

Tourism Culture

Sustainable Tourism Reconstruction

機関誌

観光文化

Tourism Culture



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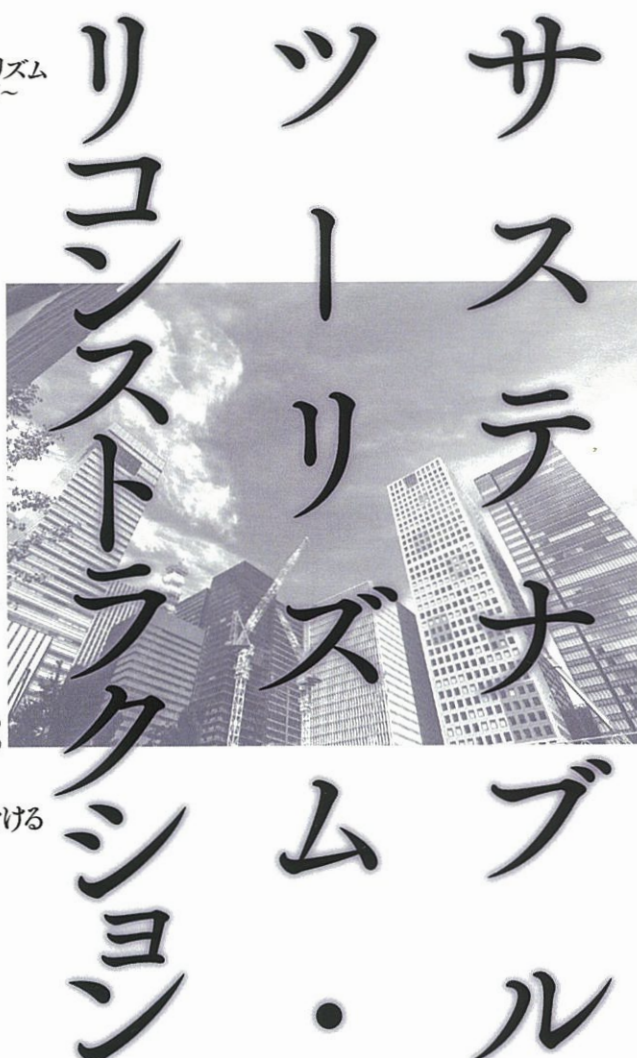
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Prefatory Note: Sustainable Tourism – Advanced and Developing Countries

Prof. Ananda Kumara

Tourism began with the exploration of unseen landscapes, customs, and traditions not found in everyday life, evolving into journeys undertaken for pleasure with the development of transportation networks and means of mobility. Regardless of whether in advanced or developing countries, destinations for such travels expanded beyond national borders to foreign lands, a fact widely acknowledged. However, the recent severe shock of the COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a significant blow to the tourism industry and many individuals alike. During the pandemic, many around the world endured severe restrictions on movement, unable to leave their homes to protect their lives. This hardship affected not only tourists but also those employed in tourism-related industries.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals plummeted by 73.1% in 2020 compared to the previous year, and the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) reported that the tourism and travel industry's share of global GDP decreased from approximately 10.4% to 5.5%, with a corresponding 18.5% decline in employment within the tourism sector.

In Japan, which aimed to become a tourism-oriented country, there was a significant reduction in the number of tourism-related workers, their incomes, and revenues from tourism facilities. The pandemic not only deprived tourists of enjoyment and purpose but also threatened the economic benefits of the country and the livelihoods of those dependent on tourism. For many developing countries heavily reliant on tourism, such as Sri Lanka where I come from, the impact of the pandemic was particularly severe compared to Japan and other advanced countries. These nations not only suffered direct damage to their tourism sectors but also faced significant adverse effects on other economic activities due to their limited healthcare infrastructure, including access to treatments, and their labor-intensive economies.

The term "people" in tourism encompasses not only tourists themselves but also those who provide various services to fulfill their purposes, including related manufacturing and administrative services. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical role of "people" in tourism more than ever before, highlighting the need for careful consideration of sustaining the livelihoods of these individuals alongside ensuring the sustainability of tourism activities and destinations.

I have just returned to my home country of Sri Lanka, a developing country, after an absence of about two and a half years. Reflecting on the previous popularity of Sri Lanka as a tourism destination, the current lack of vibrancy in the country and the significant adverse impact on the daily lives of both residents and tourists is evident.

Similar situations prevail in neighboring countries facing equally challenging circumstances. If this situation persists, affluent individuals from advanced countries may find it increasingly difficult to visit developing countries. The discussion on tourism's deep connection with SDG goals 8, 12, and 14 has been ongoing, but it is through the COVID-19 pandemic that tourism's relevance to all SDG goals has become apparent.



Ananda Kumara

President of LNBTI, Sri Lanka

Ananda Kumar, originally from Sri Lanka, graduated from the Faculty of Science at the University of Kelaniya and subsequently became a lecturer at the same faculty. He pursued further studies in Japan, completing a Master's in Industrial Engineering and a Ph.D. in Social Engineering at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, before working as a researcher at the United Nations Regional Development Center, focusing on regional development in Asian countries. He has since served as a professor at various universities, including Suzuka International University as a professor and dean, as well as holding positions such as Special Professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology and the inaugural dean of the Foreign Languages Faculty at Meijo University. Currently, he serves as the President of Lanka Nippon Biztech Institute (LNBTI), Sri Lanka's first four-year university of Japanese origin, aiming to educate IT professionals capable of contributing to Japan after graduation. In recent years, he has devoted considerable effort to research on sustainable regional development through tourism activities. He also serves as the President of the Global Talent Development Education Association in Japan.

Editorial Note: SDG goals 8, 12, and 14 refer respectively to "Decent Work and Economic Growth," "Responsible Consumption and Production," and "Life Below Water," identified in the United Nations' Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goals as areas where tourism is expected to contribute significantly.

Feature Article #1: Conceptual Clarification of Sustainable Tourism and Related Areas

Yutaka Nakajima

Sustainable Tourism encompasses a wide range of considerations, including economic, social, and environmental issues, and improvements in visitor experiences, alongside a commitment to regional communities. It has its roots in Sustainable Development, a concept proposed in the 1980s as a solution to the urgent need to improve the quality of the global environment and alleviate poverty. Due to differing interpretations regarding its meaning and application, various definitions exist both domestically and internationally.

In Japan, attention to Sustainable Tourism has rapidly increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation has led to specific considerations and initiatives across various tourist destinations, influenced by guidelines such as the "Sustainable Tourism Guidelines (Japanese Version) June 2020" by the Japan Tourism Agency and UNWTO (World Tourism Organization), as well as those by GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council). However, due to the breadth of concepts encompassed by Sustainable Tourism, there remains a current challenge in shared understanding of strategies and objectives among regional stakeholders. Indeed, since the pandemic, I have received numerous inquiries seeking guidance such as "What specific actions should be taken under Sustainable Tourism?", "What are the goals of Sustainable Tourism?", and "Can you provide an overview of Sustainable Tourism as a whole?"

Therefore, in this issue of "Tourism Culture", amidst the full resumption of tourism and inbound travel post-COVID-19, I aim to reorganize and present the concept of Sustainable Tourism that has been discussed and implemented both domestically and internationally. This effort involves "deconstruction" and "reconstruction/reconstruction" to prepare a "navigation chart" for Sustainable Tourism in various tourist destinations, leveraging the expertise of various scholars.

In Feature article #1, as a preliminary examination, I will first clarify the definition and evolution of terms related to Sustainable Tourism from both domestic and international perspectives. Additionally, I will explore several related concepts such as Ecotourism and Responsible Tourism, aiming to highlight the distinctiveness of Sustainable Tourism through comparative analysis.

1. Terminology Organization in Sustainable Tourism and Related Areas

Firstly, "Sustainable Tourism." This term, based on the concept of Sustainable Development proposed by the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) in 1987, was defined by UNWTO in 2004 as tourism that considers the impacts on the current and future economy, society, and environment,

while addressing the needs of visitors, industry, environment, and the community hosting visitors, applicable to all types and forms of tourist destinations. In Japan, despite some usage variations due to its broad concept, the definition adopted by the Japan Tourism Agency is widely recognized as a broad and official definition.

Secondly, "Ecotourism" focuses on sustainable, non-intrusive nature-based tourism, emphasizing learning directly from nature, low-impact and non-consumptive behavior, ethically managed tourism that is locally oriented in terms of management, benefits and scale. On the other hand, in Japan, The Ministry of the Environment defines it as a tourism that targets natural environments and historical cultures, with responsibility for conservation. The Ecotourism approach presented by Japan Ecotourism Association, Japan Nature Conservation Association, and Japan Ecotourism Center, also differs in that it focuses on history, culture, and lifestyle as resource aspects, and is somewhat broader in scope, including cultural aspects other than nature.

Additionally, "Responsible Tourism" has been used in the context of tourism and sustainability since before the 1990s, but lacks a singular official definition nationally and internationally. As highlighted in the Cape Town Declaration of 2002, it emphasizes responsible management in places visited by tourists, where tourism businesses operate, and where local communities and tourism businesses interact, focusing on maximizing positive impacts and minimizing negative ones, as an attitude of action rather than just a phenomenon.

On the other hand, terms such as "Ethical Tourism" and "Regenerative Tourism" have become more common in recent years within the context of tourism and sustainability. Both terms, like Responsible Tourism, lack an official singular definition but they are based on fundamental concepts of sustainable tourism, focusing on considerations such as the environmental, social, and economic impacts within the triple bottom line framework. It seems that terms like "Ethical Tourism" are often used in contexts where both travelers and the industry act ethically in addressing issues, focusing on actions and responses. On the other hand, "Regenerative Tourism" refers not only to mitigating negative impacts but also to generating positive outcomes. These terms are commonly used to specify narrower aspects or situations within sustainable tourism, depending on the context.

Lastly, "Adventure Tourism" is defined by the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) as travel composed of at least two out of three elements: activities, nature, and cultural experiences. Additionally, desired forms include support for "balancing resource utilization and sustainability" and emphasis on "local economies." These perspectives are incorporated as additional elements, sharing many commonalities with sustainable tourism in these respects.

These are the basic background information for each term. In subsequent sections, I will explore the usage trends of each term chronologically and examine in which contexts they are used from a somewhat original perspective.

2. Appearance Timing and Frequency of Terms

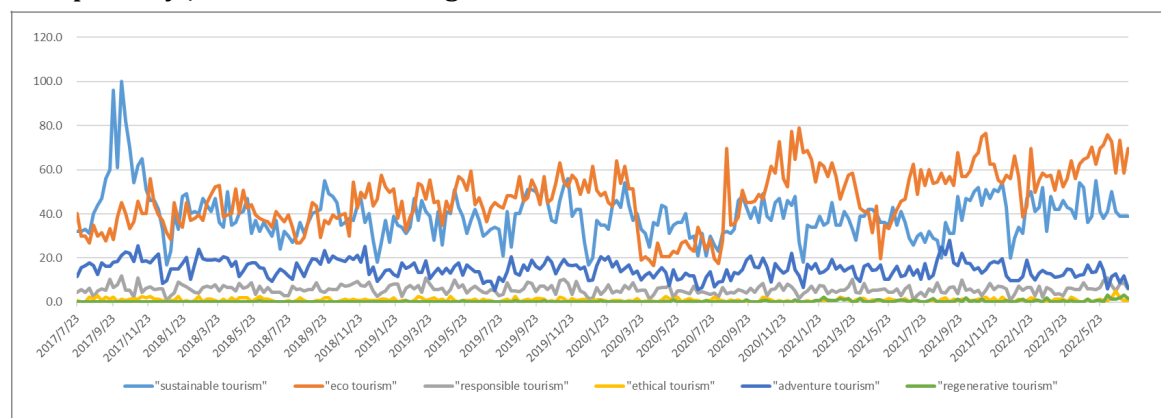
Before each term was officially defined by public institutions, they had been used in various media and contexts in somewhat disparate ways. Therefore, it was meaningful to provide a certain direction in setting definitions to promote the proper understanding of each term's original concept and to advance related initiatives. In other words, although these terms had been used before their official definitions were established, this section aims to identify when each term started to be used and how they gained a certain level of recognition.

Firstly, Figure 1-1 aggregates the trends of keyword search volumes provided by Google using the tool "Google Trends," which displays the search frequency over time for each term defined in the previous section. In Google Trends, the displayed values represent relative indices of search volumes normalized to a maximum value of 100 for the peak search volume within the specified period, rather than absolute search volumes. Therefore, for this study, the relative values during the period were graphed based on the peak search volume of "sustainable tourism," set at 100. Due to the low search volumes in Japanese for each term and the resulting inability to analyze trends using Google Trends, the analysis relies on search data in English. Additionally, to ensure comparability with the current period in terms of method of aggregation, the analysis covers trends over the past five years.

Figure 1-1

Search Trends for Sustainable Tourism and Related Terms (Past 5 years)

Compiled by JTBF based on Google Trends data



Based on those results, it appears that the search volumes are highest for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism, followed by Adventure tourism. Responsible Tourism shows slightly lower volumes, while Ethical Tourism and Regenerative Tourism have relatively lower search volumes.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism generally had similar search volumes. However, Ecotourism experienced a decline in search

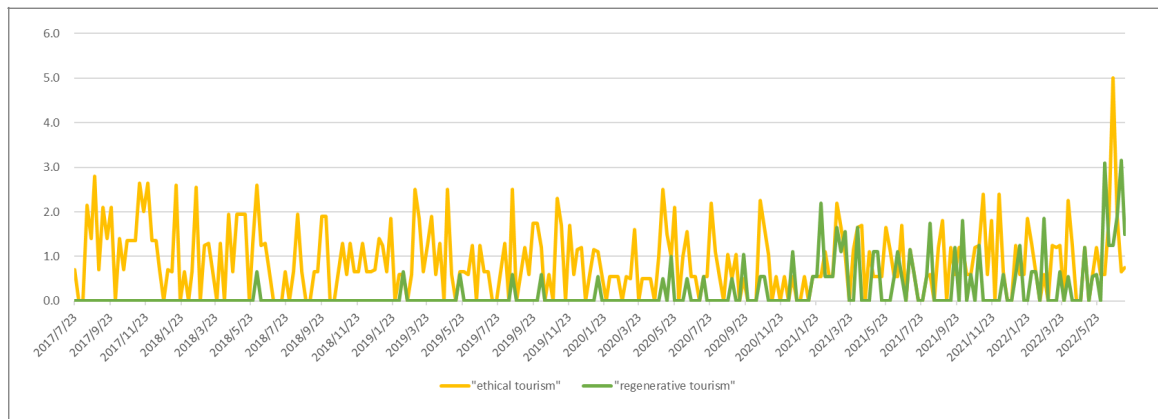
volume around March 2020 when the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic intensified. Subsequently, the search volume recovered, and recently, Ecotourism has slightly surpassed Sustainable Tourism in search volume. The factors behind these trends are not explicitly clear from the graph. However, for Sustainable Tourism, there was heightened attention towards sustainable perspectives due to issues like over-tourism linked to the pre-pandemic increase in international tourist numbers. Regarding Ecotourism, while initial interest waned as a form of travel during the pandemic, it regained traction as a relatively low-risk outdoor travel option in the context of living with COVID-19. These are likely contributing factors influencing the search volumes observed in the graph.

For Adventure Tourism and Responsible Tourism, it appears that search volumes have remained relatively stable throughout the observation period. In contrast, Figure 1-2 isolates the graph specifically for Ethical Tourism and Regenerative Tourism, which exhibited comparatively lower search volumes. Excluding the recent sharp increase, the frequency and volume of searches for Ethical Tourism have generally remained consistent since five years ago. In contrast, Regenerative Tourism has shown minimal detection until mainly the latter half of 2020, indicating a recent surge in search frequency, suggesting it is a concept or term that has only recently come into use. Additionally, considering the predominance of overseas sources in its introduction, the usage within Japan is likely limited to very recent times.

Figure 1-2

Search Trends for Ethical Tourism and Regenerative Tourism (Past 5 years)

Compiled by JTBF based on Google Trends data



I conducted an analysis using the total search volumes on Google Trends as an indicator closely related to the usage and frequency of each term. Except terms which have seen a sudden increase in frequency over the past 1-2 years, terms like Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism have been used primarily since the 1980s, spanning nearly 40 years. To explore usage trends over a longer timeframe, I proceeded with an analysis based on "Google Scholar". Google Scholar is a scholarly literature search engine provided by Google, allowing users to search and access

academic documents worldwide, including papers, books, and abstracts. It supports keyword searches, date range specifications, and language preferences. However, it does not comprehensively cover all academic papers available worldwide, and the number of search results displayed may not always reflect exact figures.

Figure 2-1 represents the results aggregated over approximately 30 years (target languages: all languages). As observed on Google Trends, similar to earlier findings, Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism exhibit higher search volumes, followed by Adventure Tourism and Responsible Tourism at comparable levels. Ethical Tourism and Regenerative Tourism show significantly lower search volumes in comparison.

In relation to Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism, since the 1990s, Ecotourism has shown a slightly earlier increase in search volume. However, mainly from the 2010s onwards, the growth rate of search volume for Sustainable Tourism has accelerated, surpassing Ecotourism in recent years. Furthermore, when examining recent trends, differences from what was observed on Google Trends include the slightly lower volume of Ecotourism compared to Sustainable Tourism, and the volume of Adventure Tourism declining slightly to a level comparable to Responsible Tourism. This suggests that Google Trends captures searches for Ecotourism and Adventure Tourism from a more general or business-oriented perspective as forms of travel, while Google Scholar focuses on conceptual and academic aspects, aggregating papers and books, which is likely a contributing factor.

Additionally, Figure 2-2 represents data when the search language is limited to Japanese. While the overall volume for each term significantly decreases, the relative balance between the terms generally remains similar to Figure 2-1.

