

Assessment of doctoral thesis

Title of thesis: Stakeholder Perceptions Towards Sustainable Tourism: A Case Study of Vietnam

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A) Relevance of the dissertation topic

The thesis topic is highly relevant. Tourism is a global economic sector, and its development directly impacts not only economic growth, investment, and employment, but also life within destinations and socio-environmental systems. Consequently, the negative side effects of tourism raise questions about how to balance best its economic, cultural, social, and environmental impacts. Sustainable tourism is gaining importance and can be understood as a multidimensional category encompassing economic competitiveness, environmental protection, visitor and resident satisfaction, and the preservation of cultural heritage. These pressing issues also apply to Vietnam, where tourism represents a crucial sector for the country's socio-economic development. Formally, sustainable tourism is enshrined in Vietnam's legislation; however, its practical implementation remains uneven across destinations and stakeholder groups.

B) Achievement of the objectives set out in the dissertation

The thesis is structured around two primary research questions. To address them, the doctoral candidate established four research objectives. Although the PhD student does not explicitly state which of these objectives is the primary one, it is clear from the context that the main goal is to develop an integrated conceptual model linking perceived tourism impacts, host-guest relationships, ESG practices, and political trust to destination sustainability through tourism resilience – namely, the objective labelled as RO3. Nevertheless, an explicit statement of the primary objective would have enhanced the clarity of the thesis.

The PhD student has successfully fulfilled the stated objectives and addressed the research questions.

Objective RO1 (a critical literature review in the field of tourism resilience) was achieved in Chapter 4.1, where the student conducted a bibliometric analysis of tourism resilience literature spanning 2000–2025. The student identified six thematic clusters and critically delineated gaps in existing research, particularly regarding trust, legitimacy, stakeholder diversity, and the daily pressures of tourism.

Objective RO2 (stakeholder interpretation) was realised in Chapter 4.2 through qualitative research (in-depth interviews). The student compared in detail how residents, tourists, businesses, and public administration perceive sustainability and resilience, synthesising the results into a stakeholder positioning model.

Objective RO3 (formulation of the conceptual model): The student developed an integrated model in Chapter 2.6 that links perceived impacts, host-guest relations, ESG practices, and political trust with destination sustainability through the mediation of resilience, which was subsequently tested to achieve Objective RO4. Objective RO4 was fulfilled in Chapters 4.4 and 4.5, where the student utilised statistical methods to test hypotheses H1–H5 across all four stakeholder groups.

Furthermore, the student successfully answered both primary research questions. RQ1: Chapter 4.2 reveals that one's position within the system shapes perceptions – while residents and tourists emphasise emotional and cultural aspects, businesses and public officials focus on strategic and institutional factors. RQ2: This question was addressed primarily in Chapters 4.4 and 4.5. The results confirmed that tourism resilience functions as a universal mechanism that positively influences destination sustainability across all groups, although the significance of individual predictors varies between them.

C) Problem-solving procedure and results of the dissertation, specifying the student's specific contribution

The submitted thesis follows a traditional structure. In the introduction, the doctoral candidate explains the development and significance of sustainable tourism, particularly within the context of Vietnam. The student cites previous scholarly work on the perspectives of individual stakeholders. Here, the student highlights in particular the fragmented analyses of individual stakeholder groups and dimensions of sustainable tourism, and points out the lack of a sufficiently integrative explanatory model. In the introductory section, the student outlines the research gaps emerging from the literature review. For clarity, I recommend a stronger structural link between this section and Chapter 2.5, which essentially synthesises the main findings of the literature review.

The student divides the research gaps into four categories: Analytical gap: Concerns a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder perceptions - specifically, how the views of individual groups converge, diverge, or clash, and how this dynamic affects sustainability outcomes at the destination level. Integrative conceptual gap: Sustainable tourism encompasses various dimensions that have hitherto been investigated in isolation. Resilience mechanism gap: Existing studies tend to view resilience as a destination attribute, an adaptive capacity, or a desirable outcome of effective management. This leads to an insufficient understanding of how destinations transform stakeholder responses to disruptions and changes in the context of a longer-term, adaptive, and sustainable trajectory. Contextual gap: Most studies address tourism sustainability in Europe, North America, and Oceania, while paying less attention to Southeast Asia.

The introduction is followed by a literature review based on approximately 200 predominantly journal sources, which address the development and understanding of sustainable tourism, the perspectives of individual interest groups, and destination resilience and sustainability. The chapter concludes with a theoretical summary establishing links to both research questions. The synthesis of the literature yields five hypotheses, the interrelations of which form the conceptual model presented in Figure 2.

The thesis is based on a mixed qualitative and quantitative research design. The research methodology is meticulously described. The research began with a qualitative, exploratory phase that used semi-structured interviews to better understand how individual interest groups in Vietnam perceive key themes. A total of 111 respondents participated (encompassing experts, residents, domestic and foreign tourists, business representatives, and public administration officials). The qualitative data were processed using thematic content analysis. The qualitative phase was followed in 2023–2024 by the collection of quantitative data through questionnaires from four stakeholder groups (250 residents, 360 tourists, 253 business representatives, and 265 public administration officials), which were evaluated using statistical methods (factor and regression analyses). I positively evaluate the fact that the selection of indicators was informed by discussions with the respective stakeholder groups and pilot-tested with a small sample.

