Tourism governance as a driver of sustainable development: insight from harar city, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Tourism governance involves policies, laws, regulations, and institutional frameworks that help guide the development of tourism. This study aims to assess administrative and institutional features of tourism governance as drivers of sustainable development with particular reference to the city of Harar in eastern Ethiopia. The research employed a descriptive and explanatory design using mixed approaches of probability and non-probability techniques in the process of data collections from various target populations such as experts in the local government offices, culture and tourism bureaus, tour operators, tour and travel guides, museum guides, hotel owners and staffs, and community representatives. Data was collected from 120 respondents through questionnaires and some key informants through interviews. The quantitative ones were analyzed using SPSS version 20 for frequency, percentage, and mean proportions. The study ascertains that tourism governance has a profound impact on the practice and development of tourism industry. Tourism governance mainly of policy frameworks, stakeholder engagements, institutional capacity, and governance structure significantly influences tourism development and subsequently shows an impact on the economic growth of the city. Limited effort in promotional activities, inadequate budget allocation, limited stakeholder involvement, political instability, and weak institutional structure have been identified as the main problems related to the tourism governance of the study area. As a remark, the authors finally recommend that the government improve tourism regulations, review policies, encourage stakeholder engagements, and allocate sufficient budget for the tourism industry to maximize the opportunities potentially could be gained from it.

Key words: Tourism governance, challenges, Sustainability, Tourism development, Harar City.

Introduction

Understanding the concept of governance in tourism sector is important for sustainable tourism development. Governance, in its whole sense, can be defined as the rationale behind policy-making, stakeholder participation, and resource distribution. In this context, tourism governance refers to the structures and functions and relationships that determine the management and order of tourism activity within a specific location (Hall, 2011). Tourism governance encompasses the political, legal, and administrative frameworks governing the functioning of tourism industry to ensure community ties, cultural preservation, environmental safety, and economic rewards (OECD, 2012; Scott, 2011).

Effective tourism governance enhances decision-making processes and ensures equitable distribution of tourism gains in a sustainable manner, as it involves the well-functioning of all

the variables including government bodies, local communities and private enterprise (Bhuiyan et al., 2023; dos Anjos & Kennell, 2019). Strong institutional frameworks in tourism planning and management lead to higher inclusive growth and environmental performance. These can be attained through participatory decision-making, clear regulatory frameworks, and transparent procedures to foster stakeholder trust and cooperation (United Nations, 2007; UNWTO, 2019). On the other hand, Motsamai (2024) argues that poor governance practices, such as corruption and a lack of transparency, can hinder the growth of the tourism industry, erode stakeholder confidence, and obstruct productive cooperation. Moreover, pandemics such as COVID-19, geopolitical tensions, such as the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, and seasonality have been also among the challenges which significantly affect the tourism sector particularly developing counties including Ethiopia (Atasoy et al., 2023; Kumar & Ekka, 2024; Tan & Cheng, 2024). To reverse all the problems mentioned above, adopting a well-structured tourism governance framework significantly enhances the sustainability so that it meets the current needs of tourists and regions and ensures a guaranteed approach to preserve opportunities for the future as well (Bianchi, 2009; Dinica and Hans, 2008). In this case, the role of stakeholders is pivotal as it encourages participatory approach and mitigates competing interests among actors, such as government, the private sectors and local communities (Byrd, 2007).

Ethiopia possesses significant potential in its tourism industry due to its rich cultural heritage and diverse natural landscapes (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2015). However, governance issues such as political instability, safety concerns, and insufficient infrastructure continue to impede growth (Chukala, 2023; Engda, 2020). To fully exploit Ethiopian's tourism potential, improvements in political instability, investment in infrastructure and coordinated marketing strategies are essentials. This enhancement will benefit not only the economy but also local communities, positioning Ethiopia as a prominent tourist destination in Africa.

Ethiopian tourism governance comprises federal, regional, zone and district levels. This structure may pose challenges to industry growth due to lack of coordination, leading to fragmented planning and implementation (Popovic et al., 2011; Saner et al., 2015). This fragmented approach often results in communication gaps, causing inefficient resource allocation due to differing objectives and methods (Popovic et al.,2011).

Furthermore, efforts to expand tourism are complicated by unequal allocation of resources, which exacerbates regional imbalances by giving certain areas more financing and attention than others (Wang & Tziamalis, 2023). Financial limitations may impede the ability to carry out tourism-related projects and upgrade infrastructure, which would further limit prospects for development in underprivileged regions (Haq et al., 2024). Inconsistent policy implementation across different governance levels can lead to confusion and difficulty in compliance among stakeholders due to the vast variation in rules (Marpaung et al., 2021). Harar City faces challenges in sustainable tourism development, including weak tourism governance, inadequate infrastructure, ineffective implementation of policy, poor environmental management, and limited promotion of historical sites. This study examines tourism governance in Harar city, Ethiopia, focusing on policy frameworks, stakeholder

engagement, institutional capacity, and governance structure. The sustainability perspective identifies economic, environmental, and social-cultural sustainability as the primary elements for sustainable tourism development.