Figure 2-1
Search Results for Papers on Sustainable Tourism and Related Terms in all languages
(Past 30 years)

Compiled by JTBF based on Google Scholar

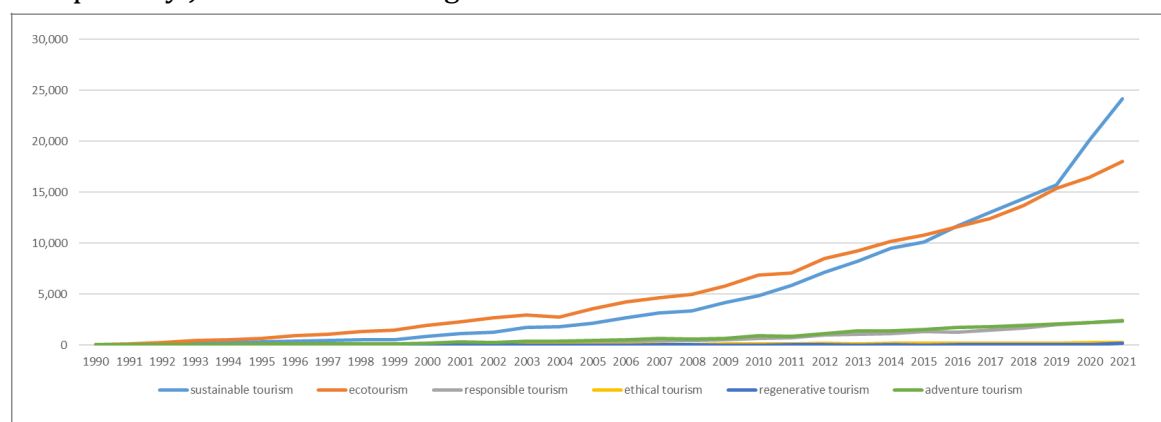
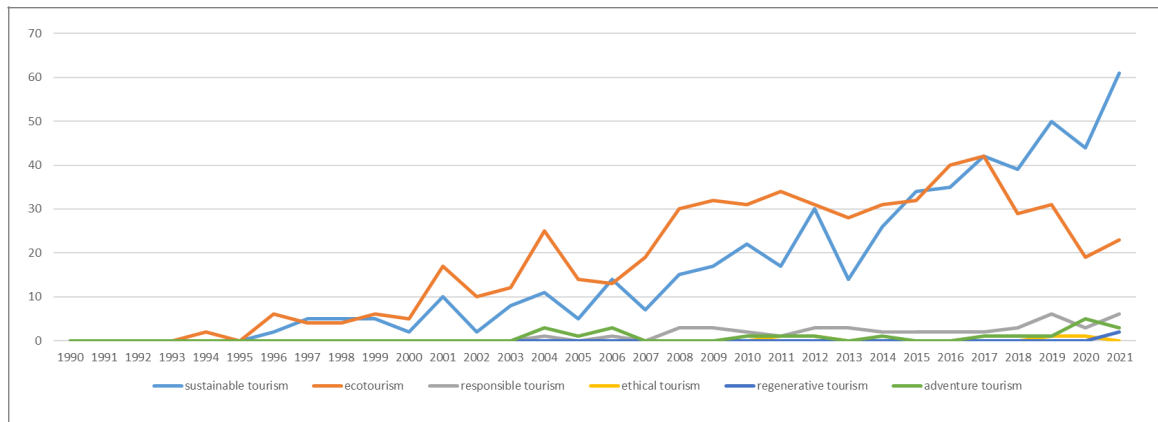


Figure 2-2
 Search Results for Papers on Sustainable Tourism and Related Terms in Japanese
 (Past 30 years)
 Compiled by JTBF based on Google Scholar



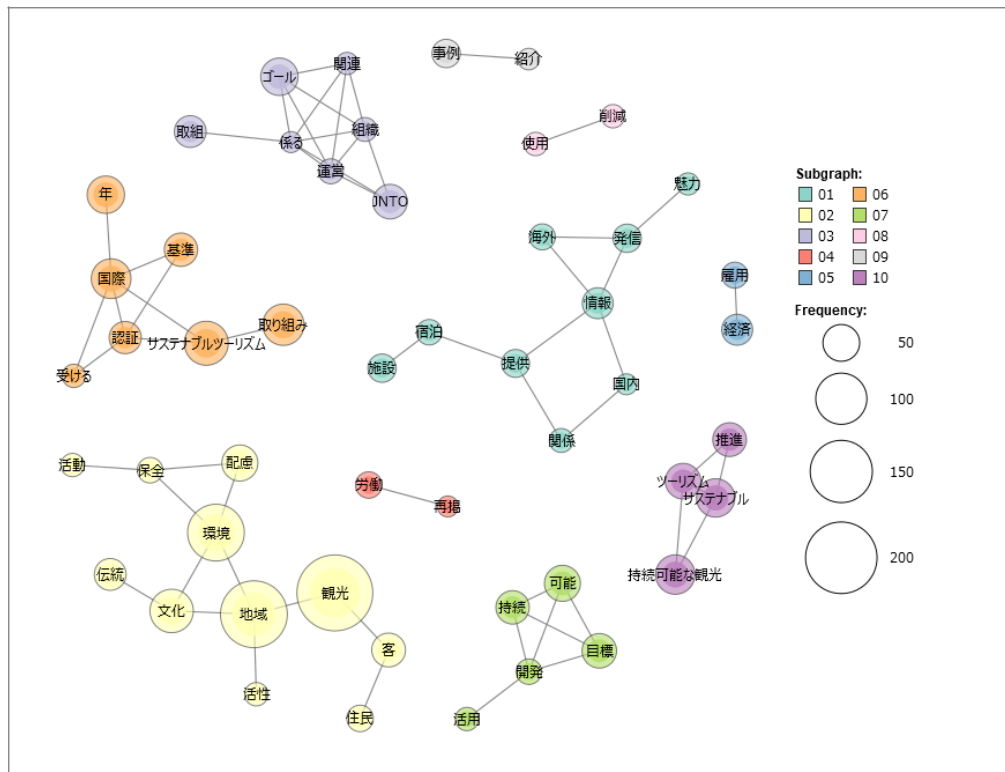
From this analysis, it can be noted that among several similar concepts and terms, Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism overlap significantly in their concepts, but are differentiated to some extent. However, there is some degree of intermingling in their use. These terms have been employed with approximately the same volume and frequency over many years. Additionally, terms such as Responsible Tourism and Adventure Tourism, which have been used for a long time, tend to be applied in more specific contexts, while terms like Regenerative Tourism, which have emerged more recently to describe new concepts, can be categorized accordingly.

3. Usage of Each Term (Text Mining Analysis)

Finally, I would like to examine the results of an analysis conducted using text mining techniques to understand how each term is used and in what contexts or contexts they are applied.

This time, I selected several websites, including comprehensive sites like Wikipedia, that provide explanations and commentaries on each term. These sites were chosen specifically because they encompass the 'definition' and 'evolution' of each term and concept. Using text mining techniques, I analyzed the text used on these sites and represented the results in a co-occurrence network diagram. A co-occurrence network diagram is a visual representation that uses circles and lines to display the relationships where words commonly appear together (co-occurrence relationships). This diagram enables an intuitive understanding of which words are more likely to appear within the text. The larger the circle, the higher the frequency of occurrence within the site.

Figure 3-1 is a co-occurrence network diagram created for sustainable tourism, using data from explanatory and commentary websites (above: English websites, below: Japanese websites). When examining the co-occurrence network diagram



On the other hand, examining the co-occurrence network diagram from Japanese websites shows a smaller number of keyword groups, suggesting a more limited scope of content compared to English websites. The keywords include groups similar to those found on English sites, relating to concepts and definitions. The terms corresponding to society, economy, and environment in English sites are represented by words like "region," "culture," "tradition," and "environment" in Japanese, with "economy" being linked to employment to form a distinct group of words. Additionally, on the left side of the diagram, it is notable that words such as "international certification" and "standards" appear within the same group as terms related to "initiatives" in sustainable tourism.

Figure 3-2 is a co-occurrence network diagram created using sites that explain and describe Ecotourism, Responsible Tourism, and Ethical Tourism in both English and Japanese.

Regarding Ecotourism, both English and Japanese sites address not only natural resources but also regions, culture, residents, and the economy, reflecting a broad concept of sustainability. Additionally, it is noteworthy that Japanese sites specifically mention the Ministry of the Environment's role in promoting these initiatives.

Additionally, the concept of Responsible Tourism is predominantly viewed in terms of travel formats, with strong emphasis on terms such as "travel," "industry," "product," and "tour." Similarly, Ethical Tourism is often presented as a mode of travel, characterized by terms like "tourist," "people," "journey," "enjoy," "travel," and "spot," indicating a strong focus on the approach to travel.

4. Conclusion

So far, albeit in a rough manner, we have reviewed the usage of terms related to Sustainable Tourism and its adjacent fields. As a result, the following points have begun to emerge, albeit still somewhat vaguely: while terms such as Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism have been clearly defined and used over many years, there are concepts like Responsible Tourism that remain without a fixed definition despite expanding in scope and understanding. Furthermore, the aspects that draw attention can vary between domestic and international contexts, as seen with Ecotourism. In this evolving landscape, new terms continue to emerge. These discussions are underpinned by the concept of sustainable development, particularly the triple bottom line.

Moving forward, in Special Features #2, #3, and #4, we will examine how specific initiatives have been implemented throughout Japan, including in Hokkaido, Okinawa and Amami. Following this, we aim to lead into a reconstruction of the concept of Sustainable Tourism in Special Feature #5.

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Feature Article #2: Reach and Challenges of Sustainable Tourism in Japan

Hideki Furuya

1. Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international tourists visiting Japan had surpassed 30 million, bringing significant economic benefits through tourist spending. However, concerns were also raised about the negative environmental impacts, including social issues such as overcrowding and behavioral problems, as well as impacts on ecosystems. Considering the subsequent decline in tourism demand during the pandemic and its effects on the tourism industry, there has been a renewed focus on addressing the dual aspects of tourism: its benefits and drawbacks, while striving for better tourism practices and aiming towards sustainable regional development.

In June 2022, the U.S. Department of Commerce announced a "Travel and Tourism Strategy" aiming to increase the number of international travelers to 90 million annually by 2027, surpassing the approximately 80 million in 2019. The strategy focuses on enhancing traveler convenience, promoting attractions, and reducing carbon emissions in the travel sector (1). Given the potential intensification of competition in international tourism, this paper examines the global initiatives toward sustainable tourism centered around the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). It also reviews the development and contents of the Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D), which was formulated in response to these global trends. Additionally, it provides an overview of the trends and future challenges in various regions within Japan following the implementation of this guideline.

2. Flow of initiatives towards Sustainable Tourism

2-1. International Initiatives

In international organizations, efforts towards Sustainable Tourism (2) can be traced back to the definition of sustainable development by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) and the establishment of the International Task Force for the Development of Indicators for Sustainable Tourism during the First United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) in 1992. And towards achieving "Sustainable Tourism," defined as tourism that meets the needs of visitors, industry, environment, and host communities while considering the impacts on current and future economies, societies, and environments, efforts have been made. The "Sustainable Tourism

Indicators for Destinations" were developed by the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) in 2004. Building on this framework, the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) were established by GSTC in 2013. This is a guideline that indicates "what should be done" rather than assessing "how much should be done" or "how much has been achieved." In the same year, the European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS) for the Sustainable Management of Destinations was developed by the EU, focusing on monitoring outcomes and outputs based on regional realities and policies.

On the other hand, issues stemming from tourism-related congestion have become evident worldwide. For instance, the documentary "ByeBye Barcelona" (2014) highlighted how the influx of numerous tourists threatened the local way of life in Barcelona. Similarly, following the recovery from the European debt crisis, Amsterdam experienced an increase in visitors due to active promotion efforts alongside renovations such as the National Museum, while Venice addressed the growing number of tourists through initiatives like the "Project of territorial governance of tourism in Venice" (2017). These examples underscore the ongoing consideration of more effective measures to mitigate these challenges.

In 2017, the United Nations designated it as the "International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development," spearheaded by UNWTO, where various initiatives have been undertaken. One such initiative is the promotion of the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO). INSTO operates on the principle that "what cannot be measured cannot be improved," emphasizing regional monitoring based on specific indicators. It promotes information sharing on best practices and tourism destination management, culminating in the first workshop held in Asia in 2019.

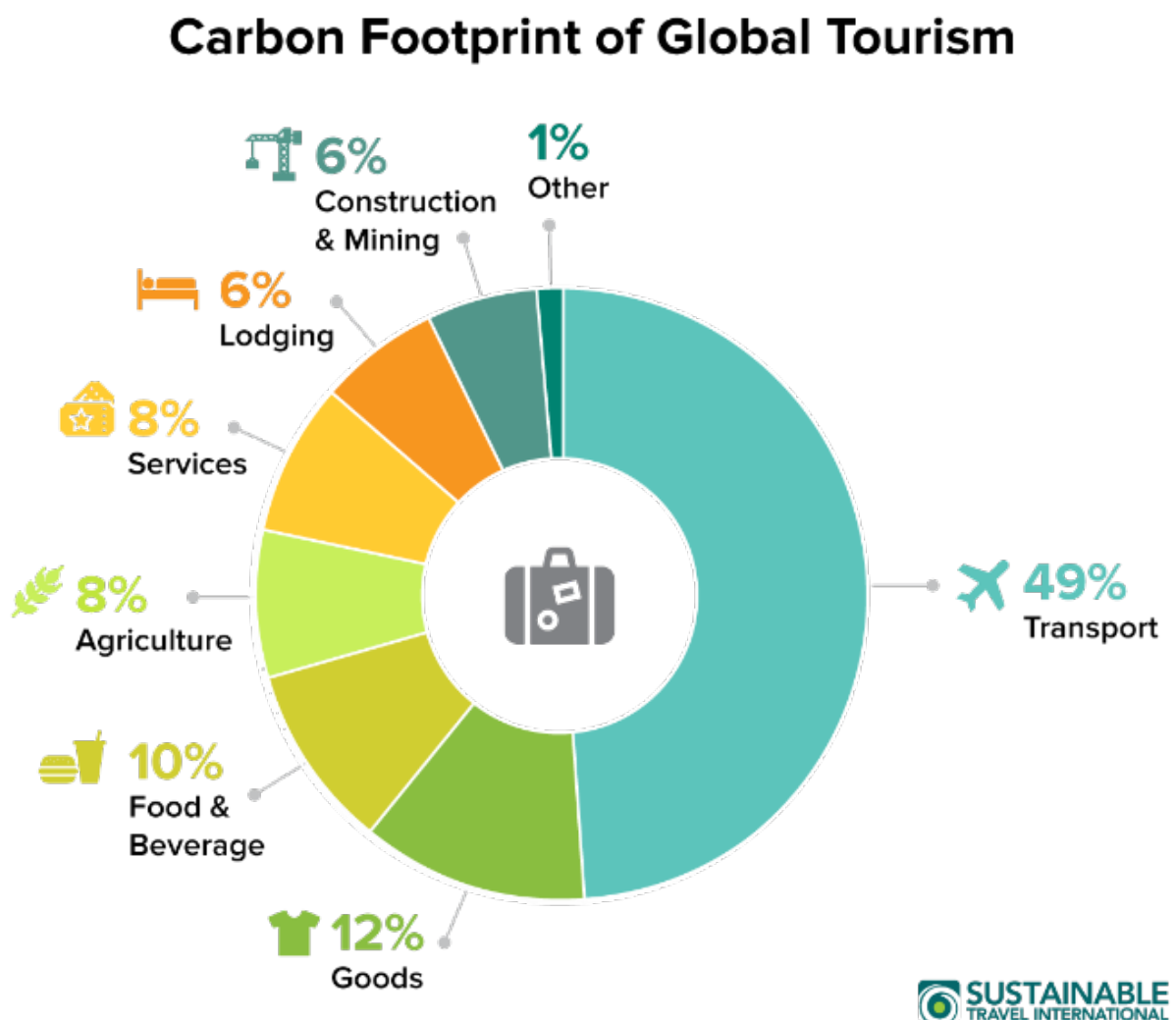
In September 2015, during the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, the "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" was adopted, which outlined 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity. The agenda also references the roles, budgets, and accountability of governments, private sectors, civil society, United Nations agencies, and other stakeholders towards achieving these goals (3). In connection with this, the "Paris Agreement on Climate Change (international framework)" was also agreed upon simultaneously, aiming to limit the rise in global average temperature to "well below 2 degrees" above pre-industrial levels and striving for a rise of "1.5 degrees" in average temperature. The mitigation of global warming can be seen as a significant reason and objective for pursuing the SDGs. Therefore, the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism (2021) sets the goal for the tourism sector to halve greenhouse gas emissions within the next decade and achieve "net zero emissions" by 2050. Signatory parties are expected to develop or update climate action plans within 12 months of signing, and to progressively

implement them accordingly (4), indicating an elevated priority on climate change mitigation efforts.

2-2. Initiatives in Japan

Figure 1 depicts global carbon dioxide emissions related to tourism, encompassing greenhouse gas emissions from various sectors beyond transportation and accommodation. In Japan, efforts are necessary to achieve the government's target for fiscal year 2030 of a reduction by 26.0% from fiscal year 2013 levels (equivalent to a 25.4% reduction from fiscal year 2005 levels). Against this backdrop, this paper provides an overview of Sustainable Tourism initiatives in Japan.

