businesses such as hotels, resorts, restaurants, and souvenir shops.

NGOs and People's Organizations (POs). These are representatives from environmental organizations, cooperatives, women's groups, and youth organizations.

Educational Institutions. These are faculty members from higher education institutions and high school teachers.

Community Residents and Leaders. These comprised of citizens, community leaders, and barangay officials.

To gather the necessary data, a checklist questionnaire was used as the primary instrument. After data collection, the responses were encoded, tabulated, and processed by the Center for Research and Learning (CRL). Researchers then analyzed the data using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and means, to quantify the level of engagement of each stakeholder group. The data were interpreted using the following scale:

Mean Range	Descriptive Interpretation
1.00 – 1.66	Low
1.67 – 2.33	Moderate
2.34 – 3.00	High

To complement the quantitative findings, structured interviews were conducted with representatives from each stakeholder group to validate their responses and provide deeper insights. Unstructured interviews were also employed to explore emerging themes and clarify any ambiguous responses, enriching the dataset and offering a more comprehensive understanding of stakeholder engagement.

Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the local chief executives of the participating

cities and municipalities. Upon approval, faculty researchers personally conducted the interviews using the checklist questionnaire as a guide, ensuring consistency in data collection across all locations. This approach not only provided a clear interpretation of how actively each stakeholder group participated in tourism development activities but also ensured the validity and reliability of the data. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods formed a strong foundation for analyzing and interpreting stakeholder engagement in sustainable tourism development in Ilocos Norte.

Results and Discussion

Stakeholders’ Engagement in Sustainable Tourism Development

Tables 1 to 4 present the extent of engagement of various stakeholder groups in fulfilling their roles as partners in tourism development. The UNWTO emphasizes that key stakeholders—including the private business sector, NGOs, community residents, and educational institutions—play critical roles in this multifaceted industry. Their active participation is essential for achieving sustainable tourism development.

Private-sector Business

The private business sector is pivotal to tourism development as they perform essential roles such as influencing the tourism sector, operating tourism services, connecting to domestic and international markets, generating employment and local income, and integrating economic, social, and environmental sustainability principles into development operations. Table 1 provides insights on how businesses engage in these roles within the context of sustainable tourism.

Table 1. Level of Engagement of Private-sector Businesses in Sustainable Tourism Development

Roles of the Private-sector Businesses	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Representation of, and influence on, the tourism sector	2.45	Moderate
Operation of tourism services	2.45	Moderate
Link to domestic and international markets	2.48	Moderate
Product development, investment, and improvement	2.55	High
Employment creation and generating local income	2.55	High
Reflecting economic, social, and environmental sustainability issues in development operations	2.55	High
Overall Mean	2.50	High

The data reveals a high level of engagement from private businesses in sustainable tourism development, as reflected by the overall mean score of 2.50. Notably, three roles received "High" ratings: product development, investment, and improvement (2.55); employment creation and local income generation (2.55); and integration of sustainability issues into operations (2.55). These findings underscore that businesses, regardless of their scale, recognize the potential of tourism for fostering product development, job creation, and local economic growth.

The study revealed a high level of engagement from private businesses in product development and investment, underscoring their pivotal role in driving tourism growth. This finding suggests that the private sector’s involvement is not only instrumental in enhancing tourism services but also in ensuring the long-

term sustainability of the industry. The active participation of private businesses in developing innovative products and investing in tourism infrastructure directly contributes to the economic vitality of the region. This engagement creates a ripple effect, boosting local economies by generating jobs, attracting more visitors, and encouraging the expansion of tourism markets. Moreover, the continuous development of tourism-related products and services can help diversify the region's offerings, making it more resilient to external shocks, such as seasonal fluctuations or global economic downturns.

The findings highlight the necessity of fostering strong partnerships between local governments and private sector entities. By encouraging private investment in tourism, local authorities can ensure that tourism infrastructure remains modern and competitive, which is crucial for attracting both domestic and international visitors. Additionally, the innovation brought about by private enterprises can improve the overall tourist experience, leading to increased visitor satisfaction and a higher likelihood of repeat visits. This, in turn, helps create a sustainable tourism environment where economic growth is balanced with environmental and cultural preservation.

