

Review Article

Understanding the Importance of Stakeholder Management in Achieving Sustainable Ecotourism

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism brings many economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits to the tourism destination, but its implementation is not simple. Several studies in the past have shown the importance of including stakeholders for the development of ecotourism in the area. Understanding stakeholders varied interests and their power of influence is vital to achieve sustainability in a tourism destination. The study aimed to develop a multi-stakeholder management model that could unite stakeholders towards achieving sustainable ecotourism in the area. A critical synthesis of the literature was conducted by classifying and then critically reviewing the literature to construct and integrate the variables that could help in the better management of stakeholders, which would lead towards the development of a framework that can guide in achieving sustainability in ecotourism. This study validates previous findings and also directs to develop a sustainable ecotourism framework through which the environmental, social, and economic benefits can be achieved in the destination. Understanding multiple stakeholders helps to achieve sustainability and, as a result, makes

the tourist destination experience better for both the visitor and host. The developed model would add value to the literature by enriching tourism destination stakeholders understanding, precisely related to the multiple stakeholder management, and leads to achieving ecotourism sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism plays a critical role in boosting the economy of the area (Abdullah et al., 2018; Miočić et al., 2016). Ecotourism boosts the destination by creating more jobs and providing an alternate source of living to the community of the area (Pongponrat & Chantradoan, 2012). Moreover, ecotourism seeks to protect resources, primarily biological and also maintains sustainability in the use of resources to help travelers give ecological experience, protect the environment and enhances the economic activities aspects of the destination (Kiper, 2013). Ecotourism undoubtedly presents several types of opportunities to the destination, but its implementation is challenging because of the involvement of multiple stakeholders (Üllenberg et al., 2015). For ecotourism to promote sustainability in the destination, which can benefit the community of the destination, enhance environmental protection and become economically viable, it must account for the complexity of issues generated because of the presence of multiple stakeholders in the ecotourism destination. Stakeholders are vital for ecotourism implementation in the destination and management is considered to be crucial for the success of an ecotourism destination (Su et al., 2014).

In the past, the stakeholder concept was mostly related to the context of organizations and their management. Researchers such as Getz and Timur (2005) have noted that destination settings are somewhat similar to the settings of the organizations. However,

the structure of the tourism destination is more complicated as compared to the organizations. Tourism destination also encompasses different stakeholders such as communities, government sector, NGOs and businesses, and these stakeholders are impacted back by the destination, and they also have the ability to influence the destination or the project taking place in the destination (Komppula, 2016; Lalicic, 2018; Wei & Yang, 2013).

Tourism development literature also emphasizes on including the stakeholder identification, power estimation, interest determination and strategy for improving stakeholder relationships, their management, prioritization and categorization for better managing the destination (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; Timur & Getz, 2008). Studies conducted by Kenawy and Shaw (2014), and Osman et al. (2018) identified that lack of stakeholder collaboration and management in an ecotourism destination could lead to

- Continuous degradation of the destination
- Reduction of the benefits provided to the stakeholders especially the community
- Degradation of natural resources because of informal and unregulated activities
- Lack of stakeholder management leads to the failure of plans for the destination

Researchers have identified that the sustainability of a tourist destination is dependent on stakeholders and their level of

interest in the destination. The development and management of ecotourism destinations for the long term sustainability will not work well if there is no active role and interest involved for each stakeholder (McComb et al., 2017; Wei & Yang, 2013). Mihalic (2016) and McComb et al. (2017) identified that difficulties in understanding issues and achieving a mutual ground among stakeholders was the main barrier in achieving sustainable ecotourism. Past literature has shown that stakeholders level of interest and their power to influence changes as time passes due to which issues among stakeholders rise (Berardi, 2013; Newcombe, 2003; Walker et al., 2008). Sustainable ecotourism is only possible when all the stakeholders are adequately managed. Lack of stakeholder management not only leads to making stakeholders resistant to the ecotourism implementation, but it also leads to significant overlap and unwanted utilization of the resources (Salman et al., 2020). Recognizing and managing stakeholders according to their interests and influence power is crucial for the long term sustainability of ecotourism destination.