Figure 1
Carbon Footprint of Global Tourism
From Sustainable Travel International



In 2017, the number of foreign visitors to Japan increased 19% from the previous year to 28.69 million and the amount spent increased 18% from the previous year to 4,416.2 billion yen, both reaching record highs at that time. Concurrently, impacts on the living environment of local residents began to emerge in certain tourist destinations. In response, the Japan Tourism Agency established the "Sustainable Tourism Promotion Headquarters" in June 2018, which subsequently compiled the outcomes of its deliberations in the following year under the title "Towards a Sustainable Tourism Leading Country." In this context, it is clearly stated that in striving towards becoming a "Sustainable Tourism Leading Country," efforts are aimed at maximizing economic benefits to local communities, travelers, cultural resources, and the environment while minimizing adverse impacts. This includes expanding model projects addressing issues such as overcrowding and behavior management in representative tourist destinations. Furthermore, local governments and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) are committed to implementing sustainable tourism management based on comprehensive assessments, developing and promoting "Sustainable Tourism Indicators" that adhere to international standards. The tourism indicators encompass a wide range of aspects including economic, cultural, environmental, and community considerations evaluating not only economic factors such as tourist arrivals but also whether tourism management reflects local resident perspectives, and whether plans are in place for the conservation of natural and cultural resources within the region.

Based on these developments, the "Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D), compliant with GSTC-D (6)," was established by the Japan Tourism Agency and the UNWTO Office in Japan (June 2020). Local governments are expected to utilize this guideline to comprehensively assess the current state of their regions, foster sustainable tourism destination management through continuous monitoring and evidence-based tourism policies and plans.

3. Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations (JSTS-D)

To ensure sustainability, it is necessary to achieve a balanced equilibrium among three domains known as the Triple Bottom Line: 1. Optimizing the use of environmental resources, 2. Maintaining the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, and 3. Ensuring long-term economic viability. However, cases have been observed where excessive tourist visits lead to congestion and deterioration of natural environments, while in contrast, insufficient tourist numbers pose sustainability challenges from economic and community perspectives.

JSTS-D (6) assesses whether local governments and DMOs, as the management entities of tourist destinations, can align with the 4 domains, 38 major items, and 174 minor items, including management added to the above, Comparing with GSTC-D, which targets UN member countries, JSTS-D has the characteristic of omitting

items that do not match the evaluation in Japan, a developed country, and setting detailed items for economic impact analysis, overtourism and reception environment maintenance, and crisis management related to disasters.

A. Sustainable Management

- The current destination strategy and initiatives are publicly disclosed.
- Risk and crisis management involve sharing information within the region and conducting training.

B. Socio-Economic Sustainability

- Efforts are being made to collect economic data.
- Initiatives are in place to encourage local tourism operators to purchase regional specialties such as agricultural products and utilize local services.

C. Cultural Sustainability

- Initiatives for the restoration and conservation of cultural heritage assets are in place.
- Measures are implemented regarding the tourism impact on cultural sites and their surroundings.

D. Environmental Sustainability

- Plans and regulations are in place concerning the conservation of natural heritage.
- Goals for energy consumption reduction are disclosed and promoted.

Figure 2 illustrates the introduction steps consisting of seven stages. In surveys targeting ETIS implementation areas (7), challenges in its operation include the need for engaging stakeholders, collecting data from them, and building trust with them. Therefore, prior to implementing initiatives, it is considered crucial to establish working groups and define roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, in Catalonia, Spain, where ETIS has been implemented, sustainability levels across multiple tourist destinations are compared (8). However, challenges have been highlighted regarding how to evaluate the outputs of these indicators and effectively integrate them into subsequent initiatives, illustrating the difficulty in leveraging them for policy formulation. From the above, it can be argued that the introduction and implementation of JSTS-D do not automatically lead to the formation of "sustainable tourism destinations". It is crucial to establish a PDCA cycle that includes

stakeholder commitment, implementation of effective policies, assessment of their impacts, and understanding where these impacts lead.

Figure 2
Steps to introduce indicators in JSTS-D

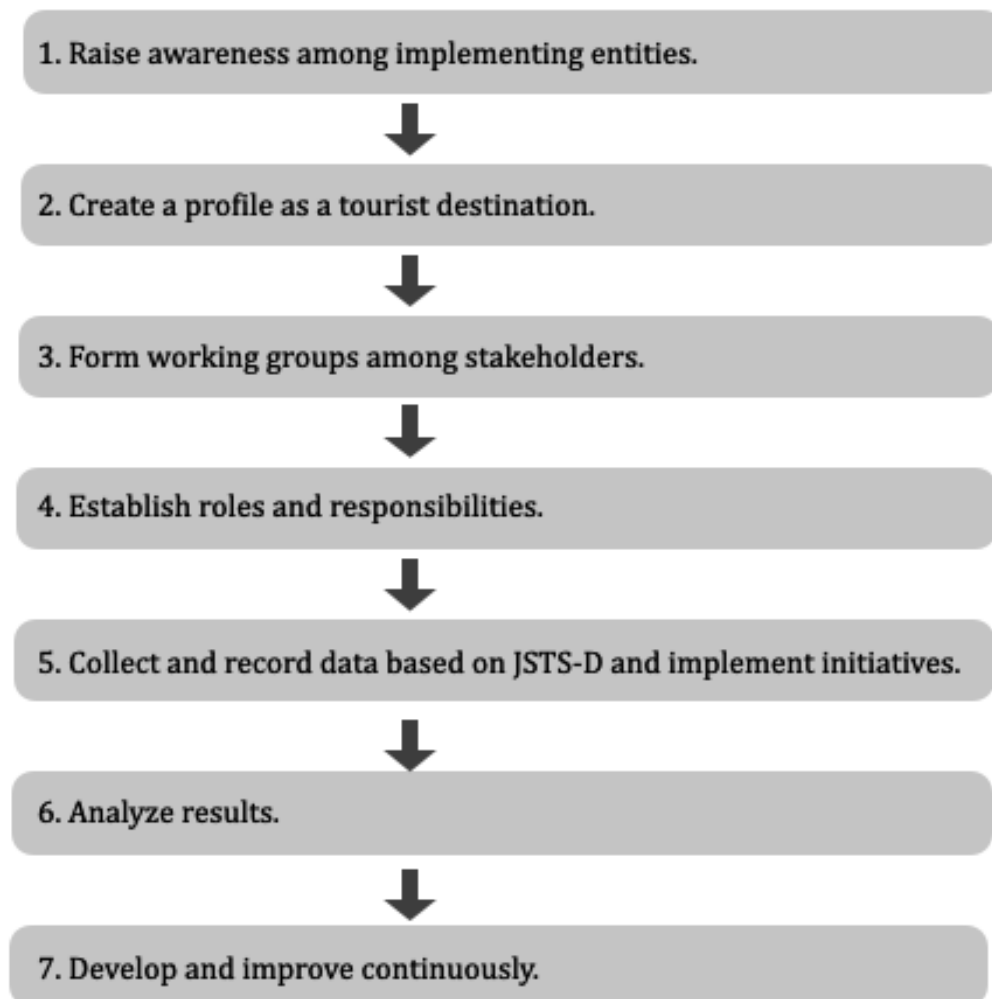


Table 1
Evaluation of “A1 Destination Management Strategy and Implementation Plan in Okinawa”

Item	Progress of Initiatives	Details of Initiatives	Data	Advisor's Comment
1. Commitment to JSTSD is clearly stated in tourism plans.	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> To be prepared in the future <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Under preparation <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate implementation underway with updates.	In the 6th Okinawa Prefecture Tourism Promotion Basic Plan, these will be clearly specified in Chapter 6: Basic Measures, and indicator numbers will be inserted into each measure.	Draft Plan	Monitoring using indicators (outcome evaluation) is already being implemented in Okinawa. Therefore, it is desirable to explicitly integrate sustainability into the planning process while clearly demonstrating its relationship with the desired state of the region (goals).
2. Tourism plans are multi-year plans.	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> To be prepared in the future <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Under preparation <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate implementation underway with updates.	The current 5th Okinawa Prefecture Tourism Promotion Basic Plan is a 10-year plan, and currently, the 6th plan is being formulated.	Revised 5th Okinawa Prefecture Tourism Promotion Basic Plan, March 2017, P2	
3. Tourism plans are reviewed periodically (at least every 5 years) and made publicly available.	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> To be prepared in the future <input type="checkbox"/> Under preparation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate implementation underway with updates.	The current 5th Okinawa Prefecture Tourism Promotion Basic Plan is a 10-year plan that was initially formulated in the fiscal year 2011 and revised in the fiscal year 2016. For the upcoming 6th plan, Okinawa Prefecture intends to establish performance indicators for each initiative. These indicators will undergo annual monitoring to assess progress toward their achievement, influencing subsequent strategies in following fiscal years.	Revised 5th Okinawa Prefecture Tourism Promotion Basic Plan, March 2017, P66	It is desirable to consider how to incorporate the results of regular monitoring into the reviews and whether a five-year cycle is sufficient. This is not the case if effective consensus are build among stakeholders.
4. Tourism plans are developed with the participation of stakeholders including local residents.	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> To be prepared in the future <input type="checkbox"/> Under preparation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate implementation underway with updates.	We convened an advisory meeting gathering various tourism stakeholders such as tourism related organizations to consolidate their opinions.	List of Advisory Council Members	In the formulation of tourism plans and policies, stakeholder participation includes methods beyond meetings, such as soliciting opinions through written public comments. Furthermore, the effectiveness of communicating opportunities like meetings and public comments to stakeholders is crucial for evaluation.
5. Results of initiatives related to tourism plans are made public.	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> To be prepared in the future <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Under preparation <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate implementation underway with updates.	We plan to solicit opinions from residents of Okinawa prefecture in fiscal year 2021.	N/A	When disclosing the results of initiatives, it is important to clearly demonstrate their relationship to the future vision of the region.

In fiscal year 2022, the Japan Tourism Agency is actively engaged in efforts to model sustainable tourism management, foster regional talent engaged in tourism practices and support local businesses providing sustainable tourism services. Additionally, the utilization of JSTS-D aims to provide tools such as self-assessment tools for understanding local conditions, communication tools for building consensus among local stakeholders, and promotional tools to enhance recognition of local initiatives. These efforts have also been recognized by external accreditation bodies as exemplary practices. The purpose of utilizing JSTS-D includes not only serving as a self-analysis tool for understanding local conditions and a communication tool to foster consensus among local stakeholders but also functions as a promotional tool to enhance the recognition of local initiatives where these efforts are recognized by external accreditation bodies as exemplary practices.

In this context, the "Guidelines for Sustainable Regional Management Utilizing Tourism" were compiled by the Transportation Research Institute established at the initiative of the then Ministry of Transportation as a comprehensive research institute (March 2022). This document serves as a guide for utilizing JSTS-D outlining how to proceed in the tourism sector towards achieving sustainable regional management, detailing the necessary know-how, skills, and procedural steps for implementing initiatives. Additionally, JICA and UNWTO are collaborating on a joint project to develop project-based indicators in tourism to assess its contribution to achieving the SDGs, with expectations for supporting Japan's international contributions.

4. Challenges for the future

In recent years, due to frequent occurrences of intense rainfall and other factors, there has been a noticeable increase in flood control measures such as reevaluating river embankment heights. In the tourism sector as well, it's essential to go beyond mere slogans like "sustainability" and implement effective measures. Looking ahead to the challenges for sustainable tourism, two key perspectives need to be considered: involving diverse stakeholders and ensuring economic support and backing.

4-1. Involving diverse stakeholders

In various regions, efforts toward sustainable tourism are being implemented, yet at the grassroots level, there are often challenges in predicting or envisioning the effects of these initiatives, and personnel frequently report not feeling the tangible benefits themselves. Kamaishi and Shirakawa-go featured in reference (10) are reported to have experienced various positive effects, but many regions struggle to perceive clear benefits.

In this context, advancing sustainable society requires setting appropriate goals based on local realities, constructing a logic for achieving them, and implementing them in society through consensus among stakeholders. In several European cities, examples of applying serious games using gamification on PCs can be seen attempting to evaluate and achieve consensus among diverse stakeholders for addressing challenges while estimating business impacts in advance. There is also research (11) that illustrates the ripple effects of tourism impacts through a logic model, positioning it as an effort not only to visualize business effects but also to contribute to consensus building among stakeholders. The stakeholders involved in regional development through tourism include a diverse range such as transportation, tourism, and accommodation operators, as well as residents, DMOs, government authorities, and environmental organizations. Given that the target is the public good of regional space, it is essential to create consensus with well balanced benefits and burdens, while ensuring accountability to stakeholders.

4-2. Establishing sustainability with economic backing

In France, alongside the enactment of the "Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Enhancement Act" in July 2021, which explicitly sets a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 40% compared to 1990 levels by 2030, there has been the introduction of night trains and super low-cost long-distance train service, called "OUIGO Classic Speed", which features reduced lowered fares and speeds (12). Furthermore, Air France has introduced the "Train + Air" service in alignment with its sustainability roadmap "Air France Horizon 2030", which involves discontinuing domestic air routes that can be covered by train within 2.5 hours, connecting with the French National Railway (SNCF) TGV services (13). The background to such initiatives seen in Europe is believed to be linked to geopolitical factors related to energy sourcing, as well as issues stemming from global warming such as food security and resulting refugee concerns.

To ensure sustainability, it is crucial not only to address global warming and environmental concerns but also to have robust economic and social support. From this perspective, the agreement on "Addis Ababa Action Agenda" at the aforementioned United Nations Summit (2015) should not be overlooked (14). This is a global framework aimed at aligning funding flows and policies with economic, social, and environmental priorities. It is closely aligned with the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI), advocated by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2006. In essence, it suggests that funding for development projects that do not meet economic, social, and environmental criteria may become increasingly difficult to secure.

Moves to ensure the relationship between the environment and the economy are exemplified by initiatives such as the introduction of green budgets in France's

national budget planning. These budgets list all the impacts of expenditures on six environmental objectives (15). Additionally, examples include the introduction of green bonds allocated to expenditures under the "Future Investment Program for Climate Change Mitigation, Climate Adaptation, Biodiversity Conservation, and Pollution Control" (16). Furthermore, in the EU, the EU Taxonomy is being piloted to assess whether corporate economic activities are sustainable for the global environment and to encourage green investments. This framework applies to large enterprises with 500 or more employees, requiring them to disclose the proportion of economic activities that comply with Taxonomy rules. Criteria also include meeting minimum social standards, thus encompassing all three perspectives: environmental, economic, and social.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have outlined the international trends in sustainable tourism initiatives, as well as the background and content of the Japanese guidelines (JSTS-D). Looking ahead, we have identified two key challenges: engaging diverse stakeholders and ensuring economic support. Sustainable tourism development requires clarity on the impacts and results of tourism from environmental, social, and economic perspectives while it is crucial to establish a mechanism for its promotion that can autonomously continue.

In the current context approaching irreversible tipping points from the perspective of global warming, sustainable societal development emphasizes the primacy of "environmental and future," necessitating a paradigm shift away from the previous "economic and status quo" oriented society. This shift requires embracing "Vision and Validation" over traditional "Predict and Provide," where "Backcasting" from envisioned futures is indispensable for determining current actions.



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Feature Article #3: Achievements and Challenges of Sustainable Tourism in Hokkaido

Shinya Momoi

Taisuke Jingu

Introduction

In Hokkaido, the tourism industry is strategically positioned as a sector for growth, with focused efforts to enhance its development. Within this context, addressing risks such as reduced attractiveness of tourism resources due to climate change, and local impacts from tourism pollution, as well as aligning with SDGs and achieving Carbon Neutrality (CN), are critically important for sustainable growth and enhancing international competitiveness of Hokkaido's tourism industry.

Based on these concerns, the Hokkaido Branch of Development Bank of Japan (DBJ) has focused on Sustainable Tourism (ST), publishing "Current Status of Sustainable Tourism and Future Directions in Hokkaido: Towards Promoting Sustainable Tourism Destinations" in March 2022.

This article introduces its overview while discussing the significance of ST in Hokkaido and examining the current achievements and challenges.

Challenges for Tourism in Hokkaido

Upon discussing ST, I would like to first outline the challenges of the tourism industry in Hokkaido from both economic and sustainability perspectives.

Economic perspective: The ripple effects of the tourism industry on the regional economy are primarily determined by three factors: "number of tourists," "spending per tourist," and "local procurement rate." In Hokkaido, there was an increase in the number of foreign tourists prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to an increase in overall tourist numbers. However, there was sluggish growth in "spending per tourist" and "local procurement rate." Promoting policies aimed at increasing tourist numbers also raises concerns about potential tourism-related pollution, and, as seen with the COVID-19 pandemic, a sharp decline in tourist numbers can cause severe damage to tourist destinations. In this context, strategic initiatives are needed to enhance the ripple effects beyond just "number of tourists" to establish a more resilient and sustainable tourism industry in Hokkaido.

Sustainability perspective: In Hokkaido, where natural landscapes, snow activities, and culturally rich towns like Hakodate and Otaru are key tourism assets, the progression of tourism-related issues such as climate change impacts, unauthorized entry into restricted areas, and littering can lead to reduced attractiveness and loss of tourism resources. Moreover, compliance with international social responsibilities like SDGs and achieving CN is essential,

regardless of tourism activities. It is crucial to consider how to address these challenges and ensure the sustainability of Hokkaido as a tourism destination.

Given the challenges outlined from both economic and sustainability perspectives, it is essential to address them comprehensively. In this context, I believe that promoting destination development based on ST is crucial as a new strategy post-COVID-19. (Figure 1)

Figure 1
Promoting Destination based on ST



Overview of ST

ST is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities." It requires consideration across three aspects: environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions.

In various contexts, ST is a tourism term used widely, but in this paper, ST is positioned as a fundamental principle in travel, applicable across all forms of travel. Therefore, even in adventure tourism initiatives promoted in Hokkaido, it is essential that the underlying principle of ST is upheld. When creating tourism products, it is crucial to understand ST correctly and to consider natural resources, local cultures, and other factors appropriately.