The role of the private businesses in the tourism industry, particularly in their contributions to product innovation and infrastructure investment is also manifested in this study. This high level of involvement from the private sector indicates a strong commitment to enhancing the tourism experience, ensuring not only short-term gains but also long-term sustainability. By continuously developing new products and investing in key tourism infrastructure, private businesses help diversify the tourism offerings, attracting a wider range of tourists and creating a more resilient tourism industry. The implications are significant: such investments not only improve the quality of the destination but also drive economic growth by increasing visitor numbers, fostering job creation, and boosting local businesses.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that private sector investment is a critical driver in maintaining the competitiveness of a destination. A diversified and modernized tourism product can attract repeat visitors and tap into new markets, expanding the region's appeal on both domestic and international fronts. From a policy perspective, these insights call for local governments to establish stronger partnerships with the private sector, ensuring that investments are aligned with sustainable tourism goals. Collaboration between public and private stakeholders can enhance infrastructure, promote local culture, and preserve environmental resources, creating a more balanced approach to tourism development.

This significant role of private businesses is supported by Telfer and Sharpley (2015), who emphasize the necessity of private sector involvement in innovating and enhancing tourism services. They argue that businesses contribute to sustainable tourism by continuously developing new products and investing in infrastructure, which fosters long-term economic growth. Similarly, Bramwell et al. (2017) highlight that such investments are crucial for attracting repeat visitors and expanding the market base. Their research shows that improved infrastructure and diversified products enhance a destination's overall appeal, thereby boosting its competitiveness. These studies collectively reinforce the idea that private sector engagement is fundamental to achieving sustainable tourism, as it lays the foundation for both economic prosperity and local community development.

The study's findings indicate that private businesses play a crucial role in employment creation and local income generation, with a mean score of 2.55 reflecting their substantial impact on local economic development. This suggests that private enterprises in the tourism sector are not only vital for the growth of the industry but also act as key drivers of regional economic empowerment. By creating jobs and generating income within local communities, tourism businesses help improve livelihoods and reduce poverty, particularly in rural or underdeveloped areas. These businesses provide direct employment

opportunities, from hospitality and tour operations to management and service positions, while also fostering indirect employment through the support of local suppliers and service providers.

The broader implications of these findings suggest that strengthening the engagement of private businesses in tourism can significantly boost local economies, promoting inclusive economic development. As tourism grows, the demand for local products and services increases, stimulating other sectors like retail, transportation, and food production. This creates a multiplier effect where the benefits of tourism extend beyond the industry itself, permeating various facets of the local economy. For policymakers, this highlights the importance of creating an enabling environment for private sector growth, where businesses can thrive, innovate, and contribute more effectively to community well-being.

The significant role of businesses in employment creation and local income generation is supported by Mitchell and Ashley's (2010) earlier findings, which have been further expanded by recent studies. For example, Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) emphasize that tourism plays a critical role in providing employment opportunities, particularly in developing regions, where it serves as a pathway to improving local livelihoods. Their research demonstrates that tourism creates direct jobs while enhancing local economies through the increased demand for goods and services. In line with this, Pavlopoulos et al. (2017) illustrate how tourism businesses generate multiplier effects within local economies by stimulating related sectors such as retail, agriculture, and transport. For example, a growing tourism industry often leads to the development of local markets for crafts, food, and other cultural products, which supports small businesses and farmers. Additionally, increased tourism boosts the demand for local transportation services, further driving economic activity. These examples reinforce the study's findings that private sector involvement in tourism is essential for fostering sustainable economic growth and improving community livelihoods through employment and income generation.

Further, the study reveals a high level of engagement among businesses in integrating sustainability principles into their operations, with a mean score of 2.55. This suggests that businesses in Ilocos Norte are increasingly aligning with global trends in responsible tourism, incorporating eco-friendly practices and supporting local communities. This commitment to sustainability reflects the growing recognition that adopting such principles is not only an ethical obligation but also a strategic move that enhances business resilience and long-term success. By implementing sustainable practices, these businesses contribute to environmental conservation, reduce their carbon footprint, and promote the well-being of local economies. For instance, supporting local suppliers fosters a circular economy, where the benefits of tourism are reinvested in the community, creating a more equitable and sustainable model of development.

The broader implications of this finding suggest that businesses which prioritize sustainability gain a competitive advantage in the increasingly eco-conscious tourism market. As travellers become more discerning about the environmental impact of their choices, businesses that adopt sustainable practices stand out and attract environmentally conscious tourists. This can lead to increased brand loyalty, repeat business, and positive word-of-mouth, further enhancing the destination's reputation as a responsible tourism hub. Additionally, local businesses that integrate sustainability into their operations may find new opportunities for growth, such as participation in eco-tourism ventures, partnerships with environmental organizations, or access to green financing options.