Related literature review

The Brundtland Commission's well-known definition of sustainable development, which states that development "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs," has become a central tenet of modern tourism planning (WCED, 1987). Sustainable tourism aims to reduce environmental and cultural damage while helping local economies (UNWTO, 2013). But just growing tourism doesn't mean things will automatically be sustainable. It really depends on how things are managed. Tourism governance involves how tourism policies are made, how choices are decided, and how everyone involved works together (Bramwell, 2011). It's not just about the government; it includes teamwork, involvement, honesty, and responsibility from different groups like public groups, businesses, community organizations, and locals (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Good tourism governance is seen as what helps tourism match the three main areas of sustainability: money, society, and the environment.

Tourism governance theory comes from two main ideas about how management affects sustainable growth. First, Institutional Theory (North, 1990) helps us see how official and unofficial rules affect what people do in terms of money and society. In tourism, this means looking at how policies, rules, and organizations either help or hinder sustainable actions. The theory says that good institutions lower uncertainty and costs, which helps everyone work together better (Scott, 2011). Second, Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) gives us a way to look at the complicated relationships involved in running tourism. It says that when managing a tourist spot, you should think about what's important to everyone involved. This includes groups like government offices, private companies, local people, and other non-profit sectors. Working well with these groups isn't just something extra but is a requirement to make tourism better for the long run (Byrd, 2007). Putting these two theories together gives us a good base for studying the main parts of tourism governance that we're looking at: rules, how people work together, the skills of the organizations involved, and how things are set up.

Research context and knowledge gap

Ethiopia's tourism industry has great potential because of its culture and nature (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2015). Governance problems like instability and poor infrastructure are still holding it back. The tourism governance system struggles with coordination problems between different agencies, which lead to disjointed planning. This creates communication breakdowns and inefficient use of resources.

Uneven resource allocation makes regional inequalities worse, as some areas get more attention than others. Limited funding restricts tourism projects and infrastructure improvements, hurting underprivileged regions. Inconsistent policies across governance levels can cause confusion for stakeholders (Weldesenbet & Meskele,2021). Although governance is important, there's not enough research applying theoretical frameworks to study how tourism governance impacts sustainable growth in cultural heritage sites like

Harar, Ethiopia. Current research mentions governance problems generally, but lacks detailed analysis of their specific impacts locally.

Harar City, a UNESCO site, shows these problems. It has issues with tourism governance, infrastructure, policy implementation, and limited promotion. This study looks at tourism governance in Harar using institutional and stakeholder theories. It focuses on policy, stakeholder involvement, institutional ability, and governance structure and how they affect sustainable tourism in terms of economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects.

Methods

Study area description

Harar is an ancient city located in eastern Ethiopia, a region draped with rich historical, cultural, religious, and natural heritage. The city is situated about 525 kilometers away from Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Origins of Harar go back to the 15th century AD, an important medieval Islamic history (Ahmad, 2015). With its exceptional architectural beauty and historical importance, Harar was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2006. This indicates that the city is an important center for Islamic cultural treasures, reflected in its arts and architectural marvels (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2015).

Regarded as one of the four holiest cities in the world, Harar is packed with attractions for the tourist: an impressive Jugol defensive wall, many majestic mosques, and residential areas of densely packed homes showcasing very fine Islamic architecture. The city boasts over one hundred shrines to saints of Islam and numerous museums and cultural centers featuring an outstandingly rich array of historic and ethnographic collections (Ahmad, 2015).

Harar's tourism development is still in its infancy, yet the potential of this city is huge. The city itself is a haven for Islamic artistry, architectural beauty, and a reflection of outstanding Ethiopian craftsmanship. Harar's cultural and religious heritage does not only benefit the local community but also offers great opportunities for sustainable tourism development. Governance of tourism, in this case, is important in acting as a catalyst for achieving sustainable economic growth with protection of cultural heritage and increased community involvement in the tourism industry. This research reviews how effective tourism governance can use the distinctive features of Harar City as a resource for sustainable development.
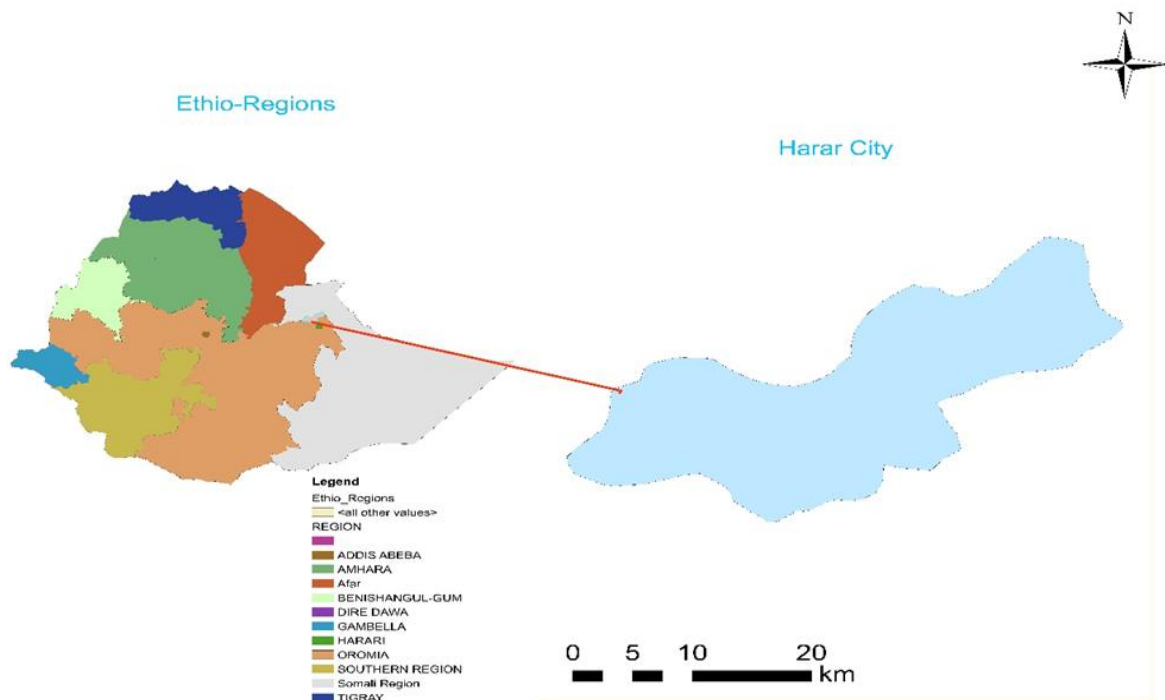
Figure 1. Map of Harar city