Even though stakeholder management has been recognized as a critical step toward to achieve sustainable ecotourism (Getz & Timur, 2005) and numerous studies in the past have tried to explore the stakeholder management point from various perspectives. Wondriadi et al. (2020) argued that on the investigation of the contributions of stakeholders to achieve sustainable ecotourism. Su et al. (2014) argued

on understanding relationships among stakeholders and emphasized on community participation to achieve sustainability in the destination. Abdullah et al. (2018) explained that increasing number of visitors and improper environmental management strategies from the perspectives of four main stakeholders; management authorities, local communities, tour guides and visitors led to unsustainability in the destination. While the previous researches are widespread and the existing studies have been largely fragmented theoretically, and have not yet developed a framework that guides to understand multiple stakeholders in an ecotourism destination and then develop management strategies to manage multiple stakeholders present in the destination. To address this issue, we propose a framework that first utilizes stakeholder theory to analyze the different aspects of stakeholders such as stakeholders interests and stakeholder level of influence and the second feature is to develop a managerial approach to develop management strategies for the stakeholders to achieve ecotourism sustainability in the destination. Since the stakeholder theory will be used as the underpinning theory for the proposed framework, this paper will start to deliberate on stakeholder theory, followed by proposing a theoretical framework and discuss its relevancy in managing ecotourism destinations.

Background

This segment examined the literature related to the subject being explored. This encompasses a general presentation

of the stakeholder theory, stakeholder interests, stakeholder influence, stakeholder management, and finally, ecotourism implementation.

Stakeholder Theory- An Overview.

Stakeholder theory was initially originated for the field of business and management during the 1980s (Freeman, 2010). Stakeholder theory helps to define, identify, and then analyze stakeholders for the success of a project or for the betterment of the organization. The main principle behind stakeholder theory is the principle of fairness, which implies that all stakeholders should be treated equally, and their interests should be equally regarded in a project (Phillips, 1997, 2003).

Understanding the stakeholders participating in the project is vital for the success of a project. It does not matter whether the project is related to engineering, management, or tourism. Stakeholder theory suggests that stakeholders should be divided into two main groups (Kenawy et al., 2017; Waligo et al., 2013).

- Primary stakeholders
- Secondary stakeholders

Primary stakeholders are those stakeholders without whose participation, the organization, or the project will cease to exist or will not be able to survive (Riahi, 2017; Waligo et al., 2013). While the secondary stakeholders are those that influence or affect or are influenced or affected by the organization, but the success of the project or the survival is not dependent

on the secondary stakeholders (Byrd, 2007; Riahi, 2017). Primary stakeholders will be heavily involved throughout the process (Maguire et al., 2012), while the secondary stakeholders are not directly associated with the project however can influence the project. Similar to the organizations, tourism destinations also have primary and secondary stakeholders such as NGOs, institutions, government agencies, local community, and businesses.

Stakeholder Theory in Tourism. Since the early 20th century, researchers have been striving to incorporate this stakeholder theory in tourism to get a better understanding of the stakeholders present in the tourism destination (Byrd, 2007; McComb et al., 2017; Nicolaides, 2015). Stakeholders are the main actors for sustainable tourism development in the destination, and their management plays a crucial role in the success of the tourism destination (Backman & Munanura, 2015; Lyon et al., 2017). Stakeholder theory also has a significant impact on the growth of ecotourism because it helps to identify the key players that are involved in the planning and decision making and thereby making the process of ecotourism implementation smoother, participatory and mutually agreeable by all parties involved in the destination (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005).

The planners and developers of the tourism destination have also realized that the policy development of the area must involve the diverse number of stakeholders who are impacted by the

ecotourism development (Fennell, 2003). Thus, the stakeholder theory can help to provide a management framework that is compatible with the values and ethics of the sustainable development paradigm (Getz & Timur, 2005). Another utility of the stakeholder theory is that it helps to include the perspectives of all stakeholder groups present in the destination with respect to the decision making and general management of resources in the area (Moswete et al., 2012).

Stakeholder theory also guides to understand the interests, stakes, and the power of the stakeholders that are involved in the tourism destination (Chan & Bhatta, 2013; Harrison & Freeman, 2015; Noto & Noto, 2019). It is vital to include stakeholders' interests and understand their power of influence during the development, planning, and management of ecotourism in the destination (Byrd, 2007; Chan & Bhatta, 2013). No stakeholder interest should be left behind (Harrison & Freeman, 2015; Kenawy et al., 2017; Wei & Yang, 2013). Treating all stakeholders with the same respect, value, and fairness will generate a synergy towards making a project successful. Byrd (2007) identified main ecotourism stakeholders as local communities, protected area personnel, tourism industry, NGOs, consumers, financial institutions and ecotourism associations in the area.

Freeman (2010) stated that the essential component of the stakeholder theory was understanding the mutual interests and the power of influence of the stakeholders through which the stakeholders could be better managed. Stakeholder management

relies a great extent on stakeholder theory to develop strategic management solutions (Eskerod & Huemann, 2013).