The third phase of the research was again qualitative, aimed at gaining a deeper understanding and interpretation of the empirical results. aiming for a deeper interpretation of the empirical results. Sixteen respondents participated in semi-structured discussions, and data were again processed using content analysis.

The next chapter presents the research findings. It opens with the outputs of a bibliometric analysis of publications focusing on tourism resilience from the Web of Science (WoS) covering the years 2000–2025, presented as a keyword co-occurrence map, identifying six thematic clusters. Next, the results of the qualitative research are described, wherein the respondents' statements are compared with the thematic clusters. The interview results were synthesised into a conceptual map comprising four quadrants that illustrate a structural asymmetry in how individual stakeholder groups perceive sustainability and resilience. The subsequent part is dedicated to statistical data analysis. Based on factor analysis, four factors were delineated for each group. In this section, I believe the factor analysis could have been elaborated in more detail, specifically by showing the factor loadings for each variable and how they relate to the named factors.

In Section 4.4, the student examined how stakeholder perceptions and governance-related factors influence tourism resilience and destination sustainability across the individual groups, presenting the results of testing hypotheses H1-H5. Hayes' Process Model 4 was utilised for data evaluation. This model is commonly used in the literature to test the significance of indirect effects via bootstrapping, particularly in tourism studies. However, I consider the lack of a more detailed explanation of this model within the thesis to be a certain limitation.

I highly appreciate the systematic approach, clarity, and conceptual thinking demonstrated in this thesis. The results of the analyses are thoroughly described in the text and clearly summarised at the end of each subchapter.

D) Significance for practice and for the development of the scientific discipline

The thesis provides novel insights for both the development of the academic field of economics and management and the practical management of tourist destinations. Its significance lies primarily in an integrated perspective on resilience as a key mechanism linking stakeholder perceptions with long-term sustainability.

In terms of theory, the student successfully integrates previously fragmented approaches. The student has designed a comprehensive model that explains how stakeholders evaluate destination sustainability under conditions of uncertainty and complexity. A major theoretical advancement is the application and extension of the Social Exchange Theory to the tourism domain. The research demonstrates that the perceived impacts of tourism and host-guest relations do not directly shape sustainability assessments; rather, they influence sustainability indirectly by contributing to tourism resilience. The findings shift the perception of resilience from a predominantly managerial or operational construct to a shared evaluative mechanism. The work also refines explanations of sustainability rooted in governance, particularly regarding their relationship with ESG practices and political trust.

Furthermore, the empirical evidence shows that destination sustainability does not necessitate an absolute consensus of interests among all groups. Diverse stakeholders (residents, businesses, tourists, and the state) may have distinct priorities, but their perspectives functionally converge precisely at the point of evaluating destination resilience.

The thesis offers valuable practical recommendations for destination governance, public institutions, policymakers, tourism businesses, communities, and stakeholder coordination. It highlights specific factors that enhance tourism resilience across these groups, providing

actionable insights for formulating tourism management strategies and policy tools. The overarching recommendation is to transition from merely monitoring the impacts of isolated issues (economic, environmental, socio-cultural) to actively building tourism resilience within the destination. For instance, from the perspective of tourism entrepreneurs, specific recommendations include: Building stronger guest relations and increasing market flexibility, engaging in informal networks, knowledge-sharing platforms, and collaborative crisis planning with other businesses, implementing ESG as a strategic risk management tool, investing in internal organisational culture and employee well-being or responding to the growing market demand for slow tourism.

E) Formal layout of the dissertation and its linguistic level

From a formal standpoint, the paper is well-written. As a non-native speaker, I am unable to assess the quality of the English in detail. However, the text is easy to read. The tables and graphs are clear and well-organised.

F) Publication activities of PhD students

The student lists nine publications, five of which are conference proceedings. Only three publications are co-authored. Four publications have been published in journals with a non-zero impact factor.

The article in the journal *Current Issues in Tourism* (Taylor & Francis) can be considered the most prestigious. This journal has a very high IF (4.6) and AIS (1.024) and is ranked in Q1 according to both indicators. It is therefore a high-quality journal. The paper is co-authored with the supervisor.

The other publications are also of very high quality: *Climate and Development* - IF 3.4 (Q1) and AIS 1.057 (Q1); *Tourism Recreation Research* - IF 2.6 (Q2) and AIS 0.665 (Q2).

Overall, I evaluate the student's publication activity as excellent and fully compliant with the requirements for doctoral studies.

G) Conclusion

Despite minor critical remarks, I consider the submitted doctoral thesis to be a high-quality piece of work that contains the doctoral candidate's original research results. **I recommend the thesis for defence.**

Questions for the defence:

1. How should destination managers practically communicate or implement ESG principles so that key stakeholder groups (residents and businesses) begin to perceive them as a useful tool for building their own resilience, rather than merely a remote administrative concept?
2. To what extent are your findings regarding political trust transferable to other economies (e.g., in Europe) where tourism governance is more decentralised? Do you believe that the influence of political trust on perceived destination resilience might be weaker there than in Vietnam?

Liberec, June 1, 2026

prof. Ing. Miroslav Žižka, Ph.D.