Source: Prepared by the researchers using ArcGIS (2024)

Research design

This study used both descriptive and explanatory research designs. Macdonald & Headlam (2008) argue that the researcher does not have control over variables in a descriptive design; instead, the focus is to report on and interpret what is happening. A descriptive research design was thus utilized in this study to explore and narrate the effects which the existing tourism governance system has on Harar City's sustainable tourism development using both qualitative and quantitative methods. In this respect, the descriptive approach was helpful in investigating current governance practices comprehensively, thus showing both strengths and weaknesses of the system. Conversely, the explanatory design unveiled the connection between the governance structures and the sustainable tourism outcome: how governance might catalyze the process of sustainable development.

Research approach

This study employed a mixed research approach (qualitative and quantitative) to benefit from the strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods and a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This approach is also beneficial to understand the impacts of the existing tourism governance structure on sustainable tourism development in the study area. Mixed-methods research allows for a more inclusive understanding of the problem, and it is perhaps the most widely used method in research practice (Dawadi et al., 2021).

Target population of the study

The target population of this study included local government office experts, culture and tourism office experts, tourism operators and tour guides, museum guides, hotel owners and their managers and community representatives. This diverse target population will enable a comprehensive understanding of how tourism governance influences sustainable development in the tourism sector.

Sampling techniques

Both probability and non-probability sampling were used in the process of data collection. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure insightful information was collected from experts in the local government offices, culture and tourism offices, tourism operators, and tour guides. This kind of sampling ensured that data came from sources that know about the tourism governance. Random sampling included local community representatives and government officials in order to increase diversity and reliability in the data obtained.

Sample size determination

Ethiopia has so far conducted 3 Population and Housing Censuses (PHC) in 1984, 1994, and 2007. No census has been conducted since 2007. Therefore, based on worldometer, Harar City has a population of 157,000 (https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/ethiopia-population/ which is retrieved on November 14, 2024. Therefore, the researchers took 60 people using judgmental sampling technique. The researchers selected respondents from various sources, including government officials, Harari Region Culture and Tourism Office, Harar City Culture and Tourism Office, tourist guide associations, museum guides, hotels, and local communities. The population frame for this study included people directly connected to tourist potentials and those involved in tourism governance. The sample was distributed properly using the appropriate sample size determination formula. The quantitative or survey part of the research required representation. To determine sample size, Yamane's (1967) formula was used:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where: n: The sample size; **N:** The population size; **e:** The level of precision or sampling error (0.05).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N*e2} = \frac{172}{1 + 172\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{172}{1.43} = 120.27 \approx \mathbf{120}$$

Therefore, 120 samples for each target group were allocated proportionally and 13 interviewees were selected as:

Table 1. Sample proportion

N<u>o</u>	Sample Frame/Target Groups for Questionaries'		Total Population	Sample Size
1.	Local government office experts		20	14
2.	Harari Region Culture and Tourism Office		25	17
3.	Harar City Culture and Tourism Office		15	11
4.	Tourist Guide Association		18	13
5.	Museum Staff Guides	Harar National Museum	8	6
		Sherif Museum	6	4
		Artur Rambo Arthur Museum	6	4
		Harari Cultural Center Museum	4	3
6.	Hotel owners and their managers		10	7
7.	Local community (purposely selected)		60	41
		Total	**172**	**120**
	Sample Frame for Interviewees Selection			**Selected for Interview**
1.	Local government office experts			2
2.	Harari region culture and tourism office			2
3.	Harar City Culture and Tourism Office			2
4.	Museum guides			2
5.	Community leaders			2
6.	Hotel owner/managers			1
7.	Tourist Guide			2
		Total		**13**

Data collection instruments

Quantitative data was obtained using self-administered structured questionnaires as the primary method of data collection. These questionnaires were carefully crafted to extract authentic information from the designated target groups. Furthermore, qualitative data were acquired through in-depth open-ended and semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity for thorough exploration and clarification, allowing participants to articulate their personal thoughts, ambitions, and emotions comprehensively (Buchanan, 2018).