Stakeholder theory can contribute significantly to understanding the processes involved in stakeholder management and achieving sustainability. The studies related to the stakeholder theory give strong evidence of how the stakeholder theory can contribute towards tourism sustainability (Perez-Batres et al., 2012). Together with the support of stakeholder theory, stakeholders roles, interests, and their power of influence can be determined for better management of the stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

This section talks about the methodology and the theory that supports the framework of this article to develop a sustainable ecotourism framework. This study proposed to adopt stakeholder theory by Freeman, which emphasizes on identifying, understanding, and then managing stakeholders. To develop the conceptual framework, numerous methods were used to accumulate, synthesize, and examine the literature. The literature search used the following keywords "stakeholders involvement in ecotourism development", "sustainable ecotourism framework," and "stakeholders management in ecotourism destination." Different subjects were also analyzed to understand the stakeholders because stakeholders can impact on the success of the project. The search for the articles was done through Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Web of Science.

After finding the relevant literature, an in-depth review of the literature was conducted to construct and integrate the variables that could help in the better management of stakeholders, which would lead to achieving sustainability in ecotourism. Epistemological approach was used in this study because this approach recommends that because of the interaction between the researcher and the research issues and also for a reason that of the attempt of the researcher to understand viewpoints of the other studies and researchers and then interpret them, the findings of the study exist (Creswell & Clark, 2007). A deductive approach was used in this study, which was informed by the theories and studies used in the development of this paper. This review methodology is also in line with Gilson and Goldberg (2015), where they noted that the conceptual paper should provide a link between existing theories, literature from different subjects, provide multi-level perceptions and expanded the room for thinking.

Proposed Framework

This study tries to bring a new perspective for developing an ecotourism framework by managing stakeholders in the destination. The stakeholder theory also supports the view that the stakeholders' interests and their power of influence should be understood to make sure that the complete support of stakeholders is possible for sustainable tourism development. The gap between the understanding of the stakeholders' interests and their power of influence should be understood before developing management strategies that can

lead to a sustainable ecotourism model. This is where stakeholder management as a mediating variable is relevant to this framework. Stakeholder management plays the role of the mediator in this research because it helps to explain and strengthen the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables. In the past, stakeholder management has been used as a mediator to strengthen the relationship between project success and also to achieve sustainability (Backman & Munanura, 2015; Rajablu et al., 2015; Rhodes et al., 2014). So, this study also utilizes stakeholder management as a mediator and tries to evaluate it from the perspective of sustainable tourism. The independent variables influence the mediator, and as a result, mediator influences the dependent variable. After understanding the stakeholders' interests and their influence capabilities, this study recommends to identify and develop stakeholder management strategies for the management of the stakeholders. The literature identified that stakeholder management could be done through engaging, empowerment, and monitoring of stakeholders (Rajablu et al., 2015; Waligo et al., 2013).

The understanding of the interest and the influence of the stakeholders in a tourism destination is vital for the success of the tourism destination. The management of the stakeholders of the destination on the basis of interests and influence power could help to cover the gap, and the subsequent effect would be the long term sustainable ecotourism in the destination. This study is the result of the literature review from previous

studies and many suggestions provided by different researchers such as Chan and Bhatta (2013), Waligo et al. (2013), Ayachi and Jaouadi (2017), Kenawy et al. (2017), and Mendoza-Ramos and Prideaux (2018). Thus, this study developed a conceptual framework for future scholars to establish a connection between the independent variables such as stakeholders interests, stakeholders influence, mediating variable stakeholder management, and finally, the dependent variable sustainable ecotourism implementation and operationalization. The constructs are materialistic interests, environmental interests, socio-cultural interests, power, and networking. The conceptual framework in this study has two independent variables, namely, stakeholders interests and stakeholders

influence. The dependent variable is the successful implementation of ecotourism, and the mediating variable is stakeholder management, as shown in Figure 1. There are three stages in this framework known as stage 1: action, stage 2: purpose, and stage 3: effect stage. This study centers on understanding stakeholders' interests and influences for the development of the sustainable ecotourism framework. Stakeholders are critical players in the implementation and long term ecotourism in any destination, and their importance cannot be ignored. Consequently, with the help of data collected through mixed methodology research, it is proposed that these factors might contribute towards achieving sustainable ecotourism in the destination.