Figure 2
Relationships between ST and various type of travel



Furthermore, to become a tourism destination that adequately considers "environmental," "sociocultural," and "economic" aspects, it is necessary to promote initiatives across the entire region. Collaboration is essential not only among local governments, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), and tourism operators but also with local businesses and residents.

Current State Assessment of ST

When analyzing the current state of ST, it is essential to address the efforts undertaken by destination regions and the inclinations of travelers towards sustainable tourism practices.

In terms of destination regions adhering to international standards for ST, as defined by GSTC-D (Global Sustainable Tourism Council Destination Criteria), there are notable certifications across different regions as of February 28, 2022. Specifically, there are 8 certified regions in Europe, 7 in North and South America, and 4 in Oceania, indicating significant progress in certification predominantly in Western countries. However, it cannot be conclusively stated that only Western countries are advancing within the international framework of ST as there are other tourism destinations promoting ST without GSTC certification. Still, in the international framework of ST, it can be said that regions in Europe, North America, and Oceania are leading the way.

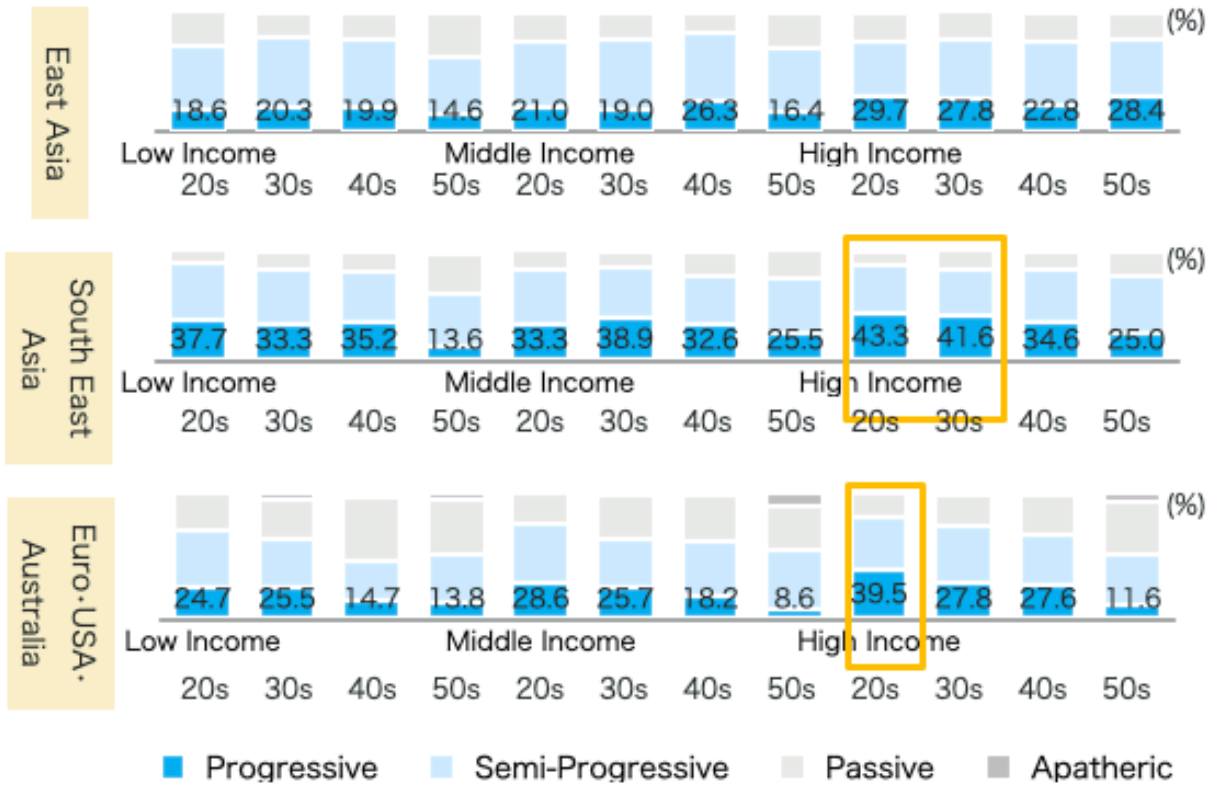
Among traveler, influenced by the widespread adoption of SDGs and CN in recent years, the percentage of travelers intending to stay at sustainable accommodations at least once was 62% in 2016, which rose to 81% in 2021 according to a survey by Booking.com, indicating a heightened interest in ST among travelers. However, among Japanese travelers, the proportion who expressed a desire to stay at such accommodations remained at 36% in 2021, suggesting that the principles of ST may not be as widely embraced in Japan compared to other parts of the world.

Based on the responses to two questions related to ST in the survey of Intentions of Foreign Visitors to Japan by DBJ & JTBF (Inbound Report), an analysis of the composition ratio by respondent demographics revealed that the proportion of respondents belonging to the "advanced segment," which shows a high inclination towards ST, tends to be higher among younger age groups and higher-income brackets. Specifically, the demographic groups with particularly high proportions in the advanced segment were "20s × high-income bracket" in Southeast Asia and "30s × high-income bracket" in Southeast Asia, and "20s × high-income bracket" in Europe, North America, and Australia. (Figure 3)

Figure 3
Preference analysis of ST among foreign visitors
Created by DBJ based on the Inbound report

		Will you increase budget on sustainable accommodations?		
		Yes	No	Don't know
Do you focus on sustainable initiatives when considering tourist attractions and accommodations?	Yes	Progressive (25.6%)	Semi-Progressive (46.6%)	
	Somewhat Yes			
	Neither Yes or No	Passive (25.7%)		
	Somewhat No			
	No	Apathetic (2.0%)		

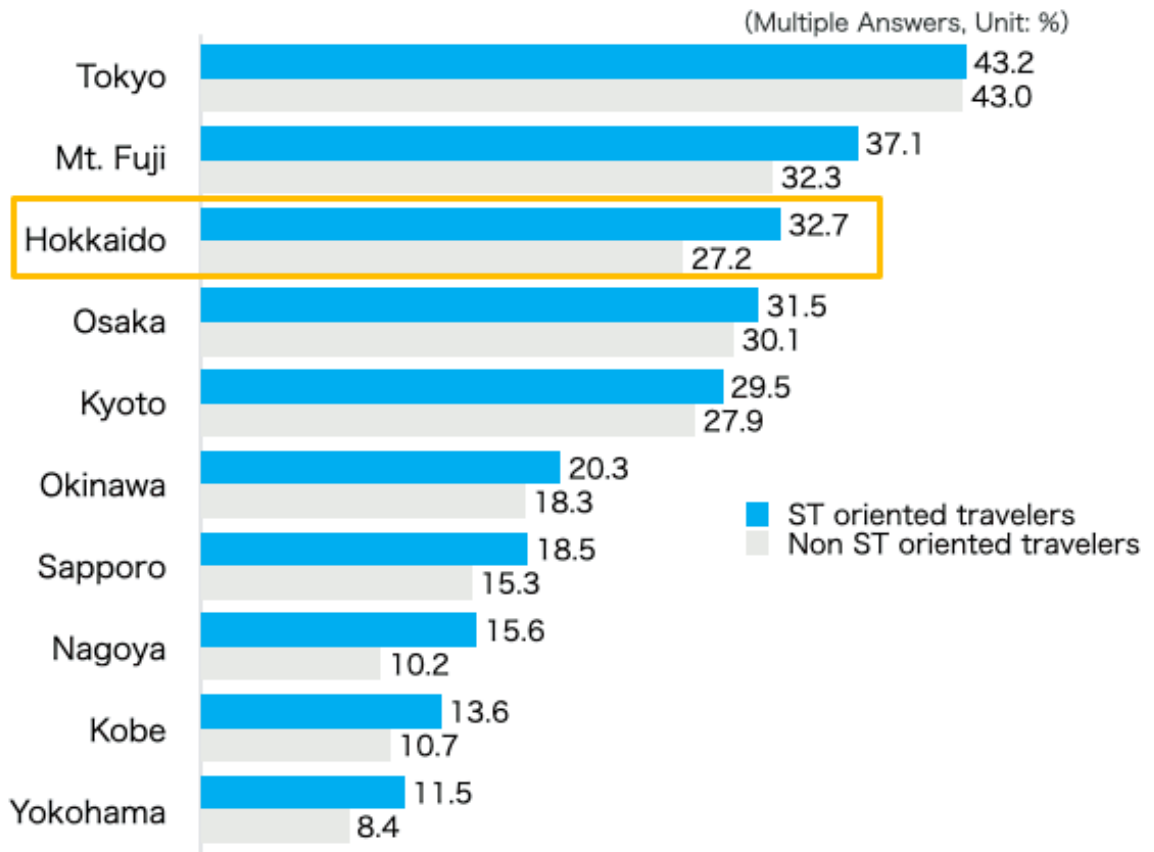
* Numerical values in parentheses () are overall averages. The size and percentage figures for each category are not identical.



Affinity and Future Directions of ST in Hokkaido

According to the Inbound Report survey questions; Which sightseeing area in Japan you would actually like to visit?, travelers inclined towards ST show a higher preference for visiting Hokkaido compared to those not inclined towards ST, with a significantly larger margin than other regions. Travelers interested in ST tend to choose destinations where they can experience nature and culture, and Hokkaido, known for its abundant natural resources and unique cultural assets, is expected to have a correspondingly high affinity with ST. (Figure 4)

Figure 4
 Sightseeing area that foreign tourists actually like to visit (Top 10)
 (Multiple answers, %)
 Created by DBJ based on the Inbound report



ST, driven by factors such as climate change, the emergence of tourism pollution and accelerated adoption and visibility of SDGs and CN, is poised to expand in the medium to long term, particularly among the advanced travelers mentioned earlier. While the fundamental principle of ST is to protect tourist destinations and resources, leveraging ST principles in the creation and provision of tourism content, ST-based branding, and effective communication can differentiate destinations, attract high-income and young travelers, and enhance consumer spending and local procurement rates with added value by ST.

On the other hand, precisely because of the strong affinity between Hokkaido and ST, delays in ST initiatives could lead not only to the loss of sustainability as a tourist destination but also the potential departure of current tourists who are attracted by its current charm.

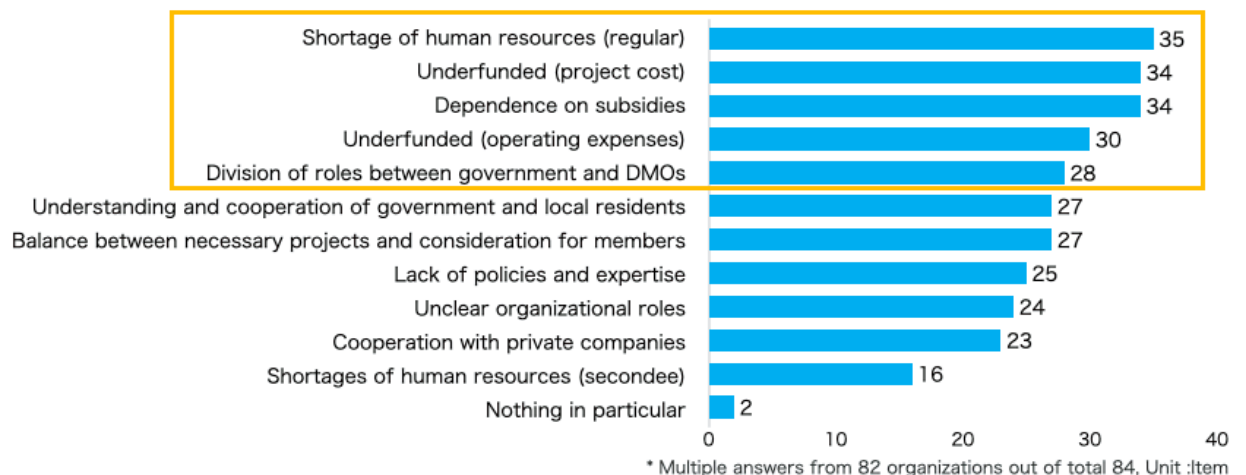
Challenges in Promoting ST in Hokkaido

To promote ST, it is essential to recognize that significant costs and resources are required. Therefore, ensuring the sustainability of tourist destinations across the entire region and continuing strategic investments are considered indispensable.

In this context, two crucial points emerge as major challenges for Hokkaido: the establishment of management structures centered around local governments and DMOs, and the securing of sustainable financial resources. According to a survey conducted by the Japan Tourism Agency targeting local governments nationwide (620 municipalities) on "Sustainable Tourism Indicators," issues such as insufficient coordination with local residents (67.0%) regarding management structures and the lack of secured long-term financial resources related to ST (63.5%) were highlighted. These challenges are presumed to mirror similar trends in Hokkaido.

Furthermore, in the "Hokkaido Tourism Promotion Organization Survey" conducted by Hokkaido Development Association among local tourism promotion organizations including DMOs within Hokkaido, challenges related to management structures such as shortage of personnel, lack of coordination with administration and local residents, and budgetary constraints emerged as top concerns. (Figure 5)

Figure 5
Organizational challenges in tourism promotion organizations including DMOs in Hokkaido
From Hokkaido tourism promotion organization survey conducted by Hokkaido Development Association



Examples of Advance Initiatives in Hokkaido

In discussing the challenges related to management structures and financial resource allocation, Town of Niseko in Hokkaido serves as an advanced case study. Niseko is not only an international resort area centered around winter skiing but also boasts abundant natural resources, such as the Shiribetsu River, known for its pristine waters. Tourism is positioned as the second-largest industry after agriculture, making Niseko one of the premier tourist destinations in the region.

In Town of Niseko, the groundwork for progressive environmental and sustainability initiatives was established with its designation as an Environmental Model City in fiscal year 2013 and as an SDGs Future City in 2018. These foundations, coupled with considerations of enhancing international competitiveness, have propelled Niseko toward developing as a sustainable tourist destination. As a result, it has been selected consecutively in 2020 and 2021 for the TOP100 by Green Destinations, which is a GSTC certification body, positioning it as a leading region in promoting ST within Japan.

In promoting ST, Town of Niseko has developed a sustainable management system by initially driving initiatives through governmental efforts until they were self-sustaining, at which point the primary role transitioned to the private sector (Niseko Resort Tourist Association), allowing for a flexible redistribution of responsibilities according to the stage of development.

In fostering a region-wide understanding and involvement in ST, it is crucial to engage local residents. Town of Niseko has targeted the relatively interested younger demographic by conducting ST workshops at Niseko High School, emphasizing the importance of building sustainable tourism destinations and thereby promoting community-wide engagement.

Regarding financial resources, in addition to effectively utilizing grants from the Japan Tourism Agency, Town of Niseko is advancing discussions on introducing an accommodation tax aimed at funding tourism promotion and environmental conservation measures. This step is outlined in the "Town of Niseko Tourism Promotion Vision," formulated in March 2022, and is part of efforts to secure sustainable funding.

Measures to Secure Financial Resources in Promoting ST

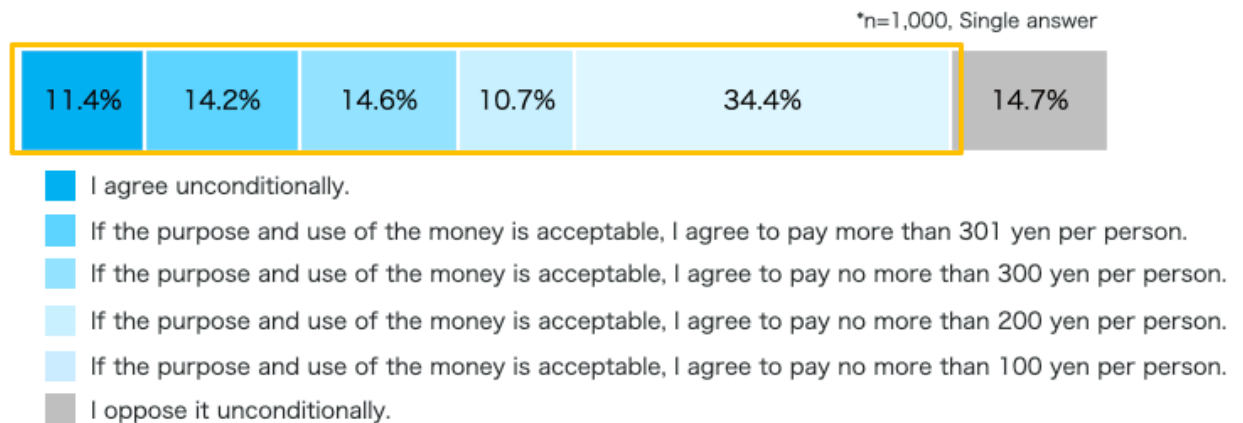
In promoting ST, it is crucial to secure funding that can be specifically allocated to such initiatives. In this context, regions are required to introduce appropriate financing strategies that fit their actual conditions, considering meticulous coordination among stakeholders.

Moreover, while the introduction of financial measures requires understanding

from tourists among others, many tourists have shown a positive response to the implementation of tax systems intended for tourism consideration and sustainable initiatives. Thus, if the financial burden is designated for the promotion of ST, it is expected to gain easier acceptance.