Closed-ended questions were employed to investigate individuals' reactions regarding specific pre-determined factors whereas open-ended questions proved particularly valuable in elucidating the rationale behind a respondent's perspective on a particular matter (Buchanan, 2018). The study gathered secondary data from various sources, including books, articles, reports, brochures, folders, magazines, and plans, to examine cultural tourism and development. It used personal observation, document analysis, and comparison of findings from different sources to ensure validity and reliability. Observations were conducted using checklists while document analysis included both published and unpublished documents. The study's validity was further strengthened by comparing findings from various sources, including web pages, academic journals, articles, commercial publications, and annual action plans.

Method of data analysis

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather and analyze data. The qualitative approach involved non-numerical data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The quantitative approach involved collecting numerical data and analyzing it using descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data, identifying recurring themes and patterns related to tourism potential and development challenges. The quantitative data were integrated based on similarity and alignment with research objectives.

Results

Response Rate of Questionnaires

Data were collected via a questionnaire distributed to 172 stakeholders in Harar City's tourism sector, including government experts, tourism operators, hoteliers, and community representatives. The survey aimed to assess perspectives on tourism governance and sustainable development. A total of 120 questionnaires were fully completed and returned, resulting in a 69.7% response rate. This section analyzes the demographic composition of these respondents with details of their gender, age, education, and employment status.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

This section presents the demographic data on respondents including gender, age, level of education and employment status. The demographic data on respondents provides valuable insights into the characteristics of the surveyed population.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percent
	Male	68	56.7
Gender	Female	52	43.3
	Total	120	100
Age	18-25 Years	14	11.7
	26-35 Years	56	46.7
	36-45 Years	30	25.0
	46-53 Years	12	10.0
	Above 56 Years	8	6.7
Educational level	Certificate	3	2.5
	Degree	108	90.0
	MA and above	4	3.3
	5.00	5	4.2
	Total	120	100.0
Employment	Tourism Related Sector	110	91.7
	Non-Tourism Related Sector	10	8.3
	Total	120	100.0

The results of Table 2 show that 101 (61.3%) of the respondents are male, while the rest, 160 (36.9%), of the total target groups are female respondents. This implies that the number of male respondents is greater than that of female respondents. This shows males are more involved in the tourism industry compared to females. The age distribution is highly concentrated between 26 and 35 years (46.7%), which suggests that the young adults are actively engaging in tourism-related activities. This section of the population might be more open to new governance practices that promote sustainable development. The sample is highly educated, with 90% holding degree holders that suggest their awareness of the principles underlying sustainable development and good governance. Moreover, as many as 91.7% of respondents in this study were employed in the tourism industry, adding another layer of credibility to their statements regarding how governance influences sustainable development. The demographic profile, therefore, revealed that the insights garnered were very crucial in framing effective governance strategies that advance the sustainability of the tourism industry in Harar.

Descriptive statistics of tourism governance

The Effect of Policy Implementation on Sustainable Tourism Development

Table 3. The effect of policy implementation on sustainable tourism development

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tourism policy effectively supports sustainable tourism development	3.6333	1.22942
Tourism Policies are regularly updated to reflect current trends and challenges.	3.2750	1.32819
The existing tourism policies promote the participation of local communities	3.5500	1.15118
Government policies support sustainable tourism development initiatives	3.4167	1.34466
There is a clear framework for implementing tourism policies in Harar	3.4250	1.32629

(Source: Survey, 2024)

The table shows that the "policies supporting sustainable tourism development" have a high score of 3.63, with a moderate standard deviation indicating different opinions. The "policies are kept up-to-date to reflect emerging trends and challenges" has an average score of 3.28, suggesting that respondents may feel policies are not adapted to changing circumstances. The statement "The existing tourism policies promote the participation of local communities" has an average score of 3.55, indicating some agreement on the setting of policies encouraging local involvement in tourism. The mean for "Government policies support sustainable

tourism development initiatives" is 3.42, with a large variation in responses. This suggests that the implementation of such policies may be effective in some cases but may not be so in others, making it context-dependent. Further research is needed to understand the factors causing such variation in perceptions, including stakeholder perspectives, varying contexts, and other contextual factors. The final statement "There is a clear framework for implementing tourism policies in Harar" has a mean of 3.43, suggesting that while some find it clear, others may encounter ambiguities or challenges. Overall, the data indicates a generally positive perception of current tourism policies in Harar regarding sustainable development, but there are concerns regarding regular updating and clarity in implementation.

In order to support the data obtained in quantitative way about effects of Tourism policy implementations on tourism development in Ethiopia, with evidence from Addis Ababa city. Interview questions were prepared and distributed to hotel managers, hotel customers and local community leaders.