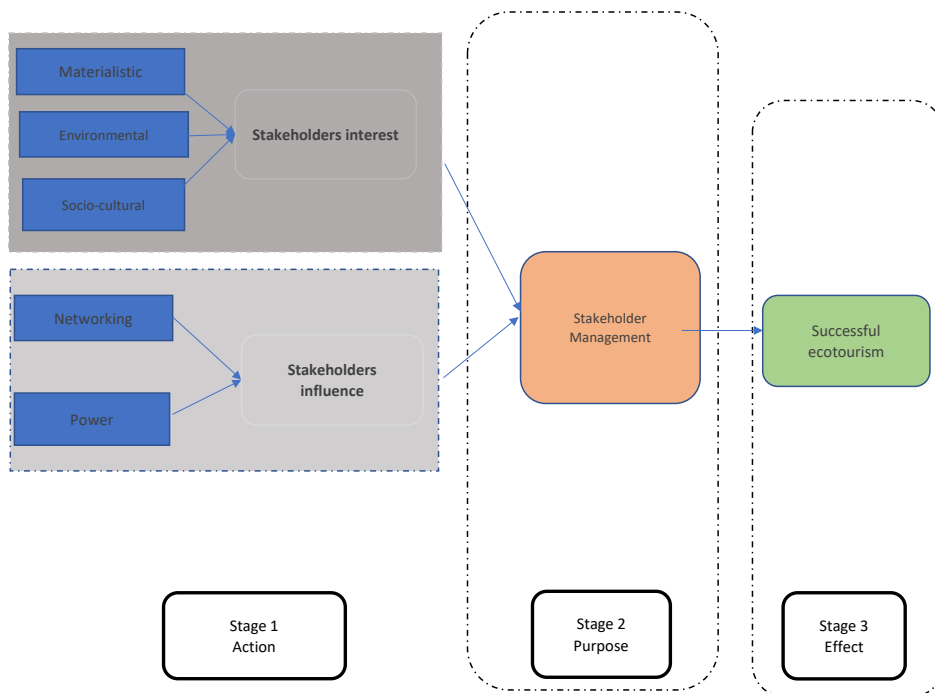


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework

Understanding Framework Components

Stakeholders Interest. The actions of the stakeholders define their interest in the project (Kenawy et al., 2017). Stakeholders importance is not judged by the possession of the money or information they hold but by the responsibilities, their contribution, and the stakes they have in the sustainable development of the destination (Getz & Timur, 2005; Nicolaidis, 2015). Stakeholders interest can also be judged by how much loss or benefit they can suffer from the project. The more the stakeholders are involved in the project, the stronger their interest will be in the project. This interest of the stakeholders can increase or decrease because of different reasons such as ownership in the project, values, legal claim, monetary benefits, and some risk and return. Stakeholder theory also points out that the interests of the stakeholders are not only economical, but different stakeholders have other types of tangible interests as well (Freeman, 2010). After reviewing the studies, stakeholders identified different type of stakeholders interest while related to the sustainable tourism which are

1. Materialistic interest
2. Socio-cultural interest
3. Environmental sustainability interest

It is crucial to understand that the stakeholders' interests vary among and in the groups. The disparate interests of the stakeholders can be an obstacle to prioritize actions and distort collective

efforts, which can result in the failure of the project (Nicolaidis, 2015). Furthermore, the benefit of recognizing and understanding stakeholders interest is that it allows to include them as a part of the collective effort. Rajablu et al. (2015) stated that in order to achieve success in a project, stakeholders interests played a vital role in stakeholder management. Moreover, understanding and identifying stakeholders with varied interests help to bring more ideas, including different perspectives, gain support, fair to everyone, strengthens the project and saves from being blindsided by different concerns such as stakeholders striking against the project or losing their interest in the project (Osman et al., 2018). Achieving collaboration among stakeholders from different areas with diverse interests can generate integrative and holistic approaches for sustainable development, policy development, and achieving advance sustainability (Lee et al., 2017; Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2010). For sustainable tourism, the primary stakeholders of the area should have strong interests in environmental protection, financial benefits the ecotourism can bring, and socio-cultural promotion. Sustainable tourism development is ecologically sustainable, economically viable and socially equitable (Ecological Tourism in Europe, 2005). In order to understand sustainable development in tourism, proactive planning should be done to anticipate the issues that can arise in the future and to find the best solution for the problems. Hardy and Pearson (2016) stated that sustainable tourism development by focusing on its principles and with proper

planning should influence the (1) Economic health, (2) Subjective well being of local (3) Protection of natural resources, (4) Healthy culture and (5) Optimum satisfaction of guest requirements.

In order to achieve a better results in a tourism destination, it is said that similar interests among stakeholder belonging to different groups will have a positive impact on that change (Butler, 2018). If the interests are urgent, then it is more likely that the stakeholders will protect those interests (Miočić et al., 2016). Studying stakeholders' interests that can affect the outcome and can help to achieve sustainable ecotourism development in the area can help to ease the process of sustainable tourism (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). Stakeholders interest is associated with the stakeholder influence because a highly interested stakeholder can significantly influence the project due to which stakeholder's interest should be combined to develop proper management strategies.

