Review Paper

Stakeholder Participation in Current Ecotourism for Sustainability of Malaysia

Kok Onn Kwong[1], Velan Kunjuraman[1,]*, Jayaraj Vijaya Kumaran[2] & Muhamad Azahar Abas[2]

[1]Centre for Research in Development, Social Environment (SEEDS), Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia
[2]Faculty of Earth Science, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), 16300 Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: velan@ukm.edu.my

Abstract: This review on ecotourism in Malaysia, Southeast (SE) Asia examines the motivations and satisfaction levels of major stakeholders, aiming to fill a gap in understanding their participation. Royal Belum State Park (RBSP) is known for its rich biodiversity, cultural significance and Indigenous communities, making it an ideal destination for ecotourism. Protected areas such as RBSP, play an important role in providing ecosystem services, preserving biodiversity and offering spaces for local communities. Accordingly, ecotourism at RBSP should balance the biodiversity conservation with needs of the locals. This requires active stakeholder participation, where the interests and rights of all involved parties are recognized and integrated into ecotourism management and decision-making. The study focuses on tourists', local community and other important stakeholders' motivations, particularly their desire to experience nature and how this insight can inform more effective management policies and promote sustainability in tourism activities. The review identifies a research gap in SE Asian ecotourism, particularly in the application of social theories and mixed-methods. The study advocates for integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods to improve the reliability of findings and better address the needs of various stakeholders. The ultimate goal is to enhance ecotourism sustainability and stakeholder engagement at RBSP by informing management policies that balance conservation with local development. By improving understanding of tourist preferences, the study seeks to support responsible tourism practices that benefit both the environment and local communities.

Keywords: Ecotourism development; stakeholders' collaboration; Royal Belum State Park; Southeast Asia

Introduction

Tourism is a significant global industry, contributing not only to economic growth but also promoting sustainable development. In Southeast (SE) Asia, tourism plays a vital role in the economy, demonstrating both its growth potential and resilience, particularly in the recovery following the pandemic. The Malaysian tourism sector's contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) is a clear reflection of this rebound. In 2024, it is projected to reach MYR 198.7 billion (~USD 44.5 bil.), marking a 1.6% increase over the pre-pandemic peak in 2019. This will account for 10.5% of the national economy (WTTC, 2024). By 2023, tourism-related employment had already reached 2.3 million (mil.), growing by 10.8% from the previous year. This upward trajectory is expected to continue, with the sector projected to employ over 2.4 mil. people in 2024, representing a 5.2% increase from 2023. Both domestic and international spending on tourism is also on the rise, with domestic expenditure expected to reach MYR 106.5 bil. in 2024, a 21.6% increase from 2019, while

international visitor spending is projected to rise by 27.8% to MYR 93.7 bil. This strong recovery is further underscored by Malaysia's recognition as one of the world's 12 mega-diverse nations, with rich biodiversity that supports not only the economy but also food security and cultural heritage (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2006; Abdullah et al., 2015).

Sustainable tourism, as outlined by Ponte et al. (2021), aims to balance economic development with the preservation of natural environments and cultural heritage. Responsible management practices are essential to avoid over-exploitation of resources while benefiting local communities. Sustainable tourism's success requires strategic planning, infrastructure investment, and a focus on promoting responsible behaviour from both tourists and providers (Kozak et al., 2008). Ecotourism, a key subset of sustainable tourism, has gained popularity in recent years, particularly in developing countries like those in SE Asia, where it is seen as a means to conserve natural areas while supporting local economies (Masud et al., 2017). This approach aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aiming to mitigate the environmental and social impacts of tourism (Kunjuraman, 2020). Given Malaysia's rich biodiversity and growing tourism sector, further investment in ecotourism and conservation could strengthen its economy while promoting environmental sustainability.

Malaysia recognized as a "mega-diverse" country, is a leading ecotourism destination, capitalizing on its rich biodiversity to attract global tourists. The country's commitment to ecotourism is outlined in the National Ecotourism Plan (2016-2025), which aims to boost Malaysia's image by promoting ecotourism products developed and marketed by local communities (Kunjuraman et al., 2022). Indigenous communities, in particular, play a vital role in developing and promoting ecotourism experiences. Ecotourism is generally defined as responsible travel to undisturbed natural areas, focusing on conservation and local community participation. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) emphasizes responsible travel that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). Key principles of ecotourism include a focus on natural areas, minimal environmental impact, education about local ecosystems and cultures, and the active involvement of local communities in tourism development. The growth of ecotourism is driven by increasing global awareness of sustainability and environmental responsibility. In developing countries, ecotourism offers a viable alternative to traditional tourism that may harm ecosystems and local communities. However, as ecotourism grows, responsible management becomes essential to ensure long-term benefits for both the environment and local populations. Successful ecotourism depends on the active participation and cooperation of stakeholders, including tourists, local communities, tourism operators, and government agencies. Involvement from local residents, especially Indigenous groups, allows them to utilize their land knowledge and gain financial benefits, fostering cultural exchange and creating more authentic tourism experiences.