To confirm this idea, an interview was conducted with one tourism expert from Culture and Tourism Office, Ethiopia, who stated that regarding Tourism related policy implementation:

> *The Ethiopian tourism development policy, launched in 2009, aimed to expand tourist attractions, diversify the industry, enhance infrastructure, attract private investment, and establish educational initiatives, but is not fully implemented in the county (Informant, 02, June, 2024). Ethiopia's tourism policy implementation in Harar City faces challenges like lack of stakeholder support, economic issues, poor coordination, and lack of awareness. To address these, political will, media involvement, increased tourism professional awareness, and government financial resource allocation are recommended (Informant, 02, June, 2024).*

The other key informants stated that:

> *The Ethiopian tourism policy, despite its vision for responsible and sustainable tourism development, lacks full support from stakeholders. This problem is exacerbated by lack of awareness about the policy, which hinders its effective implementation in areas like Addis Ababa and other parts of the country (Informant, 04, June, 2024).*

The effect of stakeholder's collaboration on sustainable tourism development

Table 4 The Effect of Stakeholders Collaboration on Sustainable Tourism Development

Stakeholders Collaboration on Sustainable Tourism Development	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tourism stakeholders (government, private sector, local community) in Harar collaborate effectively	2.2833	1.79253
Local community members are actively involved in decision-making processes related to tourism.	3.3167	1.30277
There is clear communication among stakeholders regarding tourism policies and initiatives	3.8583	.92850

(Source: Survey, 2024)

The above table shows that most respondents perceived ineffective collaboration among tourism stakeholders, including government, the private sector, and local community. The mean score for the statement "Tourism stakeholders-government, the private sector, and the local community-collaborate effectively in Harar" is 2.28, with a high standard deviation of 1.79. Local community members are actively involved in decision-making processes related to tourism, but this also indicates certain barriers to full involvement and potential limitations to effectiveness of the community engagement in tourism governance.

The highest mean score for the statement, "There is clear communication among stakeholders regarding tourism policies and initiatives" is 3.86, with a low standard deviation of 0.93. This indicates that respondents generally perceive communication among stakeholders as effective and consistent, but there are still concerns about the effectiveness of collaboration among all stakeholders in Harar. Increasing collaboration could help ensure all stakeholders are on board, which could be an important next step in advancing sustainable tourism development for the region.

To confirm this idea an interview was conducted with one tourism expert in Culture and Tourism Office, Ethiopia, who stated:

> *In sustainable tourism development, stakeholder collaboration entails cooperation among local communities, government entities, private sector businesses, and non-government organizations for mutual interest. Each stakeholder provides diverse perspectives and resources in making better decisions. Local communities may use knowledge of their environment and cultural heritage to guide them in undertaking sustainable tourism development practices. The government agencies may provide regulatory frameworks, while the private sectors can create eco-centric products and services. Collaboration among players will breed a feeling of trust across the board, which is needed for success in a long-term perspective, in addition to contributing positively to the tourism ecosystem (KI 01, June, 2024).*

Institutional capacity

Table 4 the Effect of institutional capacity on Sustainable Tourism Development

Institutional Capacity	Mean	Std. Deviation
Local tourism institutions have sufficient capacity to implement tourism strategies.	3.2750	1.22962
Tourism authorities in Harar are well-staffed and well-trained	3.2417	1.27679
The institutional framework for tourism governance supports effective communication among stakeholders.	3.4333	1.23488
Institutional frameworks are flexible to adapt to emerging tourism trends	3.7250	.78817

(Source: Survey, 2024)

Table 5 above has 3.27 mean values of institutions having sufficient capacity to implement strategies. However, a standard deviation of 1.22 means there is a moderate dispersion of the distribution; hence, though many people believe in the sufficiency of institutional capacity, a considerable number of dissenting opinions exist. The above table shows that the mean score is 3.24, meaning the level of staffing and training of tourism authorities in Harar is good to ensure sustainability of tourism development. Again, a relatively high standard deviation of 1.27 indicates that though many perceive authorities as well-staffed and trained there are indeed varying perceptions about this.

Table 5 further shows that the highest mean of 3.43 in the series, with regard to the level of effective communication among the stakeholders themselves, presents a strong belief in the institutional framework to support dialogue and collaboration within the tourism sector, which supports the suitability of tourism development. The standard deviation stands at 1.23, indicating that while most respondents believe in this aspect, there is still some diversity in opinion, because tourism institutions often have low relationship with stakeholders.

The average of 3.72 indicates that there is a favorable perception regarding the adaptability of institutional frameworks to new trends arising within tourism, a prerequisite if competitiveness is to be maintained in a constantly changing industry. The standard deviation is lower at 0.78, which indicates that tourism institutions at regional and local level have no power to update and change a framework designed and enacted by country level. The reason that the ministry of tourism in Ethiopia has exclusive power to prepare tourism policies and regulations which all regions and city administrations must apply. To this, Harar city and then the tourism office in Harar city accept the polices and implement it as well. By this reason institutional frameworks are not flexible to adapt to emerging tourism trends.

As one of the key informants who is culture and tourism office experts stated:

Institutional capacity helps to manage resources, implement policies, and engage stakeholders in sustainable practices. This capacity is crucial for sustainable tourism development because it allows for comprehensive policies that integrate tourism activities into sustainability objectives, ensuring protection of natural resources, cultural heritage promotion, and community involvement. Efficient governance structures facilitate coordination among stakeholders at local, business, and government agency levels. Institutional capacity also allows for better resource allocation, enabling investment in infrastructure supporting sustainable tourism practices, such as eco-friendly transportation options and facilities. Additionally, solid institutional frameworks build resilience to disturbances like climate change or economic cycles, ensuring the sustainability of tourism initiatives over the long term (KI 05, June,2024).