The study's findings align with global trends noted by Font and Lynes (2018), who observe that tourism businesses worldwide are increasingly adopting sustainable practices to cater to the growing demand for eco-friendly experiences. Their research highlights how businesses that prioritize sustainability—such as by reducing waste, conserving energy, and supporting local producers—meet consumer preferences while

contributing to the overall goals of responsible tourism. In Ilocos Norte, this trend could be seen in hotels implementing waste reduction programs, restaurants sourcing ingredients from local farmers, or tour operators promoting low-impact activities like cycling or hiking.

Similarly, Dodds and Butler (2019) emphasize that companies which prioritize sustainability not only protect the environment but also gain a competitive edge by appealing to a growing segment of environmentally conscious travelers. For example, a resort that reduces plastic use or adopts energy-efficient technologies can attract eco-conscious tourists who are willing to pay a premium for sustainable experiences. In turn, this competitive advantage can lead to long-term profitability and enhanced market positioning. These examples reinforce the study’s findings, demonstrating that integrating sustainability into business operations is not only beneficial for the environment but also key to achieving lasting business success in the tourism industry.

Conversely, the role of businesses in linking tourism to domestic and international markets is only moderate, with a mean score of 2.48. Stankova and Mileva (2018) highlight that businesses are key to attracting international tourists and ensuring a steady flow of visitors. However, the moderate rating here may reflect challenges such as logistical and financial constraints, particularly for smaller businesses, in accessing international markets. Sharpley (2017) similarly notes that limited resources often prevent many businesses from expanding beyond domestic markets.

Finally, representation and influence in the tourism sector also received a moderate engagement rating of 2.45. This underscores a critical gap where community members may feel marginalized in the decision-making processes that shape tourism policy and practice.

Overall, the mean score of 2.50 suggests that the private business sector in Ilocos Norte is highly engaged in sustainable tourism, particularly in areas related to product development, job creation, and sustainability integration. These findings echo those of UNWTO (2019), which highlights the critical role businesses play in promoting sustainable tourism. The data indicates that businesses in the region are committed to not only generating profits but also contributing to broader social and environmental objectives.

However, despite high engagement in several key areas, there remain opportunities to enhance the private sector's influence in tourism policy and expand their reach into international markets. Strengthening collaboration between businesses, local governments, and other stakeholders could further boost sustainable tourism development in Ilocos Norte.

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and Peoples’ Organization (POs)

Table 2 Engagement of NGOs/POs in Sustainable Tourism Development

Roles of NGOs	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Representing different stakeholders' interests	2.77	High
Engaging in strategic planning and development	2.36	Moderate
Stakeholder coordination and supporting implementation	2.51	High
Capacity building and provision of expertise	2.37	Moderate
Overall Mean	2.50	High

Table 2 presents the level of engagement of NGOs in contributing to sustainable tourism development. According to the UNWTO, NGOs are expected to fulfil several critical roles, such as representing diverse stakeholder interests, participating in strategic planning and development, coordinating stakeholders and

supporting implementation, as well as building capacity and providing expertise.

In general, the engagement of NGOs in delivering sustainable tourism is high, as indicated by the overall mean score of 2.50. This suggests that NGOs play a significant role in promoting sustainable tourism within their communities. Specifically, regarding their role in representing different stakeholders' interests, this aspect received the highest mean score (2.77), indicating that NGOs are highly effective in advocating for the diverse interests of various stakeholders, such as environmentalists, cooperatives, women's groups, and youth groups. This suggests that NGOs are actively serving as the "voice" of the community, particularly in addressing social and economic development issues. Their high level of representation highlights their influence in ensuring that the concerns of different groups are considered in tourism-related decision-making processes.

NGOs demonstrate strong performance in coordinating stakeholders and supporting the implementation of tourism initiatives, as reflected by the high mean score of 2.51. This indicates that NGOs are not only advocates but also active collaborators in executing tourism programs. Their key role in facilitating coordination helps bridge gaps between diverse stakeholder groups, promoting a cohesive and collaborative approach to sustainable tourism development. NGOs frequently serve as intermediaries, ensuring that all parties—governments, businesses, and local communities—work together harmoniously toward common goals. Their ability to foster collaboration across sectors is crucial for aligning the interests of multiple stakeholders, especially in complex tourism environments.