Stakeholder Influences. Stakeholder influence is referred to as the level of impact and involvement of a stakeholder to bring the required shift in the project (Eskerod & Huemann, 2013). Freeman (1999) defined stakeholders influence as a set of actions stakeholders use to achieve their interests. This also helps us to identify a strong relationship between stakeholders interest and their power of influence. In the past stakeholder, influence has been used as an effective tool in the sustainable development studies to explore and demonstrate the

influence that the stakeholders hold over the decision making and the planning (Lyon et al., 2017).

Both the stakeholders' interests and their influence are related to each other because, in order to have an influence over a project, stakeholders should have a strong commitment and interest in the issues and actions occurring in the project (Yang, 2014). For tourism destination, multiple stakeholders influence can be measured through their power and their networking in the destination. Power can be personal, political, or positional, and networking of the stakeholders can be within the destination or outside the destination as well. The more powerful the stakeholders are, the more probable they will influence the project (Freeman, 2010).

Sustainable ecotourism development in a tourism destination can be influenced by stakeholder groups in many ways such as including tourism supply and demand, regulation, management of tourism impacts, human resources impose a correlation between goals of tourism stakeholder management and the implementation of sustainable tourism. The stakeholders could also form local, regional, national, and international action groups through networking to influence the activities and decision-making of the project. Furthermore, they can also establish alliances and allegiances to have a more significant impact (Voss, 2014). Stakeholders can also control resources to exert influence. Their level of influence can also be determined by how much hold they have over the resources

of the area. Understanding stakeholder influence is thus crucial in promoting environmental sustainability.

As the concept of the stakeholder theory has evolved over the past years, it is thought to be synonymous with collaboration and management (Stoll-Kleemann et al., 2010; Van Cuong et al., 2018). Stakeholder theory identifies that there are several parties involved, and understanding their interests and influences is significant for the management of the stakeholders to project success and sustainability in the area (Waligo et al., 2013).

Stakeholder Management. The complexity and severity of environmental problems, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, ocean acidification, and interconnected problems, such as water and food security, need the support of all stakeholders in the society (Ayala-orozco et al., 2018). Implementing appropriate solutions to these problems requires the proper management and collaboration of government, civil society organizations (CSOs), local communities, and businesses (Ayala-orozco et al., 2018; Miočić et al., 2016).

Management of the diverse stakeholder groups mentioned above and tackling their interests can occur at national, regional, and local levels and is mostly orchestrated by a range of different organizations (Nicolaidis, 2015). The inaccessibility of many stakeholders in the tourism system creates practical communication problems and appears to be a significant factor

behind the development of collaboration and management strategies (Van Cuong et al., 2017). The first step in developing a management strategy should be to understand the interest and influence of the stakeholders involved. Influential stakeholders with the highest interest are the most important and are followed by the stakeholders with less influence power and interest (Yang, 2014).

Management of the stakeholders plays a vital role in the success of the project. Project Stakeholder Management has been introduced as the tenth (10th) Knowledge Areas of PMBOK® Guide, 5th Edition, which was published in 2013. After understanding the stakeholders' interests and influences, they can be managed through developing communication and engagement strategies. A study conducted by Salman et al. (2020), on understanding the success indicators in the development of ecotourism framework also identified that key stakeholders involvement and their management were vital for the development of ecotourism framework. This study also emphasized on the management and involvement of the primary stakeholders by identifying their interests and influence level. The literature identified that stakeholder management could be done through engaging stakeholders accordingly to their level of influence and interest (Kent et al., 2012; Rajablu et al., 2015). Stakeholder management is considered as processes required to identify stakeholders or organizations impacted by the project, analyzing stakeholder expectations

(interests), and impact on the project (influence), and developing appropriate management strategies for effectively engaging stakeholders in project decisions and execution (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2013). Stakeholder management is an iterative process, which manages stakeholders through a deliberate plan of action and strategic planning for the life of the project. Inadequate understanding of the stakeholders interests and influence will lead to misunderstanding and raise conflicts between the stakeholders and eventually impacting the success of the project. PMI (2013) after considering the importance of these aspects, proposed that the stakeholder management for the project should be based on the process shown in Figure 2.

It should be noted that the management of the stakeholders by understanding the stakeholders' interests and their influences is not a simple task. Stakeholders can have varied interests and power to influence

the project (Kenawy et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Osman et al., 2018; Yang, 2014). It is also essential to understand stakeholders because the relationship between the stakeholders keeps on changing, and moreover, new stakeholders with varied interests and influence also keep on emerging over time (Getz & Timur, 2005). For instance, the private sector may have a keen interest in the economic development activities in the region, but only a small interest in biodiversity conservation. While on the other hand, the NGO's position in the region might be different. It will be more interested in biodiversity conservation and less interested in the economic activities that can hinder the conservation in the region (Fennell & Dowling, 2003).