The effect of governance structure on sustainable tourism development

Table 5 the Effect of Governance Structure on Sustainable Tourism Development

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The governance structure supports sustainable tourism development in Harar	3.4917	1.07684
Leadership in tourism governance is transparent and accountable	3.5833	1.37556
Decision-making processes in tourism governance are participatory	2.9833	1.50620
The governance structure ensures equitable benefits from tourism for all stakeholders	3.4500	1.16569
There is a clear division of responsibilities among tourism-related organizations	3.3917	1.19731

(Source: Survey, 2024)

Table 6 above shows perceptions of tourism governance structure in Harar, focusing on its effectiveness in supporting sustainable tourism development. The mean score of 3.49 indicates a positive perception of the governance structure, with a standard deviation of 1.07 indicating a reasonable scatter in responses. In addition, the above table reveals that the mean score of 3.58 indicates a strong belief in transparency and accountability in leadership, with a standard deviation of 1.38 indicating greater variability. The other mean score of 2.98 suggests less participatory decision-making processes, with a high standard deviation of 1.51 suggesting disagreement among stakeholders over the degree of participation. Moreover, the mean score of 3.45 suggests a somewhat favorable view of the governance structure ensuring equitable benefits of tourism for all shareholders, with a standard deviation of 1.17 indicating moderate agreement but also indicating a difference in opinions regarding equity in benefit distribution. Finally, the mean score of 3.39 indicates some agreement among stakeholders

regarding the division of responsibilities among organizations engaged in tourism activities, with a standard deviation of 1.20.

As a key informant, culture and tourism office expert stated as:

The Harar City's governance structure, derived from the federal government, has significant implications for sustainable tourism development. This top-down approach can facilitate or hinder grassroots initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable tourism. Aligning with federal governance provides Harar with broader resources and frameworks, such as funding opportunities, marketing strategies, and infrastructure development. However, this direct translation of federal government structures into reality can also pose problems, as local regulations and policies may not consider the unique cultural and environmental contexts of Harar. A one-size-fits-all approach may limit local initiative spontaneity and responsiveness to needs. For example, federal guidelines may focus on large-scale tourism without considering local input or ecological impacts, leading to over-tourism or degradation of natural resources. The success of sustainable tourism governance depends on local governments' ability to translate federal directives into relevant contexts. If local governance structures are weak or lack authority and resources, a gap may exist between policy and practice (Informant 01,05,08 & 10, June, 2024).

Challenges of tourism governance on tourism development

Table 6. Challenges tourism governance on tourism development

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lack of promotion	3.4562	1.36556
Inadequate budget allocation	3.7125	1.18903
Limited stakeholder engagement	3.2560	1.42858
Political instability	3.5125	1.38903
Weak institutional structure	3.3563	1.41658

(Source: Survey, 2024)

Table 6 presents data on challenges in tourism governance affecting tourism development, showing the mean and standard deviation for each listed challenge. The findings reveal significant challenges in the tourism industry in Harar city, including inadequate budget allocation, lack of promotion, political instability, weak institutional structure, and limited stakeholder engagement. The high mean value of 3.71 indicates a significant issue with low financial resources, posing a major development challenge. The lack of promotion, with a mean value of 3.45, indicates insufficient efforts to promote tourism activities, hindering growth and potential. Political instability, a weak institutional structure, and limited

stakeholder engagement also pose significant challenges to effective tourism management and development in Harar city.

In addition to the questionnaire survey, the key informant interview stated that:

> *Tourism governance is vital for the industry's growth and sustainability, but challenges from political, economic, social, and environmental factors can hinder its effectiveness and negatively impact tourism development. Political instability in the country significantly impacts tourism development, leading to policy changes and lack of political will, causing uncertainty for investors and businesses. Corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies also hinder sustainable tourism practices. (Informant 02, 04, and 06, June, 2024).*

They added that:

> *Economic factors like fluctuating exchange rates, inflation, and global crises can hinder tourism development in cities, with insufficient funding and income inequality affecting the equitable distribution of benefits. In addition to this, in Hara city, inadequate stakeholder engagement is a major obstacle to tourism governance and development. These stakeholders are vital in decision-making, policy formulation, and sustainable tourism practices. Inadequate engagement often results from ineffective policies and lack of inclusivity and hinders the overall growth of the tourism sector (Informant 02, 04 and 06, June, 2024).*

The other key informant who is a tourism expert in culture and tourism offices in Harar city added that:

> *Even though promotion is crucial for attracting tourists, increasing awareness, and boosting the local economy, promotional activity in Harar city is inadequate. Inadequate promotion can hinder the growth and sustainability of the tourism sector. It hinders investment in tourism infrastructure and services, as many tourists may remain unaware of the city's cultural heritage sites, historical landmarks, vibrant markets, and diverse culinary experiences. This can exacerbate the challenges faced by Harar city in developing its tourism sector. Furthermore, inadequate promotion can strain the resources and capabilities of local authorities responsible for managing tourism development. Without sufficient funding and support, government agencies cannot effectively market Hara city as a tourist destination and coordinate with private sector stakeholders, resulting in fragmented approaches to promoting tourism. This can result in missed opportunities for collaboration and synergy (Informant 01, 02 and 05, June, 2024).*

