

## FRAMING THE FUTURE AGENDA OF BLUE TOURISM IN SUSTAINABLE COASTAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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*Viewpoint*  
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### INTRODUCTION

Coastal tourism destination constitutes one of the largest and fastest-growing segments in the tourism industry. Notably, they are unique; thus, one developmental strategy fits all are no longer relevant. Hence, integrating coastal tourism with global sustainable development plans is challenging. Hence, many governments embrace tourism developmental plans purely based on economic and monetary logic (IRMA 2018). However, most of them prioritised monetisation over the sustainability of resources, which negatively impacts the environment and the local community's livelihood. Besides, the conventional tourism development model neglects ecosystem preservation, community participation, and community-inclusive growth. Moreover, most previous developmental strategies did not consider sustainable governance, the coordination between stakeholders, and administrative policy structures (Dwyer 2018; Heidkamp and Morrissey 2018; Mior Shariffuddin et al. 2022; Morais de Brito et al. 2019). As a result, most of the adverse environmental effects of tourism activities can be seen mostly in the island and coastal destinations (Sharafuddin and Madhavan 2020).

Developing island tourism as per the sustainable development growth thrusts should be done through active stakeholders' involvement and holistic policy engagement. However, numerous concepts related to tourism destination sustainability, such as sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, pro-poor tourism, green tourism, and ethical tourism, are used indiscriminately whilst lacking clear definitions and conceptual frameworks (Hanafiah et al. 2016; Morais de Brito et al. 2019). Besides, the rapid and uncontrolled tourism development in the coastal tourism destinations has exposed their fragile ecosystems to an ever-increasing risk of ecological degradation (Munro et al. 2019; Woo et al. 2018). Hence, there remains a significant gap in the current understanding towards a comprehensive conceptualisation of sustainable tourism development.

As a result, current researchers recently poised the Blue economy concept as a sustainable practice of marine resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, jobs, and ocean ecosystem health (Narula and Sakhuja 2017; Morais de Brito et al. 2019; OECD 2016). The United Nations also champion the Blue economy concept as part of

the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda (OECD 2016). However, the adoption of the SDGs to guide coastal tourism destinations is still incipient. Besides, the lack of communication between different tourism stakeholder groups makes it difficult to develop a unified, sustainable developmental policy (Morais de Brito et al. 2019). Moreover, the lack of engagement between the industry-academia-community makes the SDG's aspiration beyond reach (OECD 2019; IRMA 2018).

## **BLUE ECONOMY AND TOURISM**

As part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations advocated the Blue economy concept and agenda within the marine and coastal areas (OECD 2016). The Blue economy is the long-term strategy to support sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors, including sustainable use, management, and conservation of aquatic and marine ecosystems and associated resources. Similar to the 'Green Economic', the Blue economy model aims to improve human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. Since the implementation of the SDG2030 by the United Nations, the concept of 'Blue Economic' has been adopted globally by various organisations (Sharafuddin and Madhavan 2020).

Conceptually, the Blue economy framework proposes that the island tourism industry and tourist activities contribute to destination sustainable growth. Besides, island tourism and tourist activities should contribute to sustainable development: by promoting exceptional livability, equitability, and fair distribution of resources and opportunities (Dwyer 2018). The United Nations proposes practical policy guidelines to increase the contribution of tourism to the blue economy while documenting the vulnerability of coastal, marine and maritime tourism in the blue economy agenda (OECD 2016). However, few efforts have been made to date to integrate the Blue economy model into sustainable tourism efforts (Heidkamp and Morrissey 2018; Morais de Brito et al. 2019).

As the coastal tourism destinations' economic sustainability depends on their marine and coastal resources, various governments follow suit the Blue economy framework proposed by the United Nations (OECD 2016). The Blue Economy concept has an added importance, as the coastal and marine tourism activities generate significant revenue and substantially impact the community's quality of life (OECD 2016). However, coastal and maritime tourism activities affect sustainable development in all its components; hence, policymakers are challenged (Cater and Richardson 2017; Dwyer 2017; OECD 2016). Hence, there is an actual need to formulate a strategy to ensure that coastal tourism destination development will generate economic growth while ensuring ecological and social sustainability (Krishnamurthy et al. 2018; Munro et al. 2019). This includes more economically and environmentally sound investments and businesses and utilising natural resources more efficiently.