Figure 6

Tourist’s assessment of the introduction of green/sustainable tourism tax system
Hokkaido University, Ishiguro lab, Web survey regarding ST in Hokkaido

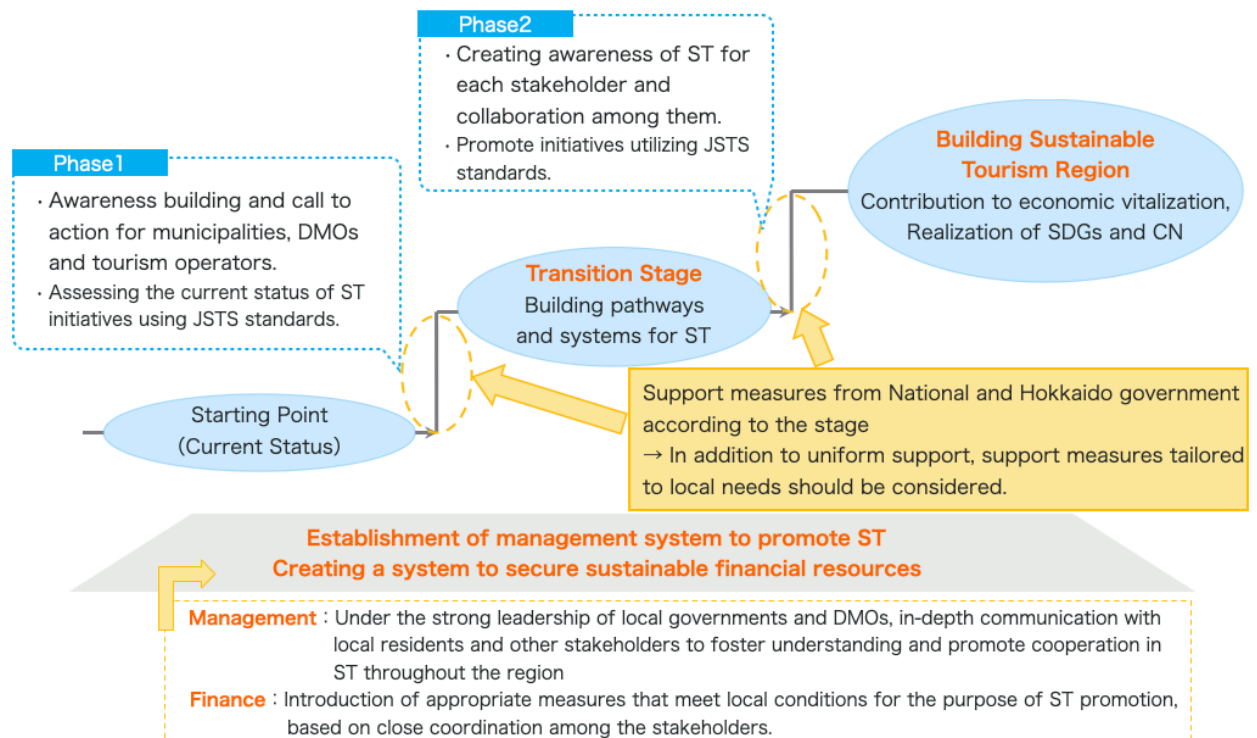


Future Directions

In the future, Hokkaido tourism should aim to establish a sustainable tourism zone that creates a virtuous cycle by building a collaborative system involving local governments, DMOs, tourism businesses, and local residents working together as a unified community.

Considering the broad range of tasks involved in promoting ST and the significant funding and labor they require, it is challenging to establish a sustainable tourism destination in one leap. It is desirable to proceed gradually, including developing mechanisms for establishing management systems and securing financial resources. Additionally, to support initiatives across various regions, assistance from the national and Hokkaido government is crucial. Implementing unique support measures tailored to each stage can help facilitate progress.

Figure 7
 Management System, Securing financial resources and Phased approach in promoting ST



Conclusion

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many tourist destinations and operators in Hokkaido have suffered significant setbacks, facing unprecedented situations. While the future of COVID-19 remains uncertain, it is necessary to continue efforts to minimize its impact. At the same time, there is a need to consider a new approach to Hokkaido tourism from a medium to long-term perspective, anticipating the post-COVID era. We hope that our report will contribute to this effort.



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Feature Article #4: Achievements and Challenges of Sustainable Tourism in Amami & Okinawa - Case Study on Implementing Adventure Tourism in Society

Yuki Iwasa

In July 2021, Amami and Okinawa (Amami Oshima, Tokunoshima, northern Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island) were registered as the fifth World Natural Heritage site in Japan. From July 2018 to March 2021, I was involved in the registration process as an official at the Okinawa Regional Environment Office of the Ministry of the Environment. At that time, as an increase in the number of tourists was expected following the heritage registration, we were exploring how to balance the protection and utilization of the heritage and what mechanisms and concepts should be in place for this purpose. It was during this period that I encountered the concept of adventure tourism, a sustainable and high-value natural cultural experience tourism.

This paper focuses on adventure tourism, which is highly compatible with sustainable tourism, and uses the social implementation of adventure tourism in Okinawa as a case study to discuss the achievements and challenges of sustainable tourism in Amami and Okinawa.

1. Encounter with Adventure Tourism

The problem of overtourism has been identified as an anticipated challenge in Amami and Okinawa prior to their World Heritage registration. The evaluation results from May 2021 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which conducts the scientific review for heritage registration, prioritized the need for stringent tourism management.

For example, prior to the pandemic, in 2019, the number of tourists entering Okinawa Prefecture reached a record high for the seventh consecutive year at 10.16 million (according to a survey by Okinawa Prefecture), marking the first time the annual number exceeded 10 million. Additionally, that same year, the number of cruise ship dockings at Naha Port was 260 (according to a survey by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism), marking the highest number in Japan for the first time following six consecutive years of increase. As a resident, I remember well the chronic severe traffic congestion. Tourist spots, including Kokusai Dori, were perpetually overcrowded, clearly indicating that the capacity of local infrastructure was being exceeded. If registered as a World Heritage site, there were strong concerns about the negative environmental impacts due to overtourism. How can we resolve a dilemma that too many tourists can damage nature, yet reducing tourist numbers can lead to a decline in the local economy that is suffering issues from depopulation? It was during this period that I encountered the concept of adventure tourism.

2. What is Adventure Tourism

Adventure tourism (AT), as defined by the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), is travel characterized by at least two of the following three elements as primary objectives: interaction with nature, physical activity, and cultural exchange. It is crucial that AT extends beyond the traditional concepts of the travel industry by leaving sustainable economic and social effects on local small and medium enterprises and residents. Furthermore, these effects should contribute to the protection and revitalization of local nature and culture. Based on the author's experience in environmental administration and the social implementation of adventure tourism, the concept of AT is summarized in Figure 1. (Iwasa, 2022)

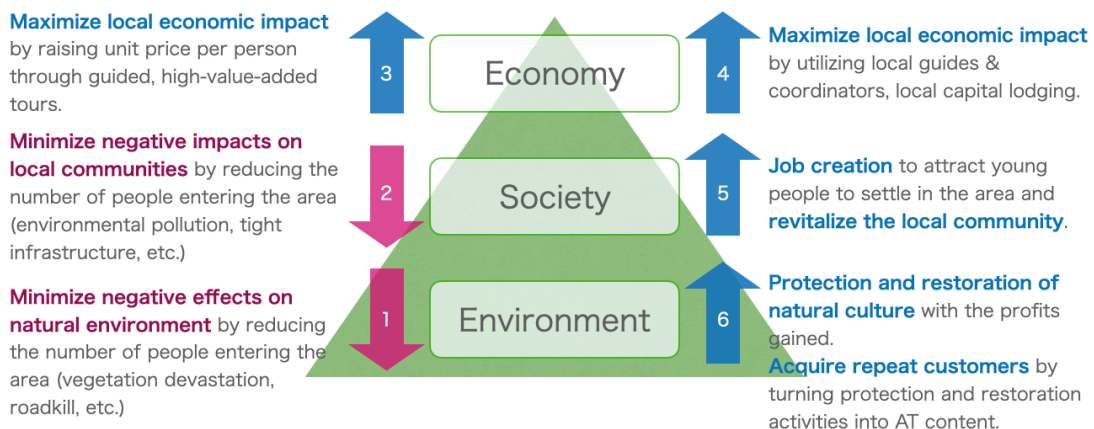
Figure 1
Concept of Adventure Tourism (Iwasa, 2022)

What are the concepts of AT?

Narrow Sense 1: Tourism conducted to protect and regenerate culture and nature.

Narrow Sense 2: High-value tourism which guided services that reduces the number of visitors and increases the spending per visitor.

Wide sense: Sustainable and responsible tourism with respect to the local environment, society and economy.



In the Amami region, which was recently registered as a World Heritage site, the concept of the Amami Islands National Park celebrates the "environmental culture" as the regional traditional culture cultivated through a life coexisting with nature. Additionally, a researcher studying the interaction between humans and nature in Okinawa describes the culture created between living beings and humans as "biocultural," addressing nature and culture as an integrated whole. (Toyama, 2015) Therefore, in Japan, rather than the international definition of AT which involves two or more of "nature," "culture," and "experience," it is more familiar to define AT straightforwardly as experiencing "natural culture."

3. AT Initiatives in Okinawa and Issues for Future Social Implementation

The main initiatives related to AT in Okinawa are summarized in Table 1. A 2018 initiative by the Japan Tourism Agency served as a pioneering implementation of AT in Okinawa. Specifically, as model regions, areas such as Kin Town and Kunigami Village on Okinawa Main Island have been advancing the social implementation of AT.

Table 1

Main AT initiatives in Okinawa

Created from materials of Okinawa General Bureau, Cabinet Office and Okinawa Convention and Visitors Bureau

From April 2018:

- Implementation of the "High Value-Added Product Development Survey Project for Sustainable Tourism in Broad Area Circulatory Tourism Targeting Europe and the United States" (FY 2018 Japan Tourism Agency Inbound Tourist Circulatory Promotion Project)

From April 2019:

- Implementation of the "High Value-Added Content Development Project Utilizing Okinawa's Natural Fields" (FY 2019 Cabinet Office Okinawa General Bureau Inbound Global Campaign Content Development Project)

May 2019:

- Held Adventure Connect in Okinawa (co-hosted by JTB Research Institute and JTB Okinawa, sponsored by OCVB)

September 2019:

- Participated in Adventure Travel World Summit in Sweden

December 2019:

- Held AT Seminar in Northern Okinawa Main Island (hosted by Cabinet Office Okinawa General Bureau)

Continued

From April 2020:

- Implementation of the "AT Guide Training Survey Demonstration Project" (FY 2020 Cabinet Office Okinawa General Bureau Demonstration Survey Project for Preparation for World Natural Heritage Registration)
- Implementation of the "Coordinator Human Resource Development Program in Adventure Tourism" (FY 2020 Cabinet Office Okinawa Core Industry Human Resource Development Project)

From April 2021:

- Implementation of the "Through Guide Training and Tour Development Project" (FY 2021 Cabinet Office Okinawa General Bureau Model Tour Development Project Utilizing Regional Tourism Content for Adventure Tourism)
- Implementation of the "Coordinator Human Resource Development Program in Adventure Tourism" (FY 2021 Cabinet Office Okinawa Core Industry Human Resource Development Project)

May 2021:

- Implementation of the "SDGs Next Generation Educational Tour Planning Guide Training Project utilizing Yanbaru World Natural Heritage" (Demonstration project for promoting regional collaboration through refinement of regional tourism resources - First selection)

September 2021:

- Implementation of the "Kunigami Village Regional Revitalization Project utilizing Miraculous Forest of Rare Wildlife and Wise Ancestors" (Demonstration project for promoting regional collaboration through refinement of regional tourism resources - Second selection)

From March 2022:

- Implementation of the "FY 2021 Sustainable Tourism Content Enhancement Project" (Project for grasping the key points in the creation of globally competitive sustainable tours and building hypotheses for the required system and functions for realizing them / Creation of sustainable tours in Okinawa)

Through projects in Okinawa, the author reflects on perspectives and challenges for the future implementation of AT. Note that the term "AT" can also be read as "sustainable tourism" or "ecotourism" without affecting the understanding of the content.

(1) Share AT Philosophy within the community.

Firstly, it is essential to share within the community the philosophy behind AT, what AT aims to achieve, and fundamentally, why there is a need to engage in AT. If this aspect is not sufficiently debated and shared within the community, efforts remain isolated, making it challenging to implement AT on a community-wide scale, and discussions about broader regional travel become tenuous.

(2) Do not use the number of tourists as a KPI.

Next, it is crucial not to focus solely on the number of tourists as a target. In places like Singapore and Barcelona, where overtourism has become a problem, the goal of increasing tourist numbers has been abandoned. Future Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for AT should align with the concept and may include the amount of spending that stays in the local area, the status of conservation and restoration of nature and culture, resident well-being, and tourist satisfaction and intentions to revisit.

(3) Develop a regional tourism vision by means of AT.

A bottom-up approach is necessary for defining a regional tourism vision, utilizing AT as a means to envisage the desired character of the region. Government planning often begins with addressing crises and challenges, typically outlining concrete measures from a forecasting perspective. In this context, a region-led, bottom-up tourism vision certainly requires the involvement and authority of local government. However, it also entails defining a future-oriented vision through the deliberation of diverse local stakeholders and outlining specific initiatives from a backcasting perspective. The formulation of a tourism vision should not be confined solely to individual municipalities but should also consider wider areas encompassing multiple municipalities as needed. Furthermore, instead of a generic desire for "anyone and everyone to visit," it is essential to externally communicate who exactly is desired as visitors to realize the previously defined tourism vision. While AT can be seen as a form of high-value tourism, it raises the question: should any affluent tourist be welcomed by the community? Ideally, the region should aim to attract "cultured individuals" who respect the local nature, culture, and community, recognize the value the area offers, and resonate with its potential.

(4) Define zoning of use.

It is necessary to clearly define the zoning and methods of use. For example, there should be strict protection zones where no human entry is allowed to preserve the natural environment; areas where limited entry is permitted under specific rules, such as daily or per-group limits facilitated by AT; and zones designed to accommodate mass tourism. This involves livelihoods, therefore discussions must include not only stakeholders such as tourism operators but also a broad range of community participants. While self-regulation is preferred, legal regulations should be considered as necessary.

(5) Train AT coordinators.

While training of site-specific guides is essential, there is an urgent need to develop what could be called "AT coordinators" who connect these guides and plan overall AT tours. The method could involve holding training sessions with the support of local governments, focusing on concentrated skill development, and deploying these skills widely through networking across various regions.

(6) Create a fund that links tourism and nature conservation.

It is necessary to create a fund that integrates tourism and nature conservation. While accommodation taxes are being discussed in various places, it is crucial that funds related to tourism and nature conservation are not separate but integrated, or operated in coordination with each other. Considering the sustainability of the environment, society, and economy in the region, such a fund should aim to create a virtuous cycle where the more tourism advances, the more nature conservation progresses. Additionally, tourism assets like nature and culture cannot be protected or regenerated for free. Depending on the need, it may also be necessary to consider an entrance fee as a user charge.

(7) Establish AT promotion body

Finally, there is a need to establish an AT promotion body consisting of various stakeholders. Nationally, the Japan Adventure Tourism Association (JATO) was established in 2019. Regionally, in Hokkaido, which is a leading area for AT, the Hokkaido Adventure Travel Association (HATA) was organized in 2017. However, there is no similar organization yet in Okinawa. For AT, a wide range of roles are expected, including promoting understanding and raising awareness, responding to inquiries from domestic and international sources, advertising and recruitment, sharing information and insights, providing training and facilitating exchanges to

develop personnel, and planning and implementing policies. The stakeholders involved are anticipated to be diverse, including guides, coordinators, accommodation providers, tourism associations, DMOs, experts, and government officials. In building the body to promote AT, it will likely be necessary to establish an organization that under certain government support, allows for the swift decision-making and creativity of the private sector, characterized by democratic leadership and official support. Additionally, mechanisms for ensuring continuous funding and human resources will be essential.

In conclusion, while the seven points listed are crucial, it is essential that the implementation process, driven by the region's autonomy and enthusiasm, not only focuses on developing AT content but also enhances the overall quality of the region's environment, society, and economy. This approach will foster a virtuous cycle model that contributes to sustainable regional development.

In terms of the future social implementation of AT in Amami and Okinawa, while Okinawa Island is currently at the core of AT implementation, the nature of AT, which is based on long stays, necessitates a broader regional perspective. Therefore, beyond Okinawa Island, there is a need to consider other parts of Okinawa Prefecture, such as the Kerama Islands, the Daito Islands, the Miyako Islands, and the Yaeyama Islands, as well as to further enhance cooperation between Okinawa and the Amami Islands, and between the Amami Islands and Yakushima, following their World Natural Heritage status. This should include developing a broader network across the southwestern islands for AT, which would involve developing courses, fostering talent, and sharing information.

4. Current Status of Sustainability at Resort Accommodations in Okinawa

For the preparation of this paper, from June 1 to 3, 2022, interviews were conducted at three domestically funded resort accommodations in Okinawa to understand the current status of sustainability at resort accommodation facilities. Additionally, expert consultations were held with a university scholar knowledgeable about the situation in Okinawa.

The room count at each facility varied, with approximately 200 rooms, 100 rooms, and one single rental villa. While the accommodation rates also varied, ranging from about 20,000 yen to 150,000 yen (with prices more than doubling during the busy months of July and August), a common concept shared by these facilities is the authentic experience of Okinawa's nature and culture, with inventive touches evident throughout.

The landscape features breathtaking views of the emerald-green sea characteristic of Okinawa in the distance, with natural coastlines and vegetation in the foreground, minimally altered to preserve the authentic beauty of the surroundings (Photo 1). The gardens also contain local fruit trees such as shikuwasa

and acerola, showcasing products grown in Okinawa.



Natural coast and natural vegetation from guest rooms

In terms of resource cycling, initiatives to eliminate plastic usage were a standard practice. For instance, plastic water bottles were not placed in guest rooms. Instead, water dispensers were located near the elevators, allowing guests to self-serve water using pitchers provided in their rooms (Photo 2). Alternatively, pitchers filled with water were stored in the refrigerators in the rooms. Prior to implementation, there were concerns within the organization about potential high costs, but actual calculations revealed that adopting this system would lead to cost savings. This result truly represents an integration of environmental and economic considerations.