Correlation matrix

		Policy	Stakeholder Collaboration	Institution	Governance	Sustainable tourism Development
Policy	Pearson Correlation	1	.417**	.798**	.738**	.707**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	120	120	120	120	120
Stakeholder Collaboration	Pearson Correlation	.417**	1	.183*	.465**	.568**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.045	.000	.000
	N	120	120	120	120	120
Institution	Pearson Correlation	.798**	.183*	1	.663**	.607**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.045		.000	.000
	N	120	120	120	120	120
Governance	Pearson Correlation	.738**	.465**	.663**	1	.841**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	120	120	120	120	120
Sustainable tourism Development	Pearson Correlation	.707**	.568**	.607**	.841**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	120	120	120	120	120

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows that the study examined the bivariate relationship between the main dimensions of tourism governance and sustainable development in the city of Harar, Ethiopia. Pearson's correlation analysis showed that all governance factors are strongly and positively correlated with the sustainable development of tourism. The governance structure showed the strongest correlation (r =.841, p <.01) and was identified as the most important relationship between sustainability performance. Policy (r = .707, p < .01) and institutional capacity (r = .607, p < .01) also showed strong and significant correlations, while cooperation between stakeholders (r = .568, p < .01) showed a slightly positive correlation. However, the strong interrelationship between independent variables, in particular between policy and institutional capacity (r = .798, p <.01) points to possible multilinearity, which should be further explored in a subsequent multivariate analysis.

Discussions

The survey indicates that the majority (56.7%) of respondents are men, while 43.3% are women. This gender discrepancy shows that more males are likely to be working in the tourism business. This tendency is consistent with previous tourism research **(Mitra & Sankar, 2021).** The majority of respondents (46.7%) are between the ages of 26 and 35, indicating that young individuals participate in tourist activities. The survey found that 46.7% of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35, showing that young individuals are actively participating in tourism-related activities. This is consistent with research demonstrating that younger people are more inclined to adopt sustainable development strategies. It shows the respondents' extensive educational background, with 90% having earned degrees, to enhance their understanding of sustainable development concepts. The 91.7% of respondents who work in the tourist industry provide weight to their perspectives on governance and sustainable development. This demographic profile is critical for developing effective governance solutions to help Harar's tourist industry remain sustainable.

The main finding of this study is that all core tourism governance dimensions demonstrate significant positive correlations with sustainable tourism development, which are quite strong. Among them, governance structure stands out to be the most powerful factor with a very strong correlation coefficient (r = .841, p = .01) demonstrating it. Therefore, the study's main argument, that governance plays a key role in sustainable tourism development, receives strong empirical backing aligned with global frameworks (UNWTO, 2021)**.** The degree of these relationships is quite different and gives a subtle understanding of the influence each one has, while the entire picture of governance is positive and this highlights their significance as a group in bringing about sustainable results. While the overall governance structure was positively assessed (average = 3.49), the low score for participatory decision-making (average = 2.98) revealed a significant deficiency in the governance. This indicates that a governance structure is in place, but that its implementation lacks real inclusiveness. This strong correlation suggests that strengthening participatory processes - moving beyond what Bachtiar (2022), would have called tokenism to a genuine empowerment of citizens - could bring the biggest improvements in sustainability outcomes. The high level of transparency (average = 3.58) provides a solid basis on which to build more collaborative structures.

Both policies (r =.707, p <.01) and institutional capacity (r =.607, p <.01) showed strong and significant links to sustainable development. However, their very high correlation coefficients (r =.798) and the fact that the correlation coefficient is lower than that of the independent drivers indicate that they are deeply interlinked, not independent. Descriptive results underline this link: respondents were generally positive about the effectiveness of the policy (mean = 3.63) but were only slightly confident about institutional capacity (mean = 3.27). This divergence is consistent with the qualitative observation that institutional frameworks often lack the adaptability and staffing to effectively implement well-intentioned policies. As Ngxongo (2021) points out, policies need to be adaptive, but in Harar the gap between policy and practice is due to a lack of data and analysis. This strong correlation suggests that

policies alone are not enough; they must be backed up by institutions that have the training, resources, and flexibility to be effective local intermediaries.

Cooperation between stakeholders has shown a modest but significant correlation with sustainable development (r =.568, p <.01). This statistical link is crucial, as it underlines the importance of cooperation, even when descriptive data reveal that cooperation is a major area of weakness. The very low average score for effective cooperation (2.28) shows a serious deficiency despite good communication (3.86) and efforts to involve the community (3.32). This suggests that, while channels of communication may exist, they do not translate into meaningful cooperation. This finding is supported by Hilario et al.(2024), underlining that cooperation is often lacking in practice. The positive correlation indicates that addressing this cooperation deficit is a clear opportunity to improve the sustainability of the performance.