NGOs' involvement as "bridging agents" is instrumental in creating synergies among stakeholders. By organizing forums, facilitating discussions, and providing expert knowledge, they ensure that tourism projects reflect the needs and aspirations of the local community while balancing environmental and economic concerns. For instance, local NGOs in Ilocos Norte have been actively involved in promoting sustainable tourism by working closely with local government units (LGUs), private businesses, and community leaders. These NGOs help bring together stakeholders to develop eco-friendly tourism practices that are both beneficial to the environment and supportive of local livelihoods. By facilitating dialogue and ensuring the active participation of local communities, NGOs help align tourism projects with conservation efforts, such as protecting Pagudpud's pristine beaches and preserving heritage sites like Paoay Church.

Although NGOs continue to play a critical role in capacity-building efforts that empower local communities to actively engage in tourism, recent studies indicate there is still ample room for improvement in this area. NGOs enhance the knowledge and skills of local communities, but strengthening their capacity-building initiatives could further enable communities to engage more meaningfully in sustainable tourism development. For example, Bianchi and de Man (2021) emphasize that NGOs are integral in advancing ecotourism and community-based tourism (CBT) by offering training and education programs that focus on sustainability. Such initiatives are essential for building local expertise in managing tourism resources.

However, recent findings echoed earlier concerns about the limitations NGOs face. Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) argued that despite the important role NGOs play in sustainable tourism, many capacity-building programs remain underfunded and understaffed, leading to limited long-term impact. Moreover, Dangi and Jamal (2016) pointed out that while NGOs are instrumental in promoting sustainable tourism, their success often depends on local governments' support and private sector collaboration, both of which are sometimes lacking.

Strengthening the capacity-building role of NGOs, as suggested by these findings, would help local comm-

unities become more self-sufficient and better equipped to manage tourism projects sustainably. As Stone and Stone (2020) noted, empowering communities to lead their own tourism initiatives is key to achieving the dual goals of economic development and environmental conservation. Enhancing NGO support in this way would align with the broader objectives of sustainable tourism, fostering both community resilience and long-term environmental stewardship.

The mean score of 2.36 for NGOs' engagement in strategic planning and development suggests moderate involvement in this crucial role. This indicates that while NGOs are somewhat involved in planning processes, their participation could be enhanced. To maximize the impact of sustainable tourism efforts, local leaders should consider further integrating NGOs in planning and decision-making stages, as they possess valuable insights and can act as strategic partners.

Overall, the data indicate that NGOs are highly engaged in representing stakeholders and supporting implementation, but show moderate involvement in strategic planning and capacity building. This pattern suggests that while NGOs are effective advocates and collaborators, their strategic influence could be enhanced. Local leaders should, therefore, consider involving NGOs more comprehensively in planning and capacity-building activities to leverage their full potential as partners in sustainable tourism development. Enhancing their role in these areas can lead to a more integrated and effective approach to achieving sustainable tourism goals.

Engagement of Educational Institutions in Sustainable Development

Table 3 Engagement of Educational Institutions in Sustainable Tourism Development

Roles of Educational Institutions	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Knowledge gathering and dissemination	2.53	High
Supporting policy and strategy development	2.56	High
Capacity building and training	2.53	High
Providing specific advice and expertise	2.56	High
Overall Mean	2.54	High

Table 3 presents the engagement of educational institutions in sustainable tourism, focusing on areas such as knowledge gathering and dissemination, supporting policy and strategy development, capacity building and training, and providing specific advice and expertise.

As a whole, educational institutions are highly engaged in fulfilling their roles in sustainable tourism, as indicated by the overall mean score of 2.54, which is rated as high.

Specifically, their role in knowledge gathering and dissemination emerged as high, with a mean score of 2.53. Educational institutions' strong engagement in this area aligns with their core missions of research and education. Findings reveal that they have already embraced their role in realizing sustainable tourism within their communities, particularly in knowledge gathering and dissemination, which are integral to their functions as educators. Additionally, the academic community holds the authority to advocate for sustainable development. Their contributions to tourism-related research and other teaching and learning activities are critical for strategy development and policymaking.

According to more recent research, universities and colleges continue to serve as essential hubs for advancing research that informs sustainable tourism policies and practices. Their role in generating, analysing, and disseminating data is critical for equipping policymakers and tourism stakeholders with the knowledge required to make informed decisions. For instance, Joppe (2018) highlights the importance of

academic institutions in producing evidence-based research that fosters innovation and sustainability in tourism. Universities are increasingly collaborating with government agencies and the private sector to identify best practices for sustainable tourism management.