However, short-sighted management plans focused on economic prosperity have promoted instability and inequality in coastal tourism destinations. Besides, the lack of communication between different stakeholder groups makes it difficult for the adopted development policy to succeed (Dwyer 2017; IRMA 2018; Morais de Brito et al. 2019;

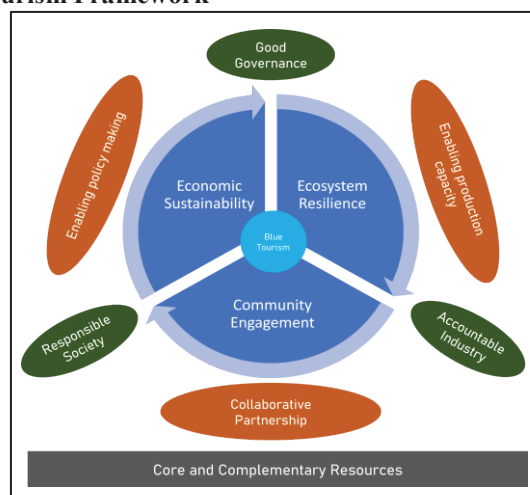
Olewiler et al. 2016). Given the complex constellation of actors in coastal tourism destinations, community participation and support are critical for a win-win situation. Also, due to the uniqueness of coastal tourism destinations' environments, a holistic framework is needed to monitor, mitigate, and manage the impact. Notably, the potential to achieve the SDGs in coastal tourism destinations requires a clear strategic developmental framework and stakeholders' support, which is currently lacking.

## BLUE TOURISM FRAMEWORK

The coastal, marine and maritime tourism, poised as the Blue Tourism' is expected to be the largest among the Blue Economy sectors by 2030 (OECD 2016). Owing to the uniqueness of these coastal, marine and maritime tourism destinations setting, a unified framework is required to monitor, mitigate, and manage the associated coastal tourism development impacts (Hyytiäinen et al. 2022; Kabil et al. 2021), thus warranting the need to explore a much unified and sustainable tourism developmental paradigm. Hence, it is necessary to explore the potential of an integrated Blue economy and sustainable tourism development framework in a unified Blue Tourism framework.

The Blue Tourism framework should emphasise utilising coastal tourism destinations opportunities (core products) while maintaining its coastal ecosystems and socio-economic well-being. This is in line with SDG14 "Life below Water" thrust; by 2030, emphasising sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism activities. The Blue Tourism framework should also offer better coordination between tourism developmental programmes, the stakeholders that promote and market tourism and those that manage the coastal areas. The Blue Tourism framework should encourage local tourism stakeholders to adopt innovative measures to boost sustainability of coastal tourism destinations and achieve enormous economic contribution. Hopefully, such alignment would promote sustainable tourism practices and indirectly empower the tourism stakeholders in planning future tourism development.

Figure 1: **Blue Tourism Framework**



Source: Researcher

The proposed Blue Tourism framework (Fig. 1) foundation is based on the available core and complementary resources, whereas it is supported by economic sustainability, ecosystem resilience and community engagement. This cooperation should be backed by good governance, accountable industry and responsible community. The all-inclusive Blue Tourism integration would thrive from enabling policymaking, enabling production capacity and collaborative partnership environments. The Blue Tourism integration may enhance the likelihood of long-term sustainability of marine life and coastal area superiority while treating the local communities as vital economic development stakeholders. Such a concept would also align with the 2030 SDG1 (no poverty), SDG2 (zero hunger), SDG3 (good health and well-being), SDG4 (quality education), SDG5 (gender equality), SDG8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG10 (reduced inequalities), SDG12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG17 (partnerships for the SDGs).

Future research and practical action combining academic and hopeful tourism stakeholders' efforts should consider the urgency of coastal tourism destinations sustainability and how the Blue Tourism framework could contain the damage to the coastal and marine environments. Hence, this paper proposes future research should frame sustainable gains (balancing economic, social and environmental benefits) into the unified Blue Tourism framework. Specifically, this paper recommends future researchers explore (i) ways to define the scope and measurement of the Blue Tourism framework; (ii) how would tourism core stakeholders interpret Blue Tourism; (iii) how to align stakeholders' expectations with Blue Tourism and 2030 SDGs; (iv) how tourism stakeholders conceptualise the current tourism governance processes with Blue Tourism paradigm in shaping their decision-making and collaborative participation; (v) how does the unified Blue Tourism paradigm contribute in sustaining the coastal tourism destinations resilience and well-being.

## CONCLUSION

Despite a volume of literature demonstrating that Blue Tourism would trigger enhanced sustainability practices and impact, its adaptability and usability in supporting the call to "restart tourism" and the post-pandemic revival tourism initiatives require further investigations. Besides, many have claimed the right time to restart tourism during the recovery stage. Hence, tourism recovery must be built on sustainability (SDGs), avoiding past mistakes. In line with the priorities outlined in the UNWTO Global Guidelines to Restart Tourism, future studies should explore the attributes of the unified Blue Tourism paradigm and its potential to assist and strengthen the strategic direction of coastal tourism destinations, in line with the thrust of SDG2030. A unified Blue Tourism and sustainable tourism development framework would propel coastal tourism destinations to sustain their marine and coastal ecosystem and socio-economic sustainability. As there has been no attempt to integrate socio-economic sustainability and sustainable tourism development into a unified Blue tourism framework to date, this paper is hoped to be a catalyst for such an effort.

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