Ecotourism Implementation. The concept of ecotourism was generated due to the negative impacts of mass tourism on one hand and environmental awareness on the

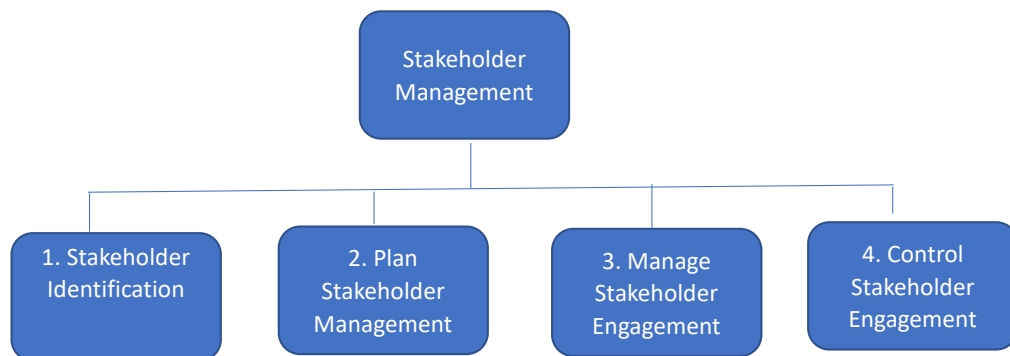


Figure 2. Stakeholder management processes PMI (2013)

other (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Dam, 2013; Nigar, 2018; Picard, 2015). The International Ecotourism Society (2018) defined ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education.”

Ecotourism has gone through many changes since the time of its emergence. It is one of the rare topics in the field of tourism that has been debated and researched but is still facing practical implementation issues (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Walker & Moscardo, 2014).

Researchers have found that the lack of understanding on stakeholders interest and influences can lead to the failure of ecotourism implementation (Ayachi & Jaouadi, 2017; Rivera et al., 2018). All the stakeholders such as the local community, government, NGOs, tourists, research institutions should work together despite of the diversified interests and their power to influence to enhance the community well-being and the conservation of the resources. NGOs and the local government should collaborate with the community for a better understanding on this issues (Chan & Bhatta, 2013; Grieves et al., 2014; Mendoza-Ramos & Prideaux, 2018).

If ecotourism is implemented and maintained properly with the help of stakeholders, it can not only help generate economic benefits for the destination, but it can also stop the environmental destruction, increase cultural awareness and protect the resources of the destination (Salman et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the

issues and varied interests of these multiple stakeholders are considered to be vital for successful ecotourism implementation.

RESULTS

Several studies have been conducted in the past to develop a sustainable ecotourism framework, and the main focus areas of researches were concerned about the factors affecting sustainable ecotourism. Researchers have acknowledged that key players for implementing and managing ecotourism are the stakeholders, and their involvement and collaboration is vital for the successful implementation of ecotourism in the area. Literature observed for this study shows some researches focused on the place-specific conditions for ecotourism development, while some have focused on governance strategies to develop sustainable ecotourism in the area. All of the studies reviewed have pointed out that the stakeholders are vital for ecotourism implementation, and without their involvement, collaboration and management, ecotourism implementation, or operationalization in an area is not possible. Some of the primary studies conducted to develop sustainable ecotourism are mentioned in the table provided in appendix section.

The studies analyzed showed that continuous work was being done on achieving sustainability in ecotourism. The studies indicated some critical factors for achieving ecotourism sustainability which are:

1. Conservation
2. Destination Management
3. Stakeholders collaboration
4. Ecotourism policy development

The researchers are aware of the importance of the multiple stakeholder management, but still, none of the studies above has focused on understanding stakeholders interest and their influence first to develop management strategies for stakeholders to achieve ecotourism sustainability in the destination. Understanding stakeholders interests and their level of influence will help to prioritize key stakeholders and can also guide to achieve unity among different stakeholders to achieve a common goal of ecotourism sustainability.