Similarly, Weaver and Jin (2020) stress the role of academic research in advancing sustainability practices, emphasizing the contributions of higher education institutions in training future leaders and professionals equipped with the skills to implement sustainable tourism strategies. These institutions play a key role in ensuring that tourism development aligns with the goals of environmental conservation and community well-being.

The UNWTO (2019) further reinforces this by highlighting how academic research serves as a foundation for evidence-based tourism policies, ensuring that sustainability efforts are grounded in rigorous scientific analysis. Universities not only provide the research but also offer practical training programs that help translate theoretical knowledge into actionable strategies for tourism stakeholders.

Regarding their role in supporting policy and strategy development, engagement is high, as shown by the mean score of 2.56. This reflects the significant contributions educational institutions make to shaping tourism policies. Font and McCabe (2017) note that academic input, through research, policy briefs, and expert consultations, often guides the development of national and regional tourism strategies. Furthermore, Hall (2019) discusses how educational institutions can influence sustainable tourism policies by collaborating with government agencies and private sector stakeholders to create long-term strategies that balance tourism growth with environmental protection.

The role of educational institutions in capacity building and training is also rated high (2.53). This underscores their essential role in equipping tourism professionals and community members with the skills necessary for sustainable development. According to Ruhanen et al. (2015), universities and training centers play a pivotal role in developing curricula and programs that address sustainable tourism practices to help them build local capacity and enhance the competencies of tourism professionals. Through specialized training programs, these institutions ensure that tourism development aligns with sustainability principles.

Educational institutions also play a critical role in developing practical solutions tailored to local contexts, as reflected by the high score (2.56) for providing specific advice and expertise. Zhou et al. (2015) highlighted that academic institutions serve as consultants to both public and private tourism entities, offering insights on environmental management, heritage conservation, and community-based tourism initiatives. The high mean score reflects the importance of their expert contributions to sustainable tourism projects and strategies.

In general, the overall mean score of 2.54 demonstrates that educational institutions are highly engaged across all roles in sustainable tourism development. Their comprehensive involvement in research, training, policy support, and expert consultation makes them indispensable partners in advancing sustainability in the tourism industry. According to the UNWTO (2019), collaboration between academia and other tourism stakeholders is critical for creating long-lasting impacts on both the environmental and socio-economic dimensions of tourism.

In general, educational institutions are well-positioned to be lead partners in sustainable tourism initiatives by leveraging their research capabilities, policy influence, and capacity-building expertise. The findings from Table 3 suggest that universities and colleges are already making meaningful contributions to sustainable tourism development, particularly in policy formulation and expert advice. Strengthening their

role further could enhance the tourism sector's ability to adapt to sustainability challenges and opportunities.

Community Residents/Leaders

Community engagement is crucial for tourism development, especially in the context of sustainable tourism. Involving local residents and leaders in planning, decision-making, equitable benefit-sharing, and interactions with tourists fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that tourism benefits are fairly distributed within the community. This study found that community residents and leaders exhibited a moderate level of engagement in these areas, with an overall mean score of 2.21. While engagement is occurring, there is considerable room for improvement in involving community members in sustainable tourism efforts.

Table 4 Engagement of Community Residents and Leaders in Sustainable Tourism Development

Role of Community Residents and Leaders	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Engaging in planning and decision on tourism at a local level	2.18	Moderate
Representing and communicating local community interest	2.22	Moderate
Pursuing equitable benefit sharing within communities	2.22	Moderate
Interacting with tourist to mutual benefit	2.22	Moderate
Reviewing income from tourism spending	2.22	Moderate
Mean	2.21	Moderate

The involvement of community residents and leaders in planning and decision-making remains moderate, with a mean score of 2.18. This suggests that while community members are becoming more engaged, challenges persist in ensuring their full participation. Recent studies, such as Li and Hunter (2020), emphasized the importance of local community involvement in tourism planning. They argue that for tourism to be sustainable, it must be inclusive and reflect local socio-economic and cultural contexts.