The results for institutional capability show a modest impression of local tourist institutions' ability to effectively implement initiatives, with a mean score of 3.27. Although respondents are confident in the capability of tourist authorities (mean = 3.24), the variety in responses indicates varying views on the sufficiency of staffing and training. This is consistent with study by Erkuş-Öztürk (2011), who states that well-trained individuals are critical for good tourist governance. The flexibility of institutional frameworks (mean = 3.72) got positive feedback, demonstrating some confidence in the institutions' capacity to adjust to new developments. Qualitative data gathered from informant's interview indicate that institutional frameworks may not always be adaptable to local circumstances, highlighting the need for institutions to be fully staffed and have the authority and flexibility to modify policies to meet the specific demands of Harar's tourism sector.

In general, Harar's system of governance is highly rated with a mean score of 3.49. However, the lower rating for participatory decision-making (mean = 2.98) indicates a considerable room for improvement. This research is in line with Arnstein (1969), fears of the "ladder of citizen participation," which mostly excludes genuine involvement in political processes. Transparency and accountability in leadership are scored highly (mean = 3.58), but the range of responses indicates various stakeholder experiences. The findings show that, while the governance structure serves as a basis for long-term tourism growth, strengthening participatory processes is crucial for establishing stakeholder confidence and ensuring equitable profits from tourist operations.

The study reveals that Harar's efficient tourist management efforts suffer from budget constraint, only 3.71% of the city's annual budget, which hinders the marketing and growth of the tourism industry. The current finding is consistent with Kauffman et al. (2020), which indicated that financial constraints are common barriers to effective sustainable tourism development. The inability carry out promotional activities to create demand, with a mean of 3.45, hampers tourism growth. Therefore, better marketing strategies should be formulated so as to attract tourists, as underlined by Chen and Kerstetter (2021). Other major barriers include political instability and weak institutions. This finding matches with Hall and Page (2019), in that political factors greatly influence the governance of tourism. Interviews with key informants have highlighted the notion that political instability forms an uncertain atmosphere for tourism development, thus affecting long-term planning and investment. The

lack of participation by stakeholders further exacerbates these problems, as good governance is possible only with the active participation of all parties.

Conclusion

This study aimed to empirically assess tourism governance as a driver of sustainable development in Harar, Ethiopia. The findings provide a clear and evidence-based conclusion: while the foundational elements for effective tourism governance are recognized in Harar, significant gaps in its structure, implementation, and collaborative mechanisms critically hinder its potential as a driver of sustainable development.

The analysis reveals a pivotal insight: the Governance Structure emerged as the strongest correlate of sustainable development (r = .841), underscoring that the overarching system of roles, responsibilities, and coordination is paramount. However, this potential is undermined by a pronounced deficit in participatory decision-making, indicating that the current structure is more hierarchical than inclusive. Furthermore, the study identifies a critical disconnection between policy and practice. While Policy frameworks themselves are viewed positively, their strong correlation with the less modestly perceived Institutional Capacity (r = .798) highlights a fundamental implementation gap. Policies cannot be effective without capable, well-trained, and adaptive institutions to execute them.

A third major impediment is the failure of stakeholder collaboration. Despite its significant correlation with sustainability (r = 0.568), the stakeholder collaboration was rated as the poorest-performing governance dimension. This indicates that communication channels exist but they fail to translate into meaningful cooperative action, creating a substantial barrier to inclusive growth.

These governance challenges are exacerbated by external and resource-based constraints, including inadequate budget allocation, political instability, and insufficient promotional activities, which collectively create an uncertain environment that stifles long-term investment and planning.

Therefore, for tourism to become a true engine of sustainable development in Harar, governance interventions must be strategic and sequential. The primary focus must be on transforming the governance structure to be genuinely participatory, empowering all stakeholders in decision-making processes. Concurrently, efforts are urgently needed to bridge the policy-institution gap by enhancing institutional capacity through training, staffing, and granting flexibility for local adaptation. Finally, moving beyond mere communication to foster genuine, action-oriented stakeholder collaboration is essential for building trust and ensuring equitable distribution of tourism benefits. Without addressing these core governance deficiencies, financial investments and promotional campaigns will yield limited returns in achieving long-term sustainability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following policy and practice recommendations are proposed to harness tourism as a driver of sustainable development in Harar.

- **Prioritize structural reforms in governance**: - As governance structures have shown the strongest correlation with sustainable development (r =.841), policy makers should work to build more integrated and coordinated governance. This means that policy makers should clearly define the responsibilities of tourism authorities at federal, regional, and municipal level, establishing formal rules to ensure coordination to reduce fragmentation in planning and implementation.
- **Strengthen participatory governance structures**: - The regional tourism office should establish a formal steering committee with decision-making powers. The committee shall be composed of representatives of local authorities, tour operators, hotel associations, and elected community leaders from the regions concerned. Its mandate should be to jointly develop tourism plans and to monitor their implementation. This would directly address problems in the collaborative decision-making process.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that that there is no conflict of interest in this research. The study was conducted fairly, and there are no such financial or personal relationships which could have influenced the results.

Ethical consideration

This study does not carry any violations against humanity. All participants' interactions were conducted in a respectful manner and in accordance with ethical procedures.

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