Ecotourism successful implementation is not possible without the stakeholders' involvement, collaboration, and management. This study focused on the factors related to stakeholders and how their interest and influence could be aligned for the management of stakeholders, which would eventually lead towards successful ecotourism implementation. Ecotourism implementation requires a framework, and it cannot be implemented if the stakeholders are not adequately understood and managed. Past literature also points out that stakeholders interests and their level of influence should be understood first before developing a strategy. Stakeholder management can be done through stakeholder engagement, and positive engagement will help and guide to develop sustainable ecotourism in the destination

Social Relevance and Implications of The Framework

Ecotourism, as identified by the International Ecotourism Society, focuses on reducing environmental damages, developing cultural and environmental awareness, enhancing the tourism experience for both visitors and hosts, provide financial benefits for conservation, and developing low impact facilities. This study will help to develop a sustainable ecotourism framework through which the environmental, social, and economic benefits can be achieved in the destination. The successful implementation of the ecotourism in the destination will result in creating more jobs and long term alternate source of living for the community. Moreover, environmental awareness will be enhanced, and the socio-cultural impact of tourism would be positive. Natural resources and its management would be done in an efficient way for the long term sustainability of the area. This framework will help to understand stakeholders of the destination because without understanding the stakeholders, it is not possible to implement sustainable ecotourism in the destination, and the benefits of ecotourism cannot be enjoyed. So, this model will also validate the previous findings that the understanding stakeholders and then developing strategies for the management of the stakeholders for the ecotourism implementation can lead to the successful ecotourism development in the area.

DISCUSSION

Importance of all primary stakeholders

cannot be overlooked while developing a sustainable ecotourism plan for a destination. Stakeholders need to be adequately managed so that they remain focused towards the same goal of achieving sustainability in the destination. Stakeholders will be involved in a destination if they have a high interest in it. Stakeholders with high interest will also be able to influence as well, so their management is of vital significance for the successful ecotourism in the destination. There are times when stakeholder management is complex, especially when multiple stakeholders are involved. Stakeholders interests and influence should be considered to make stakeholder management successful.

After analyzing the studies provided in Table 1, the difference between the successful and less successful ecotourism was observed. Successful ecotourism destinations included countries like Korea, UK, Mexico, Costa Rica, Austria, Africa and Australia. The main successful ecotourism factors identified in these points were the involvement of stakeholders, influencing stakeholders involvement, identifying key stakeholders, understanding and managing stakeholders interests, understanding stakeholders involvement capacity, analyzing stakeholders relationships, monitoring and evaluating ecotourism activities in the destination, ecological rules for the preservation of resources and environment, stakeholders support. Moreover, it was also observed that internet advertising, understanding of the right ecotourism activities, and continued

financial support for expansion was a key for a thriving ecotourism destination. Resources such as transportation infrastructure to overcome remoteness and a technical connection to the outside for public relations and advertising are necessary. As a result of successful ecotourism implementation, these destinations were able to enjoy great economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefits like more jobs, cultural promotion, biodiversity preservation and environmental protection. The community and other key stakeholders of these destinations seemed to be eager to take part in the ecotourism activities because they were aware of the benefits it will bring to them.

Less successful ecotourism destinations present in Ethiopia, South Africa, Indonesia, Philippines, Egypt, Greece, Nepal, China and Romania also identified some key points to enhance ecotourism in the destination. The analysis of the less ecotourism destinations identified that lack of satisfaction, difference in perception of stakeholders, lack of stakeholder management strategies, lack of awareness of issues, focusing on economic activities only, lack of support from the community, lack of stakeholders involvement from stakeholders, varied stakeholders interests, limited resources, overlapping land ownership structure, political issues, lack of appropriate ecotourism policies and plans, accessibility issues and finally lack of proper destination management was observed to the main factors that made these destinations less successful in implementing and maintaining long term ecotourism sustainability.

Table 1
Synthesised articles list

No	Author	Geographical Area	Ecotourism			Management			Conservation			Stakeholders		
			ED	EI	EPD	DM	MMS	CA	BC	RC	SC	KSI	SI	SIF
1	Hardy & Beeton (2001)	Australia				✓						✓	✓	✓
2	TG Ko (2005)	Korea	✓		✓							✓	✓	✓
3	Courvisanos & Jain (2006)	Costa Rica		✓				✓		✓				
4	Pipinos & Fokiali (2009)	Northern Karpathos, Greece				✓		✓		✓				
5	Chan & Bhatta (2013)	Nepal	✓	✓			✓					✓	✓	
6	Wei & Yang (2013)	China	✓									✓	✓	
7	Waligo et al. (2013)	UK	✓					✓				✓	✓	
8	Su et al. (2014)	China						✓				✓	✓	✓
9	Grievies et al. (2014)	Mexico				✓			✓			✓	✓	
10	Ramos & Prideaux (2014)	Mexico	✓					✓				✓	✓	
11	Zehrer & Hallmann (2015)	Austria	✓					✓					✓	
12	Nicolaides (2015)	South Africa						✓					✓	✓
13	Candrea & Herțanu (2015)	Romania		✓		✓				✓			✓	
14	Cobbinah et al. (2015)	Africa (Ghana)				✓				✓			✓	✓
15	Miočić et al. (2016)	Croatia	✓					✓					✓	✓

Table 1 (Continued)