Recent research supports these findings. For instance, Blackstock et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of formal mechanisms for community feedback and representation, stressing the need for participatory governance models that enhance local engagement. Their work showed that community input should play a key role in shaping tourism development strategies, making decision-making processes more inclusive. Regarding the role of representing and communicating local interests, engagement also remains moderate (2.22). Studies, such as Zhao et al. (2021), pointed out barriers such as limited access to information, insufficient resources, and power imbalances, which hinder effective community representation. They found that poor communication between community leaders and tourism stakeholders often leads to fragmented decision-making and missed opportunities for sustainable development. Strengthening communication channels and advocacy groups could improve community participation.

Similarly, the role of pursuing equitable benefit-sharing, rated at 2.22, suggesting moderate success in distributing tourism revenues fairly among local residents. Peterman and Strickland (2020) argued that community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives can enhance equity by ensuring a fair distribution of tourism income. They recommended participatory budgeting practices to improve transparency and accountability in revenue distribution.

Community interaction with tourists, also rated moderately (2.22), indicating opportunities for improvement. Boley et al. (2018) emphasized that interactions between tourists and local communities

foster cultural exchange and mutual understanding, enhancing both the tourist experience and community outcomes. Initiatives such as community-led tours or cultural workshops could further enhance engagement in this area.

Lastly, community involvement in reviewing income from tourism spending, rated at 2.22, highlights a need for greater empowerment. Dredge and Whitford (2019) pointed out that local communities often lack the tools to effectively assess tourism spending benefits. Providing training on economic impact assessment and financial transparency would enable communities to better track tourism revenues and advocate for equitable distribution.

Overall, the moderate level of community engagement across these roles suggests a need to institutionalize stronger community participation in strategic tourism planning and decision-making processes. By building capacity for residents to review and assess tourism impacts, communities can become more active partners in achieving sustainable tourism goals.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Overall, the majority of tourism stakeholders have embraced their respective roles in promoting tourism development, specifically sustainable tourism as reflected in their engagement across various functions. Private-sector businesses (2.5), NGOs (2.5), and educational institutions (2.54) demonstrated high engagement, highlighting their contributions to sustainable tourism. The commitment of stakeholders to their assigned roles suggests that sustainable tourism is achievable at the local government level.

The high level of engagement from the private business sector, particularly in product development, investment, and job creation, reflects a strong recognition of tourism's economic potential. This indicates that businesses in Ilocos Norte are actively contributing to the region's economic growth through innovation and infrastructure development. However, the moderate involvement in connecting tourism to broader markets and influencing policy highlights areas for improvement. Strengthening collaboration between businesses and policymakers could help unlock tourism's full potential for regional and international market expansion, enhancing the province's competitiveness and sustainability.

NGOs also displayed a significant overall engagement (mean score: 2.50), particularly in advocating for community interests (mean score: 2.77) and coordinating stakeholder efforts (mean score: 2.51). However, their moderate involvement in strategic planning and capacity-building (mean scores of 2.36 and 2.37, respectively) suggests opportunities for NGOs to have a greater impact in these areas, particularly by playing a more active role in shaping long-term tourism strategies.

Educational institutions exhibited strong engagement in sustainable tourism development, with an overall mean score of 2.54. Their involvement in knowledge dissemination, policy support, training, and providing expert advice emphasizes their critical role in shaping sustainable tourism practices and equipping stakeholders with essential skills.

Community residents and leaders showed a moderate level of engagement in sustainable tourism, as reflected by a mean score of 2.21. While they play crucial roles in planning, decision-making, and equitable benefit-sharing, there is significant potential to further enhance their participation and influence in tourism initiatives. Empowering these community members could lead to more inclusive and sustainable tourism outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions above, the following recommendations are forwarded:

1. Strengthen collaboration between the private business sector and local governments by establishing formal mechanisms for business representation in tourism policy discussions and supporting smaller businesses in accessing international markets. This will help overcome barriers and enhance the sector's contribution to sustainable tourism in Ilocos Norte.
2. Integrate NGOs in the strategic planning and capacity-building initiatives to leverage their expertise and insights. Increasing funding for these efforts will empower local communities, fostering a more inclusive approach to tourism management.
3. Policymakers and industry stakeholders should collaborate with educational institutions to incorporate research findings into tourism strategies. This partnership will enhance the effectiveness of sustainable tourism practices and increase investment in training programs to empower professionals and community members.
4. Establish mechanisms for community residents to be involved in planning and decision-making, such as creating advisory boards and feedback sessions. Improving communication between community leaders and tourism stakeholders will amplify local interests. Implement training programs to equip community members with skills for monitoring tourism impacts, enabling them to advocate for equitable benefit-sharing and meaningful interactions with tourists.

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