Self-supplied water by water server

Additionally, plastic amenities such as toothbrushes and hairbrushes were not placed in the rooms. Instead, an amenities corner was set up near the front desk where guests could pick up items as needed, or they could contact the front desk to have the necessary items delivered to their room. Guests staying at high-priced accommodations tend to be environmentally conscious, and such initiatives had already received a fair level of understanding. However, with the enforcement of the "Act on Promotion of Resource Circulation for Plastics" in April 2022, which rationalizes the use of specific plastic products, the acceptance and understanding among guests have become even easier to obtain. Additionally, as part of resource recycling efforts, leftover food materials are composted and utilized on farms, showing further innovative practices.

Regarding food, there is a strong emphasis on using locally sourced and seasonal ingredients, minimizing the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. The accommodations provide traditional Okinawan vegetables and dishes, further enhancing their value with Western culinary adaptations. The farm-to-table approach not only reduces transportation costs but also cuts down on carbon emissions associated with transport. Additionally, plastic tableware is avoided as much as possible, with traditional Okinawan pottery, known as "yachimun," being used to give guests a more authentic local experience.

In terms of decarbonization, the use of electric carts was observed, but it's not simply because it's electric that it's good. The method of power generation is also crucial—whether the electricity comes from fossil fuels or renewable energy sources. Since Okinawa currently relies almost exclusively on fossil fuels for power generation, the introduction and expansion of renewable energy sources will be essential for becoming a world-renowned sustainable luxury resort.

Until now, many resorts in Okinawa have adopted European, Hawaiian, or Southeast Asian styles, with few offering an authentic Okinawan luxury experience. As the shift from classic to modern luxury progresses, providing a genuine Okinawan experience during a resort stay has a high potential to create new added value.

The perspectives of environmental sustainability encompassing decarbonization, resource circulation, and biodiversity are crucial for the future of resorts in Okinawa. Considering the global trends of SDGs and ESG investments, sustainability is becoming an essential element. Failure to embrace these practices could pose a risk of becoming a resort not chosen by the global community. Focusing on resource circulation involves more than just promoting plastic reduction. It's about creating a beneficial cycle where tourism activities, traditionally a source of waste and pollution like food waste, refuse, and sewage, become opportunities for improvement through innovative technologies that recycle these wastes into new resources. This approach ensures that as tourism progresses, the local environment and community concurrently improve. It is crucial not just to leave this to private enterprises but to integrate it into governmental policies to ensure comprehensive

implementation across the community.

Although this study was limited in sample size, it provided an overview of the sustainability initiatives at resort accommodations in Okinawa. Moving forward, it is crucial not only to focus on sustainability practices at individual resorts but also to implement these practices across the entire region. Concepts and strategies such as regional circular symbiotic zones and zero carbon parks are noteworthy for consideration.

The concept of "regional circular symbiotic zones" refers to the approach aimed at maximizing regional vitality by utilizing local natural landscapes and other resources to their fullest, while forming autonomous, decentralized societies. It involves regions complementing and supporting each other's resources based on their unique characteristics, an idea that is also referred to as local SDGs. "zero carbon parks" refer to areas striving to decarbonize national parks through initiatives such as the use of electric vehicles within the parks, the utilization of renewable energy in facilities located in the parks, and promoting local production for local consumption. These efforts aim not only at reducing carbon footprints but also at creating sustainable tourist destinations that include efforts to reduce plastic use. The concept of zero carbon parks is almost synonymous with regional circular symbiotic zones, and currently, seven national parks are registered under this initiative. By utilizing these concepts and policies, building concrete sustainable regions not only fosters sustainable tourism but can also enhance the value of existing industries and generate further ripple effects through new innovations.

5. Building New Forms of Tourism including Sustainable Tourism

Since the post-war era of rapid economic growth, the construction of tourism infrastructure such as roads has led to the destruction of natural environments. This situation often resulted in a dichotomy where stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction when natural conservation efforts limited tourism development. However, beginning around the 1990s, movements towards ecotourism, which seeks to reconcile nature conservation with sustainable tourism promotion, started to emerge in various locations, including Yakushima.

Following these developments, Japan's tourism policy evolved significantly. In 2008, the establishment of the Japan Tourism Agency marked a new phase. By 2013, the number of international tourists exceeded 10 million, and in 2016, the government formulated the "Tourism Vision to Support the Future of Japan," coinciding with international tourist numbers surpassing 20 million. Additionally, the National Parks Enjoyment Project was launched, aimed at enhancing the appeal of national parks and doubling the number of foreign tourists visiting these sites. Subsequently, in 2018, the number of international tourists visiting Japan surpassed 30 million, resulting in significant economic benefits to regions, but it also led to

negative impacts, including so-called tourism pollution. As mentioned earlier, Okinawa experienced issues related to overtourism. In Setouchi Town on Amami Oshima, prior to its designation as a World Heritage site, a conflict emerged between local conservation efforts and tourism development concerning the acceptance of cruise ships, ultimately leading to the withdrawal of the acceptance plan. Regions blessed with natural environments have limited environmental and infrastructural capacities, making it difficult to protect and nurture their environment, society, and economy sustainably through mass tourism based on consumption. In such areas, sustainable tourism practices like adventure tourism and ecotourism, which balance nature conservation with tourism, are particularly well-suited.

This year, 2022, marks the 5th anniversary of the United Nations International Year of Sustainable Tourism, the 20th anniversary of the International Year of Ecotourism, the 50th anniversary of Okinawa's reversion to Japan, and exactly 30 years since the philosophy of "coexistence and circulation" was proposed on Yakushima, Japan's first World Natural Heritage site. The concept of "coexistence and circulation" will likely serve as an important guideline in promoting new forms of tourism, including sustainable tourism. What should new tourism look like after the COVID-19 pandemic? It's essential to continue exploring the future of tourism from the perspective of implementing sustainable tourism in society.



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Feature Article #5: Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Concept of Sustainable Tourism

Yusuke Ishiguro

Yutaka Nakajima

Enlargement of Sustainability

The profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has radically transformed the environment surrounding both domestic and international tourism, while scenarios for normalization have been greatly complicated by political instability originating in Europe. Nevertheless, sustainability remains the foremost theme for industries including tourism, with the dissemination of SDGs rapidly increasing opportunities for encountering this term in everyday life. When considering travel and tourism, regardless of whether one adopts the perspective of the traveler, the local community, or the industry, there is an immediate need to navigate a dual-front strategy which involves confronting known risks in tourism such as infectious diseases and conflicts, alongside pursuing sustainability as a universal goal for humanity. In recent times, sustainability is often discussed in terms of preparing for and recovering from such risks, encompassing resilience and recovery efforts.

On the other hand, this inclusiveness of sustainability can sometimes obscure its true essence. It's often unclear whether discussions on sustainability are focused on the subject itself — in other words, questioning what can be sustained — or if they are exploring processes and methodologies for achieving sustainability and continuity. These days, there may be little contention against advocating for sustainability as a label. However, it's challenging to assert that comprehensive discussions have thoroughly addressed what should be placed alongside it. The surge in popularity of the SDGs undeniably marks a successful movement towards sustainability as a theoretical framework. However, when it comes to translating this into substantive implementation within policies and projects to yield tangible outcomes, the clarity of its existence often becomes hazy. Furthermore, with the revival of inbound tourism and the engagement with the "world" as customers and investors, the "Galapagosization" of interpretations regarding sustainability may no longer be tolerated. In this paper, I would like to embark on a thought experiment to explore what the world and various regions consider as sustainability, and how they conceptualize it.

Sustainability on Tourism or Tourism on Sustainability

Sustainable tourism is literally constituted by the two terms sustainability and tourism. The foregrounding of sustainability as a contentious issue stems, needless to say, from the Brundtland Commission's discourse on "sustainable development."

On the other hand, tourism, even conservatively viewed, is a global force of the 21st century. As an industry capable of driving economic development primarily through the lens of "development," it has been a target for promotion in many developing countries. The "encounter" between sustainability and tourism at the end of the 20th century could be seen as somewhat inevitable.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities."

At the core of such definitions lies the idea that "tourism occupies a unique position to bring economic and social benefits to local communities and to enhance awareness of and support for environmental conservation" (UNEP & World Tourism Organization, 2005).

However, there has been significant critical examination of the notion of treating tourism as inherently special. For instance, R.W. Butler, known for the Tourism Area Life Cycle theory, points out that discussions of sustainable tourism in geography often do not align with the comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach of sustainable development concepts. In essence, the criticism suggests that sustainability, originally achievable through various industries and approaches including tourism, becomes minimized in the discourse of sustainable tourism by overly focusing on tourism itself as the objective.

This "reversal of roles" appears to stem from the unresolved nature of the relationship between sustainability and tourism. There are numerous forms of tourism defined by their relationship with sustainability, including ecotourism, and new terms continue to emerge in this evolving field. For example, ecotourism and adventure tourism can be seen as practices within tourism seeking sustainability "internally." On the other hand, responsible tourism and regenerative tourism position sustainability outside of tourism as goals or purposes that should be achieved through tourism, so to speak, "externally."

The simplicity in the construction of "sustainable tourism" as a term seems to inherently encompass various interpretations of the relationship between sustainability and tourism. This ambiguity can be seen as allowing for the potential expansion of the discourse as a movement. However, it also carries the risk of potential misinterpretations or deviations from its intended purpose. Furthermore, in the practical implementation of tourism policies, this ambiguity can potentially lead to discrepancies between policy goals and the actual menu of policies and measures. These days, while there may be little contention against pursuing sustainability, positioning it as part of tourism policy necessitates a renewed understanding of its comprehensive framework. It requires obtaining a "navigation chart" to understand where regions are heading and how sustainability fits into their tourism strategies.

Prime Factorization and Reconstruction of Sustainable Tourism through the NIST Tree

On the other hand, comprehensively capturing sustainable tourism, which as mentioned earlier possesses conceptual expansiveness and ambiguity, is exceedingly challenging. This is due to the varied interpretations and understandings across regions, which have been accommodated by the practical realities of sustainable tourism. Therefore, to comprehend its entirety, sustainable tourism must be viewed as a complex entity and decomposed into its constituent elements. In essence, by decomposing sustainable tourism into its fundamental components, we generalize it not as a whole but as patterns of composition. In doing so, we believe that the contours of sustainable tourism become visible through reconstructing sustainable tourism tailored to the local realities and characteristics.

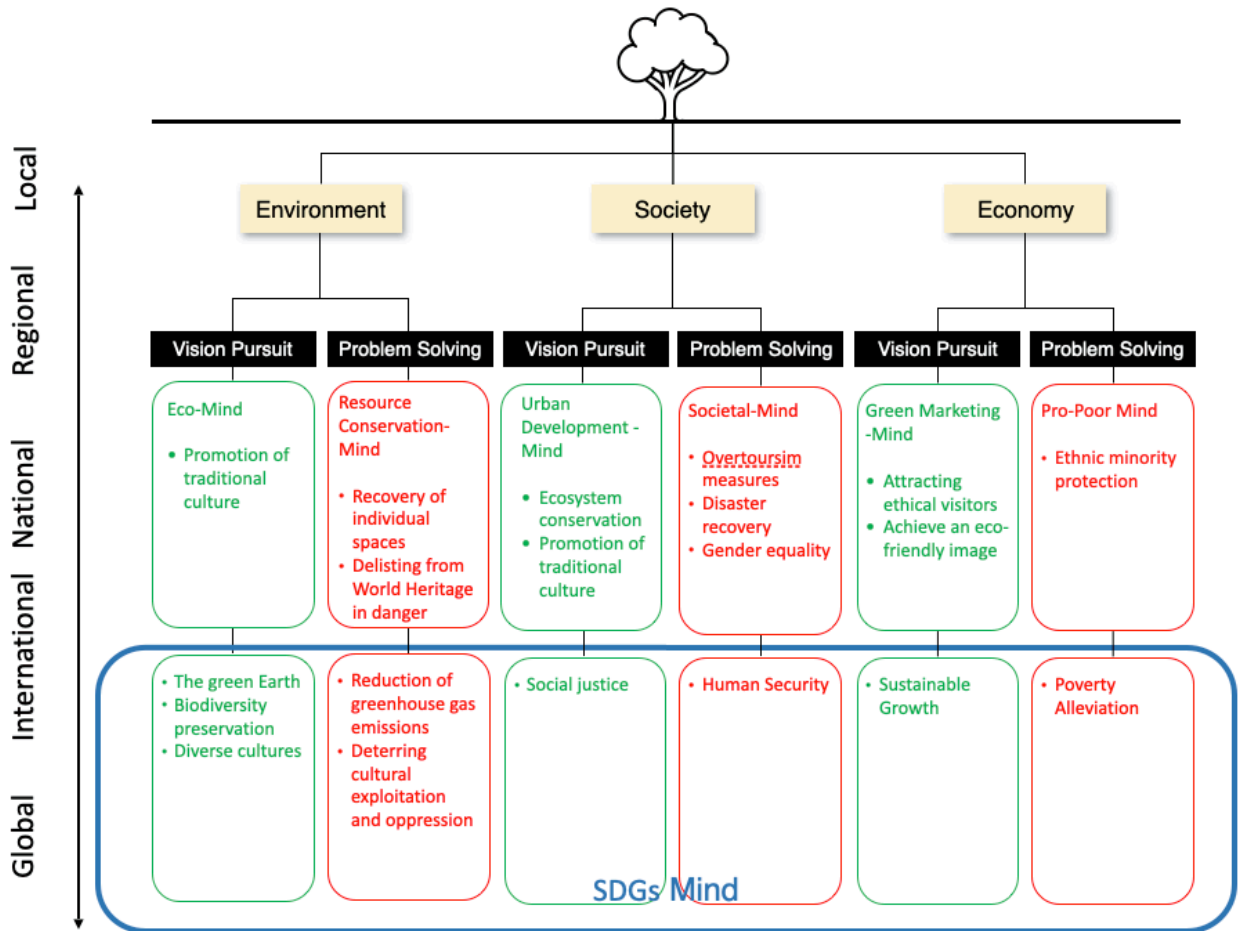
Therefore, going forward, we will analyze sustainable tourism by dividing it into two components: the "mindset" based on policy challenges and its scope, and the resulting "measures" formulated and implemented as a consequence. We will then organize and integrate these aspects into a model resembling a tree structure composed of "roots," representing sustainable tourism as policy, and "rings," reflecting its growth and development over time. In this paper, we humbly propose to name this model the "NIST Tree," with the initials of the two authors alongside sustainable tourism.

Furthermore, tourism, not limited to sustainable tourism alone, is a comprehensive and organic industry based on various initiatives and participations from both public and private sectors. In this sense, the practice of sustainable tourism can involve diverse stakeholders and perspectives. In this paper, to narrow the focus, we have organized our discussion by setting the policy makers as the main actors who can set the whole region as the target or site of their efforts, rather than industries or individual private businesses.

Trial Theory: "Decomposition" by Roots Model (Mindset)

The first aspect, "mindset," has been organized along two axes: policy challenges set by policy makers and their scope (Figure 1). This diagram resembles a tree structure, but whereas a traditional tree diagram depicts the branching out of leaves from branches and stems, this diagram illustrates policy challenges originating from the trunk of sustainable tourism. Hence, we propose to refer to this as the "Roots Model" of sustainable tourism.

Figure 1
 Roots model of sustainable tourism (Decomposition of mindset)



Firstly, it is crucial to understand which aspect of sustainability a policy challenge seeks to address. In sustainability discourse, issues related to natural environments such as climate change and biodiversity are often prominently recognized. However, for example, the Hawaii Tourism Authority, DMO for Hawaii, promotes sustainable tourism not only by emphasizing conservation of natural environments but also by advocating for the sustainable development of Hawaiian culture through community participation and the realization of a sustainable tourism industry (Hawaii Tourism Authority). In essence, policy challenges are identified across each component of the triple bottom line comprising natural environment, society, and economy.

The next point of discussion is the "motive" behind policy challenges, whether they aim to solve specific problems or are creative efforts to realize a certain vision. For instance, in Europe, Barcelona in Spain has incorporated sustainability concepts into its tourism policy primarily to address the social issue of "overtourism". In contrast, Copenhagen in Denmark uses sustainable tourism to embody the concept of "localhood," focusing on realizing a vision rather than resolving a specific problem. The former can be categorized as "problem-solving oriented," while the latter can be

categorized as "vision pursuit oriented." Interestingly, the SDGs themselves can be seen as a combination of both problem-solving and vision pursuit elements upon closer examination. For example, "No Poverty" focuses on addressing the specific problem of poverty, while "Good Health and Well-being" sets forth an idealistic goal rather than targeting a specific problem. As detailed later on, the latter often aligns with relatively long-term strategies, with policies designed around overarching visions and goals. On the other hand, the former involves policy formulation rooted in specific, urgent challenges aimed at resolving immediate issues. Policies under this category generally emphasize achieving short-term results and effectiveness, often leading to the implementation of more stringent regulatory frameworks.

Another analytical axis is the extent to which these policy goals are designed with a certain range or scope of problems or visions in mind. For example, in sustainable tourism in Barcelona, the policy challenge is relatively narrowly focused on alleviating overtourism within the city. In contrast, in Copenhagen, also a European city, there is a commitment articulated from the outset towards global goals.

In the Roots Model, the scope of policies ranges vertically from local: localized areas or facilities, such as specific districts or facilities, to city and town levels, then regional: from a unit of cities and towns to a prefectural level, followed by national, international, and ultimately global levels. The model is structured such that, akin to the roots of a tree extending deep into the soil, the scope and impact of policies broaden towards the lower levels. Naturally, the actual "scope" cannot be distinctly segmented, and it often spans intermediate areas and overlaps multiple categories. Thus, it may be more appropriate to depict it as a gradient rather than discrete categories. However, as mentioned earlier, this paper aims to model based on the perspective of policy makers, and thus intentionally organizes it into five stages. In other words, policy makers at the municipal or regional DMO level primarily focus on the local aspects, while those at the prefectural or regional cooperation DMO level consider regional or national perspectives. Policy makers at the national level align with national objectives or motivations, and may also consider international or global goals from the standpoint of international contribution.