No	Author	Geographical Area	Ecotourism			Management			Conservation			Stakeholders		
			ED	EI	EPD	DM	MMS	CA	BC	RC	SC	KSI	SI	SIF
16	Wang et al. (2016)	Taiwan	✓				✓				✓			✓
17	Lee et al. (2017)	Korea	✓				✓					✓		✓
18	Kenawy et al. (2017)	Egypt	✓									✓		✓
19	Ayachi & Jaouadi (2017)	Island of Farasan				✓					✓		✓	
20	Van Cuong et al. (2017)	Australia					✓				✓			✓
21	Ayala-orozco et al. (2018)	Mexico	✓				✓				✓			✓
22	Osman et al. (2018)	Egypt	✓				✓				✓			✓
23	Rivera et al. (2018)	Philippines		✓				✓			✓			✓
24	Van Cuong et al. (2018)	Vietnam	✓				✓				✓			✓
25	Litheko & Potgieter (2019)	South Africa	✓			✓								
26	Herlangga & Basuni (2019)	Indonesia	✓											✓
27	Wondriat et al. (2020)	Ethiopia	✓				✓				✓		✓	✓

Coding Note: **Ecotourism** (ED= Ecotourism Development, EI= Ecotourism Integration, EPD= Ecotourism Policy Development); **Management** (DM= Destination Management, MMS= Management of multiple stakeholders); **Conservation** (CA= Conservation Activities, BC= Biodiversity Conservation, EC= Environmental Conservation); **Stakeholders** (SC= Stakeholder Collaboration, KSI= Key stakeholder involvement, SI= Stakeholder Interest, SIF= Stakeholder influence)

It can be noticed that whether the destination is successful or less successful, stakeholders are considered to be the key of achieving ecotourism sustainability in the destination. Both types of destinations have pointed out that along with other factors, the management of stakeholders is vital for the success of any tourism destination. It was clearly observed from the less successful ecotourism destinations that lack of understanding and management of the stakeholders resulted in the failure of achieving sustainability in the destination.

The unsuccessful cases of ecotourism implementation also pointed that their lack of understanding of the stakeholders interests was one of the major reasons for the destination failure in contrast to the successful ecotourism destinations pointed out that identifying stakeholders, understanding their interests, level of influence, perceptions and proper management led to the success of the destination. Stakeholders in sustainable ecotourism development can be classified accordingly to their level of interest and the level of their influence. The level of interest will determine how much stakeholders care about the outcomes. Are they beneficiaries or will there be adverse effects? The level of influence will determine the degree in which a stakeholder will make or break the project, for example, authority, protests, legislation or funding. After their level of interest and influence is determined, stakeholders management strategies can be developed to make sure that the stakeholders remain focus on the sustainable ecotourism implementation and development.

In the context of developing a sustainable ecotourism framework, the aforementioned factors mentioned in the framework such as understanding stakeholders' interest and their influences are vital for success. Stakeholders interests and influence power must be considered during planning and decision-making phases for the successful ecotourism development. These factors can lead to the success or failure of an ecotourism destination. It is vital to manage the destination properly with the help of all key stakeholders because stakeholders involved in the destination can influence the destination in various ways such as demand, supply, policy development, workforce or holding of the resources. This indicates the importance of stakeholders management in the destination. Moreover, the majority of the issues that hamper the ecotourism sustainability in the destination are also related to the stakeholders due to which stakeholder management should be carefully planned and strategized. Therefore, the framework proposed in this study will help to understand the interests and level of influence of the stakeholders which will as a result help manage and align all stakeholders of the destination towards achieving ecotourism sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study examined and suggested a positive mediating influence of stakeholder management on ecotourism implementation and operationalization. Consequently, this proposed model has numerous contributions regarding sustainable ecotourism

implementation. The resultant effect of this model would produce results that will offer insights to policymakers and government agencies regarding the significance of the stakeholders in the ecotourism development.

Secondly, past studies have pointed out that the stakeholders are of vital importance when it comes to the implementation of the ecotourism in the destination. Not including the interest of a single stakeholder can lead to the failure of the project. Furthermore, strategic stakeholder management can also lead in creating support for the area and constructs an environment that helps the destination to grow. Understanding the stakeholders involved in the destination will also guide the policymakers to manage the destination efficiently leading towards sustainable ecotourism. The recommended framework also suggests that adequate stakeholder management will lead to sustainable ecotourism. This implies that the understanding of stakeholders interests and their power of influence have the potential to implement ecotourism in the area. Thus, this model can be validated and additional research, both empirical and non-empirical analysis could be done to understand just how the moderating effect of the stakeholder management will lead to the ecotourism implementation and operationalization.

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