Based on this organization, attempting to typify based on the directional focus behind policy, it can be classified into a total of six mindsets. "Visionary Pursuit" can be categorized into three mindsets across relatively small scopes: "Eco-Mind" pursuit in the environment domain, "Urban Development-Mind" pursuit in the society domain, and "Green Marketing-Mind" pursuit in the economic domain. The "Problem-solving" mindset also comprises small scopes based on three motivations: "Resource Conservation-Mind" motivated in the environment domain, "Societal-Mind" motivated in the society domain and "Pro-Poor-Mind" motivated in the economic domain.

In Okinawa Prefecture, for instance, sustainable tourism is positioned as a policy issue within the pursuit of visions such as natural environment restoration and

ecosystem conservation driven by World Natural Heritage site designation. While there may be various discussions rooted in specific problems and crisis awareness, the emergence of sustainable tourism can be interpreted within a future-oriented discourse of how tourism in Okinawa "should be," rather than solely focusing on specific problem-solving methods. This aligns with the Roots Model, where initiatives targeting natural restoration and ecosystem conservation at the local and regional levels are framed under an "Eco-Mind" context.

On the other hand, even within island regions and the same World Natural Heritage site, the pursuit of sustainable tourism in places like the Galápagos Islands in Ecuador takes on significantly different characteristics. The Galápagos Islands were listed on the UNESCO World Heritage in Danger list in 2007 due to factors such as increasing tourist numbers, accompanying immigration, and the introduction of invasive species. This event prompted efforts to promote sustainable tourism in the region. Sustainable tourism with a "Resource Conservation Mind" can be characterized by efforts to mitigate the negative impacts tourism brings to the islands, aiming to "recover ecosystems" and achieve "delisting from the World Heritage in Danger list."

In the Roots Model, regarding the rationale for international and global scopes, both "problem-solving" and "visionary pursuit" are integrated into what is termed as the "SDGs Mindset." This approach assumes that, with some exceptions like international organizations, many policymakers conceive sustainable tourism at international and global levels without necessarily distinguishing between goals and challenges. Climate change mitigation, efforts to combat global warming, and reducing microplastics are prime examples where the significance scales up, blurring the distinction between problem-solving and visionary pursuit. As mentioned earlier, this ambiguity is partly why the SDGs allow for a blend of "problem-solving" and "visionary pursuit" approaches.

The "rationale" and "scope" serve as essential foundations for local governments and DMOs engaging in sustainable tourism when they continually verify the validity of their policy objectives and the means and measures. Given the inherent ambiguity in the definition of sustainable tourism, as mentioned earlier, it is imperative for policy makers themselves to proactively establish its overarching principles. Through the Roots Model, becoming aware of the fundamental significance of promoting sustainable tourism contributes not only to enhancing the continuity and strategic relevance of policies but also to objectifying its meaning.

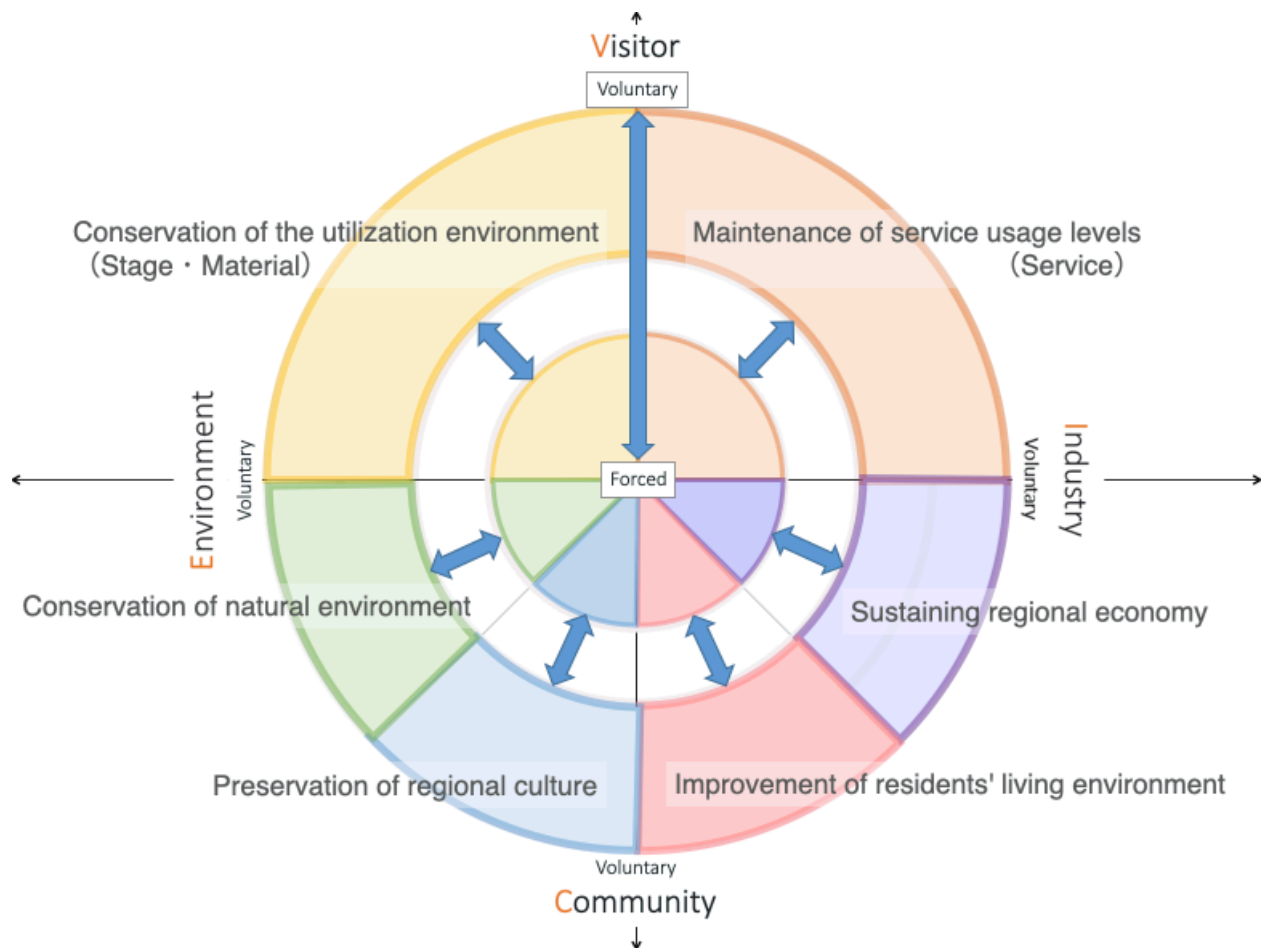
Trial Theory: "Decomposition" by Ring Model (Measures)

Next, a model based on mindsets, aimed at decomposing sustainable tourism at the policy and implementation levels, is the ring model resembling annual growth rings

(Figure 2). In the ring model, the targets for expected policy and initiative effects are positioned in four directions based on the VICE model proposed by UNWTO (Visitor, Industry, Community, Environment). By establishing such axes, it becomes possible to visualize the classification of six initiative effects in the model, including conservation of the utilization environment and natural environment in the destination, maintenance of service usage levels, sustaining regional economy, improvement of residents' living environment, and preservation of regional culture, as domains within the figure.

Figure 2

Ring model of sustainable tourism (Decomposition of measures)



For example, Barcelona's initiative to restrict accommodation capacity based on urban planning is positioned as a policy expected to achieve improvement in residents' living environment through both community and tourism industry efforts. Based on this, sustainable tourism initiatives are positioned in a gradient from

highly mandatory measures towards voluntary ones, radiating outward from the center of the circle. This approach allows us to differentiate between initiatives that achieve expected effects within the same domain, whether they are mandated by regulations or legal frameworks or based on voluntary actions by the initiative targets, enabling the representation of the range in terms of institutional scope. Barcelona's approach with the stringent "restriction on accommodation capacity based on urban planning" places it closer to the center of the circle. On the other hand, Copenhagen faces similar challenges typical of urban destinations such as the expansion of vacation rentals and congestion, yet it adopts different policy responses compared to Barcelona. Specifically, within their tourism planning, Copenhagen has advocated a departure from conventional tourism promotion and introduced the concept of "local hood" while championing its unique urban sustainable tourism. This initiative aims to foster qualitative transformation in tourism by encouraging and mobilizing efforts from businesses and residents. Positioned closer to the outer edge of the circle, this represents a more voluntary approach to sustainable tourism initiatives. Even when similar policy agendas are set, the degree to which they adopt measures with high compulsion or institutional rigidity varies among cases.

When organized in this manner, various initiatives and projects identified as specific measures of sustainable tourism can actually be classified into six domains based on the VICE model principle. Within these domains, the discussion converges on the selection of policies and measures with high institutional rigidity. Because sustainability addresses a global issue, there is a tendency to overlook the critical question of "who benefits from the policies." However, reframing it as "what effects are expected for whom" naturally clarifies the overall picture of policies and measures. It also reveals how far institutional rigidity should be enhanced. In contrast, simply espousing the noble cause of promoting sustainable tourism and merely copying policies from other regions will not necessarily lead to regionally optimized initiatives.

Six Types of Sustainable Tourism by NIST Tree

In this paper, we have deconstructed sustainable tourism into two perspectives: mindset and measures, organizing them conceptually as the "Roots Model" and "Ring Model". Finally, we aim to integrate the classification of mindsets in the "Roots Model" into the "Ring Model" to complete the NIST tree.

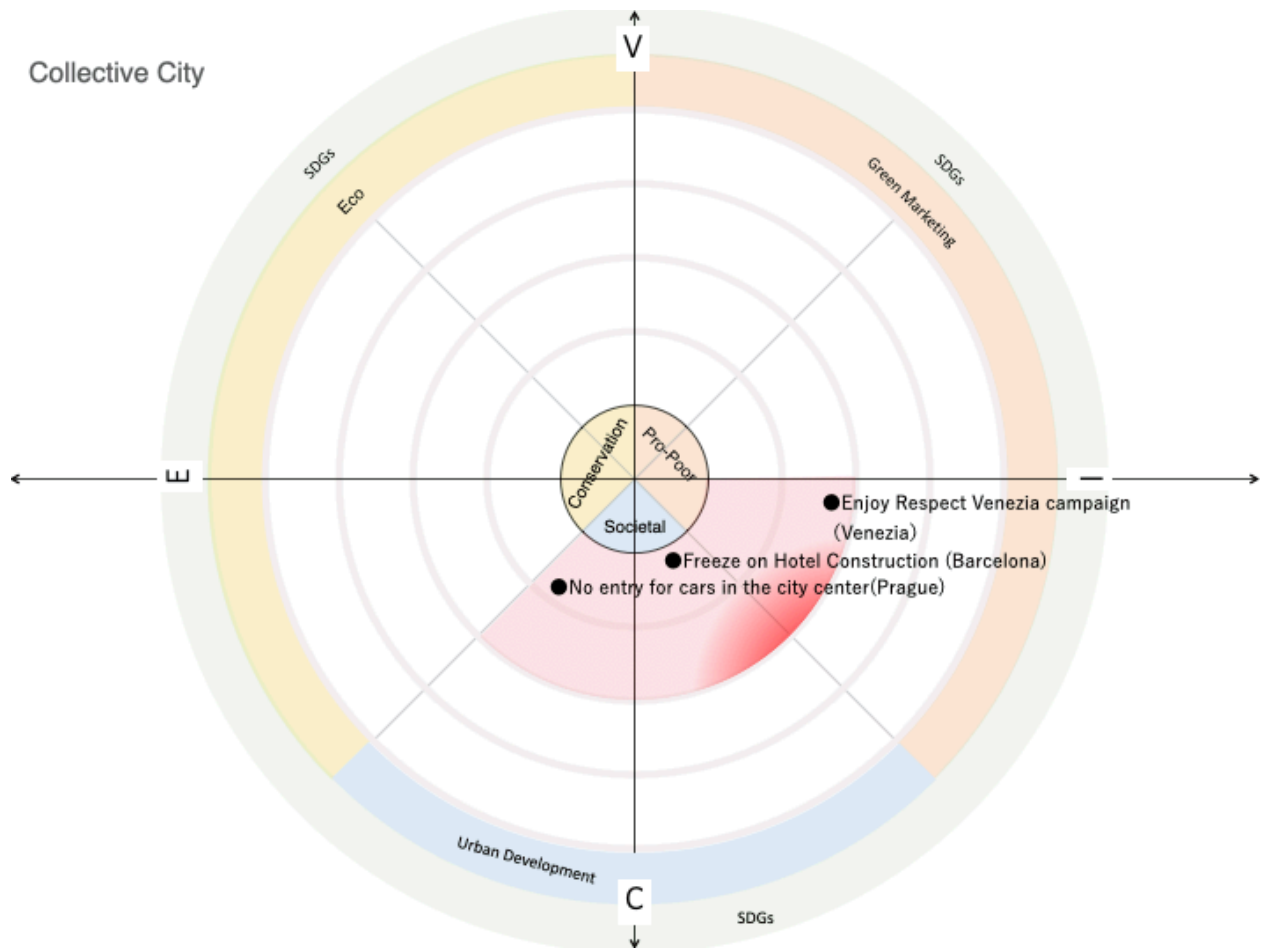
In the "Ring Model," the three "Problem-solving" mindsets from the "Roots Model" are positioned towards the center of the circle, whereas the three "Visionary Pursuit" mindsets are placed towards the periphery. The center of the circle signifies higher urgency, hence policies there are expected to yield short-term, specific results, often involving institutional rigidity or a form of compulsion. Moving outward from the center, institutional rigidity gradually diminishes, allowing for

more flexibility in policies. In the "Visionary Pursuit" mindset, the focus is not on immediate problem-solving but rather on achieving long-term and generally significant goals such as ideals, visions, or societal trends. Therefore, policies chosen tend to prioritize autonomy and are aimed at realizing these larger objectives over the medium to long term. From the perspective of policy makers, expressed more subjectively, those aiming for "problem-solving" focus their policy deliberations towards the center of the circle, whereas those oriented towards "vision pursuit" contemplate optimal policies towards the outer periphery. In the NIST Tree, the "SDGs Mindset" is positioned at the outermost layer. This interpretation arises from the difficulty in enforcing commitments to achieving the global issue of SDGs literally.

By organizing it this way, it becomes possible to depict the overall composition of today's sustainable tourism, understanding its elements and the policies executed with specific objectives in mind. As mentioned earlier, sustainable tourism presents a fundamentally simple structure combining sustainability and tourism. However, it also entails ambiguity in their relationship and, as revealed through validation by the NIST tree, encompasses a broad and diverse range of elements. It is difficult to imagine opposition to the promotion of sustainable tourism in regions that have been actively pursuing tourism policy. However, following general approval, challenges often arise in the implementation of policies into practice. This thesis has systematically examined the overall framework of sustainable tourism, which has been ambiguously understood and discussed. Its purpose has been to outline a model suggesting where to start and where to aim, or which directions to pursue in order to move forward effectively.

On that basis, in terms of indicating the directionality of overall regional management, we also want to categorize the imagery of goals regarding which destinations to aim for, and discuss how these can be assembled based on various 'prime factors.' This is the essence of 'reconstruction.'

Figure 3
 NIST tree of sustainable tourism - Collective city as an example



- Collective City

To address the negative impacts of tourism on the social aspects of regions, such as overtourism, there is a type that seeks to collectively position tourism within the community. This approach is commonly observed in European cities, with Barcelona being a prominent example. Tourism as an industry and tourists are conceptualized not as an independent entity, but rather as integrated within the urban ecosystem. This approach acknowledges the direct impact on the daily lives of city residents, often facing significant issues. In the context of the NIST Tree, emphasis is placed on the "Societal Mind," where policies with relatively high enforceability are occasionally adopted to address these challenges.

- Cool Rural

It is an attractive rural area expanding as an alternative to traditional urban and large tourist destinations. Traditionally known as rural tourism, it emphasizes keywords such as slow living, local culture, and food. If we were to identify differences from traditional rural tourism, it lies in the conceptual reimagining of

rural areas not merely as "non-urban," but as more deeply rooted in the region through tourism resources and practices. This approach results in forms of tourism with a lower environmental footprint. Additionally, "Cool Rural" tourism features coexist with advanced design and comfort.

In the context of the Ring Model, the aim is to achieve a balance between "conservation of the usage environment" and "maintenance of usage levels," often seen in destinations oriented towards "eco" or "green marketing." Initiatives typically involve less coercive measures, such as promoting environmental certification systems or developing eco-tour products. New Zealand's inaugural "Sustainable Tourism Charter," along with destinations like Rotorua known for Maori indigenous tourism and thermal spa tourism, and initiatives such as the UNWTO's Best Tourism Village launched in 2020, can be interpreted as frameworks bolstering the concept of "Cool Rural."

- Green Isle

This is an example of sustainable tourism initiatives stemming from a sense of crisis over resource depletion and similar issues. It primarily focuses on environmental conservation. Islands where concerns about depletion and qualitative degradation of resources are prevalent and mountain destinations tackling issues like reduced snowfall due to climate change fall within this category.

Many initiatives in this category primarily adopt a "resource conservation mindset" and often entail measures with a degree of enforcement. A notable example is the enforced limitation on the number of tourists allowed to land in the Galapagos Islands. Hawaii is uniquely positioned as a "Green Isle" while emphasizing culture as a focal point in its policies and initiatives.

- Dove Village

Many initiatives are often undertaken with community participation, aiming to expand economic ripple effects within the region. These efforts are predominantly found in depopulated areas and small-scale villages. Examples include Community-Based Tourism, which is more prevalent in emerging and developing countries rather than advanced countries. We'd like to name it "Dove Village," inspired by the dove, symbolizing peace and social justice.

A concrete example that comes to mind is Bhutan, which imposes a daily tourist tax of \$200. Known for its community-based tourism, this small country has prioritized qualitative improvement over quantitative expansion of tourists from early stages. It aims to foster a form of tourism that contributes to the happiness of residents, social justice, and economic development. The \$200 tourism tax serves as a funding source for initiatives such as the development of tourism-related skills within Bhutan.

In the Roots Model, mindsets such as "Green Marketing," "Community

Development," and "SDGs" often serve as starting points. On the Ring Model, these are centered around "Sustaining Regional Economy," ranging from "Maintaining Usage Levels" to "Improving Living Environment," covering a certain spectrum of actions and initiatives. Therefore, rather than specific high-enforcement initiatives, the emphasis is on initiatives with high autonomy, such as "tour development" and "establishment of local product purchase venues."

- Ethical Resort

Policies aimed at incorporating ethical travelers at tourist destinations are being implemented among private enterprises, enhancing the image of sustainable tourism. In recent years, media has often highlighted lists such as "Top 10 Ethical Resorts in the World" or "Ethical Resorts for Honeymooners," where high-end hotels and resorts in emerging and developing countries and island nations frequently develop their businesses with an "ethical" concept. Therefore, these mindsets are classified under "green marketing," "eco," and "SDGs."

The characteristics include a distinction between types that focus on "sustaining regional economy" on the Ring Model and those oriented towards "conserving usage environment." The former encompasses luxury resorts such as Tulum in Mexico, which employ local artisans, focus on traditional building materials and methods, and offer locally sourced ingredients. These resorts have garnered attention from affluent North American clientele in recent years. The latter example, like the Six Senses Fiji with its "100% solar-powered" initiative, represents it focusing on environmental conservation.

- Edgy Capital

This refers to cases that lead their own country or the world by advocating for sustainable tourism through advanced and innovative initiatives. Rather than specific actions, these cases set visionary goals that mark turning points in policy trends, influencing the establishment of standards and long-term policy directions. In Europe, Copenhagen stands out as a representative case with its shocking title of "The End of Tourism" strategy, while Slovenia, which swiftly introduced a national sustainable tourism certification system, would also be classified as an "edgy capital." In Japan, Kamaishi City's integrated experiential program "Open Field Museum Concept," which combines local industries, food culture, and the journey as a disaster-stricken area, could be considered relevant.

On the Roots Model, mindsets range widely from "eco" to "community development," and in recent years, many cases have expanded these to encompass the "SDGs" mindset as well. Destinations that consistently promote edgy initiatives to project its uniqueness and innovation externally, aiming to establish new values in tourism policy.

Figure 4
Six types of sustainable tourism by NIST tree





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Notes

In this paper's analysis and discussion, we have referenced the following sustainable tourism promotion strategies and plans.

The Hawaii Tourism Authority "Strategic Plan 2020-2025," Barcelona City "Turisme

2020 Barcelona," Copenhagen Capital Region DMO "Tourism for Good," Vancouver Tourism Commission "Vancouver Tourism Master Plan," Kamaishi City "Kamaishi City Tourism Promotion Vision," Okinawa Prefecture "6th Okinawa Prefecture Tourism Promotion Basic Plan," Prague City "Prague Destination Management: Putting Prague First," and the Galapagos Special Zone Government Advisory Council "Plan Galápagos: Plan de Desarrollo Sustentable y Ordenamiento Territorial del Région Especial de Galápagos"

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Perspective: Future of Sustainable Tourism

Yutaka Nakajima

Introduction

Five years have elapsed since the United Nations designated the "International Year of Sustainable Tourism." During this period, the conditions of tourist destinations involved in sustainable tourism, as well as the market and stakeholder awareness, have likely undergone significant changes. Since the mid-1990s, when the concept of sustainable tourism was first proposed, there has been considerable progress in both research and practice, particularly internationally. In the period before the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainable tourism primarily addressed issues related to overtourism. Currently, in the post-COVID era, it has gained renewed attention as a desirable model for future tourism practices.

The concept of sustainable tourism is broad, originally encompassing perspectives of society, environment, and economy. However, the focus often shifts depending on the issues at hand. During phases of overtourism, sustainable tourism is typically discussed from the perspective of local community impacts within a societal context. Conversely, in discussions about decarbonization, it is framed from an environmental standpoint concerning the global ecosystem. Thus, the emphasis in sustainable tourism varies with the specific concept of tourism, travel modalities, corresponding markets, the issues addressed, and the initiatives promoted, often overlapping and differing across various phases.

Therefore, with various international organizations, governments, local authorities, research institutions, and consulting firms each discussing sustainable tourism from their own positions and perspectives, there appears to be confusion when tourism destinations (regions and local governments) and operators (industry sectors and individual businesses) attempt to set their motivations and goals. This multitude of viewpoints and agendas could be causing a misalignment in the implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives. Acknowledging these challenges, there has been an attempt to reconstruct the concept of sustainable tourism. This reconstruction aims to clarify the complex and overlapping current notions and phenomena of sustainable tourism. The goal is to differentiate between obligatory and optional actions for tourism destinations and operators, providing clear guidelines for each entity involved in sustainable tourism.

Question from Ecotourism

As reviewed in Feature Article #1, both sustainable tourism and ecotourism as terms and concepts have existed since before the 1990s, and they have been used in various ways across different contexts. In the context of ecotourism, which primarily

treats local resources, especially the natural environment, as a tourist attraction, voluntary and proactive initiatives by operators across Japan, especially those in guiding businesses, have been complemented by national legislation ("Ecotourism Promotion Act") to further encourage active promotion. Additionally, national organizations such as the Japan Ecotourism Association and the Japan Ecotourism Center, along with regional ecotourism promotion groups, have been established throughout the country.

On the international front, sustainable tourism has been primarily driven by the development and adoption of Sustainability Indicators (STIs) since the formation of the "International Task Force for Developing Indicators for Sustainable Tourism" in 1992. Notable milestones include the UNWTO's introduction of "Sustainable Tourism Indicators for Destinations" in 2004 and the GSTC's establishment of the "GSTC-D" criteria for destinations in 2013. Domestically, significant developments awaited the establishment of the "Headquarters for the Promotion of Sustainable Tourism" in 2018. In this regard, particularly within Japan, ecotourism can be said to have advanced significantly ahead of sustainable tourism, both in terms of its theoretical discourse and its practical implementation at the regional level.

The definition of ecotourism varies among organizations in Japan, but the Ministry of the Environment defines it as a form of tourism that involves experiencing and learning about natural environments or historical and cultural aspects, while also taking responsibility for conserving the natural and cultural resources of the areas visited. This definition emphasizes the conservation of resources. On the other hand, the Japan Ecotourism Association expands upon this by defining ecotourism not only as conserving and protecting resources but also as an approach to tourism that aims to sustain local resources, contribute to the local economy, and promote regional development. This definition integrates resource protection with the establishment of tourism and regional promotion. Similarly, the definitions provided by the Nature Conservation Society of Japan (NACS-J) and the Japan Ecotourism Center also include aspects of regional promotion in their definitions of ecotourism. Indeed, ecotourism is not merely a narrow concept targeting only natural resources; it also encompasses historical and cultural elements. Broadly defined, it aligns closely with the concept of sustainable tourism, incorporating economic development and maintaining the triple bottom line of environmental, social, and economic sustainability. As explored in Feature article #1, terms like responsible tourism, adventure tourism, and regenerative tourism, though emphasizing slightly different aspects and perspectives, share a core philosophy. This philosophy centers on the triple bottom line : balancing economic, social, and environmental objectives, and the equilibrium between use and conservation. These concepts, while distinct in their emphases, fundamentally align in their foundational principles.

As ecotourism has become well-established and earnestly embraced by various

regions and stakeholders, questions have arisen whether there are concepts included in sustainable tourism that are not fully addressed by ecotourism, and whether the importance of these concepts has recently increased. Alternatively, there might be reasons for introducing new terms like sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, or regenerative tourism, even if they represent similar concepts. This question forms the starting point for the discussions in this special issue.



Yanbaru Forest in Northern Okinawa

Review of the Feature Articles

Here, we will review the key points and summaries from the feature article 1 through 5.

• Feature Article #1

In Feature article #1, as a preliminary to the overall examination, the definitions and evolution of the term "sustainable tourism" were explored. This feature also addressed related concepts deeply intertwined with sustainable tourism, such as ecotourism and responsible tourism, providing a comprehensive organization of these terms. From the analysis, it was clarified that among various similar concepts and terms, ecotourism and sustainable tourism overlap significantly in their concepts. Although there is some differentiation in their usage, there has been slight mixing of the terms, and both have been used with approximately the same volume and frequency over the years. Then, from this categorization, terms such as responsible tourism and adventure tourism, which have been used for a long time but in more limited contexts, were identified. Additionally, terms like regenerative tourism, which have emerged more recently to explain new concepts, could also be classified.

• Feature Article #2

Feature article #2 was authored by Professor Furuya of Toyo University, who has served as an advisor for the Japan Sustainable Tourism Guidelines under the Japan Tourism Agency and has been a leading figure in domestic policy within the field of sustainable tourism. In the article, the author detailed how international efforts have influenced Japan's domestic initiatives in sustainable tourism. He highlighted two key challenges for advancing sustainable tourism in Japan: firstly, the need for consensus-building among various stakeholders to implement sustainable tourism practices at actual tourist sites, and secondly, establishing sustainability with an economic foundation, emphasizing the importance of securing budgets and funds within an economic framework to support the triple bottom line of environment, society, and economy. Both points provided important insights for implementing sustainable tourism beyond theoretical discussions, emphasizing the necessity for actionable strategies. Additionally, the article stressed the importance of setting appropriate goals based on local realities to advance sustainable community development, a theme that also resonates with the regional models presented in Feature article #5.

• Feature Article #3

Feature article #3 was authored by Mr. Momoi and Mr. Jingu from the Hokkaido Branch of the Development Bank of Japan. Both have supported the sustainable growth of the tourism industry in Hokkaido and last year published a report titled "Current State of Sustainable Tourism and Future Directions in Hokkaido—Towards Promoting Sustainable Tourist Area Development." In the article, it was noted that Hokkaido, with its abundant natural resources, is highly compatible with sustainable tourism. However, there is a concern that delays in implementing sustainable practices could lead to significant damage to its reputation as a tourist destination. It also identified "establishing a management system" and "securing sustainable funding sources" as the two major challenges for advancing sustainable tourism in Hokkaido. These challenges overlap significantly with the two national issues highlighted by Professor Furuya in Feature article #2. In Niseko Town, which is recognized as a leading example, a management system is only just being established, and financial resource considerations are still in the early stages. This suggests that many municipalities in Japan are only just beginning to implement sustainable tourism initiatives.

• Feature Article #4

Feature article #4 was authored by Associate Professor Iwasa from Taisho University, who drew on his extensive field experience as a staff member of the Ministry of the Environment. He discussed the current state and challenges of adventure tourism in the Amami and Okinawa regions. Adventure tourism, as defined by the ATTA and discussed in the article, involves travel primarily motivated by at least two of the following three elements: interaction with nature, physical activity, and cultural exchange. This article introduced an expanded model of adventure tourism (Iwasa, 2022), which positions it closer to the concept of sustainable tourism. As the author notes "the term "adventure tourism" can also be read as "sustainable tourism" or "ecotourism" without affecting the understanding of the content," it indicates a significant overlap among these concepts. He also highlighted issues for social implementation such as "creating a fund" and "establishing a promotional organization," as well as "sharing the philosophy within the community" as a prerequisite. These specific initiatives are being advanced in the Amami and Okinawa regions under the banner of adventure tourism, rather than through ecotourism or sustainable tourism. This shift in focus under adventure tourism is particularly intriguing and warrants attention for future developments.

• Feature Article #5

In Feature article #5, co-authored by Associate Professor Ishiguro from Hokkaido University, who is well-versed in European contexts, and myself, we attempted to deconstruct and reconstruct the concepts encompassed by sustainable tourism. In the article, we organized and categorized information on sustainable tourism, both domestically and internationally, based on the mindsets underlying policy challenges and the scope of these policies, as well as the strategies that are formulated and implemented as a result. We proposed two visualization models: the "Roots Model," likened to the roots and trunk of a tree, and the "Rings Model," to illustrate the outcomes of our classification. Through this model, regions can use the Roots Model to identify coverage (scope) and reasons (challenges) for engaging in sustainable tourism, and the Rings Model to examine the expected outcomes (objectives) and the actual measures (policies) implemented. In the development of our approach, we recognized that there often exists a misalignment, or an unrecognized discrepancy, between the background intentions (scope and challenges) and the concrete actions (objectives and policies) in sustainable tourism efforts. To address this, we proposed the NIST model, integrating both aspects to ensure alignment. We also presented six regional images of sustainable tourism where the scope, challenges, objectives, and policies are well-matched, demonstrating how regions can effectively align their strategies for better outcomes. While other configurations may be possible, the six

patterns we presented represent typical regional models where the scope, challenges, objectives, and policies of sustainable tourism align well. These models are the result of deconstructing and reconstructing the concept of sustainable tourism, highlighting our approach to harmonizing various elements within the sustainable tourism framework.

Sustainable Tourism in Post-Covid Era

In the same year as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism, 2017, this magazine, "Tourism Culture," also organized a special feature on sustainable tourism. It featured "Learning Problem-Solving Skills from the Field" with eight domestic cases ranging from Hokkaido to Okinawa. The cases explored specific challenges and solutions in sustainable tourism from the perspectives of resources (natural and cultural), society (residents and tourists), and economy (industry and employment). The goal was paradoxically to highlight the importance of the comprehensive concept of sustainable tourism through these specific instances.

After five years, sustainable tourism is no longer seen just as an alternative form of tourism in the post-Covid era. It is increasingly recognized as a fundamental concept underlying the entire tourism sector, emphasizing the necessity for tourism practices to be inherently sustainable. In this context, the concept of sustainable tourism is expanding beyond the regions initially considered advanced in their practices five years ago. More regions are now voluntarily or responsively engaging in sustainable tourism, including areas that are new to the concept. These regions may experience confusion and challenges in fully understanding and implementing the broad and complex aspects of sustainable tourism.

While it's not essential to get caught up in the terminology of sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, or adventure tourism, as someone tasked with communicating the concept and importance of sustainable tourism and promoting its adoption domestically, it's crucial to avoid presenting new information and insights as if they are the sole correct answers. This approach ensures a balanced and open-minded perspective on sustainable tourism practices. On the other hand, regions engaging in these initiatives also need to evolve from relying on and listening to experts and knowledgeable individuals, to a more proactive stance of researching and making decisions independently. While I don't believe this feature issue has provided a complete navigation chart for both parties, I hope it has prepared the materials necessary for future discussions and development.

Establishment of Okinawa Lab for Sustainability

This year, Japan Travel Bureau Foundation announced the opening of the "Okinawa Office (Okinawa Lab for Sustainability)" in Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture. This is the first time the foundation has established an office outside its main location in Aoyama, Tokyo. The initiative is part of the foundation's strategic plan "Challenge

2026" and represents a significant step in its efforts to expand and innovate. Going forward, the Okinawa Lab for Sustainability will energetically pursue various activities with a focus on sustainable tourism, the theme of this issue. These activities include supporting the recovery and sustainable development of tourism in Okinawa, conducting research and surveys in the field of sustainable tourism promotion, and building a platform for individuals practicing sustainable tourism to share knowledge and experiences.

The foundation positions itself as a "practical academic research institution" and has always aimed to balance theory and practice. It has developed theories based on insights gained through independent projects funded by its own resources. These theories are then applied in practice through projects commissioned by national and local governments, further enhancing their robustness.

This special issue attempts to construct new perspectives and theories on sustainable tourism, though the discussions and theoretical robustness are acknowledged to be still in development. Moving forward, the aim is to refine these theories through ongoing discussions with experts, researchers, and stakeholders involved in sustainable tourism, not just those featured in this issue. The ultimate goal is to create practical applications based on these theories, especially through activities at the Okinawa Lab for Sustainability, to serve as a precise navigational chart for the field.



O2O Okinawa, Okinawa Lab for Sustainability is in this shared office.

Conclusion

During the writing period for this piece, I encountered numerous articles and commentaries on sustainable tourism from both domestic and international sources. Many of these articles seemed focused on redefining the concept of sustainable

tourism and explaining how it differs from other types of tourism. The increased interest in sustainable tourism, which had been gradually rising even before the pandemic, surged further during the COVID-19 crisis. This heightened interest has led to a rapid increase in regions beginning to engage in or explore sustainable tourism initiatives. From my own observations, this surge in activity has also prompted a wave of questions and concerns about the specifics of these initiatives. The recent surge in articles and commentary on sustainable tourism, both domestically and internationally, can be seen as a response to the questions and uncertainties expressed by practitioners in the field. This interaction between the ground-level initiatives and the support from researchers and experts is particularly encouraging. Five years after the International Year of Sustainable Tourism, the enthusiasm surrounding sustainable tourism could make 2022 the de facto inaugural year of sustainable tourism in Japan, particularly as we anticipate a full resurgence in travel post-pandemic. The rapid rise in awareness and national initiatives for sustainable tourism in Japan can be attributed to the efforts of various entities including the UNWTO's office in Japan, the Japan Tourism Agency, related organizations, and pioneering regions like Kamaishi City and Niseko Town. The dedication and efforts of these stakeholders over the past few years have significantly contributed to this momentum. I'd like to express profound respect for their persistent efforts.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to Professor Ananda Kumara, who, despite being busy with his return to Sri Lanka after years of research and teaching in Japan, contributed the foreword for this issue. I also express hope that Sri Lanka, despite its current challenges, will soon see a revival in tourism, economic, and academic exchanges. With these thoughts, I conclude this manuscript.



Evening view from Colombo, Sri Lanka

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