The review identifies a gap in previous studies on stakeholder participation in ecotourism, particularly in SE Asia. Previous research has not adequately explored the integration of sociological principles with tourism theories, which remains an underdeveloped area. Researchers such as Canosa et al. (2018), Kunjuraman et al. (2022), Shakthinathan and Kunjuraman (2024) and Sharma (2020) have pointed out the lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework for tourism, especially ecotourism. This study highlights the need to explore the roles of multiple stakeholders in Malaysian ecotourism and emphasizes the importance of using mixed methods and social theories in ecotourism research. The review aims to fill gaps in literature by addressing the lack of analysis in these areas and to provide a clearer understanding of how stakeholder conceptualizations and sociological principles can be integrated into contemporary tourism theories. The study's two main objectives are to identify gaps in the application of social theories and mixed methods and to review the methodologies used in existing ecotourism research.

Methodology

This review provides an analysis of studies published mainly between 2015 and 2025 in reputable journals, with a focus on bibliometric analysis to identify prevailing themes and emerging trends in ecotourism research. We employed established methods (Van Der Have & Rubalcaba, 2016), sourcing articles from the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus using the single-string search technique. The review specifically examines the

application of mixed methods, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and evaluates how these methodologies have been utilized to explore various aspects of ecotourism, particularly stakeholder participation. Previous findings indicate that while mixed methods research holds significant potential to enhance the reliability of studies and provide a more holistic understanding of complex stakeholder dynamics, it remains underutilized in the field of ecotourism. This gap in research methodology has led to a partial understanding of stakeholder perspectives and participation processes, hindering the development of transformative knowledge in the field. Mixed methods approach particularly techniques like triangulation and complementary methods, are emphasized as effective tools to enrich study findings, mitigate biases and integrate multiple perspectives. These techniques could provide a more nuanced view of the ecological, social, and economic factors influencing ecotourism, offering a deeper understanding of stakeholder engagement.

The Findings

1. Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the underlying belief system that guides researchers in their work (Sharma, 2020). It influences how we think about the nature of knowledge; the ways knowledge can be acquired and the methods they used to conduct research. In research philosophy, there are multiple paradigms, perspectives and dimensions that shape how research is approached. Different research inquiry paradigms offer different lenses for understanding the world, how knowledge is generated and what is considered valid. The most commonly discussed paradigms are positivism, epistemology, ontology, interpretivism and critical theory (Table 1). For the relevance of this review Epistemology is independent of the researcher, can be discovered through observation and experimentation. For the latter knowledge is subjective, dependent on the perspective of the researcher and participants. The core belief of pragmatism is truth based on practical consequences and what works in a given situation. This research focuses on finding solutions to practical problems, through a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods depending on the research problem. Epistemology is derived from human experiences, is always evolving where knowledge is shaped by power and is aimed at promoting social change (Sharma, 2020).

Research perspectives offer deeper insights into the assumptions that underpin how knowledge is understood and interpreted in research. These perspectives typically address several key aspects of research (Table 1). Epistemology focuses on the nature of knowledge, how we know what we know and how knowledge is acquired. Positivist epistemology is derived from observable and measurable facts, while interpretivist knowledge is context-dependent and constructed through human experiences. Methodology refers to the techniques and procedures used in research to collect and analyse data. It involves the general approach researchers take to study a phenomenon. Quantitative methods are typically associated with positivism and focus on statistical data, whereas qualitative methods are linked to interpretivism and emphasize understanding human experiences and meanings. Researchers are encouraged to reflect on their own position and how it shapes the research process and interpretation of findings. This breakdown of paradigms and perspectives contributes in clarifying their approach to research, guiding them in designing their studies and analysing findings (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary table of main research inquiry paradigms and perspectives used in research philosophy

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology	Axiology	Reflexivity
Positivism	Objective reality exists independently	Knowledge can be discovered through observation and experiment	Quantitative methods (e.g., surveys)	Value-free, objective research	Minimal reflexivity, researcher is detached
Interpretivism	Reality is subjective and socially constructed	Knowledge is subjective and context-dependent	Qualitative methods (interviews)	Value-laden, values shape research	High reflexivity, researcher is part of the study

| Pragmatism | Reality is practical and shaped by human actions | Knowledge is practical and evolves from experience | Mixed methods approach, depending on research problem | Practical considerations, values matter | Reflexivity is acknowledged but balanced with practical needs |
| Critical Theory | Reality is shaped by social, historical, and power dynamics | Knowledge is shaped by power and aims at emancipation | Critical analysis, participatory action research | Values are central to driving social change | High reflexivity, researcher must recognize their role in social change |

Source: Adopted from Sharma (2020)

2. Tourism Sociology

Tourism sociology examines the relationships between tourists and the societies they visit. Smith (2010) define it as the study of the dynamics between tourists, their motivations and the social and economic effects of tourism. It explores how tourism is structured and the consequences it has on societies and environments. Tourism sociology addresses the complexities of how tourism interacts with broader societal trends, cultures, and economic practices. The study of tourism has been broadened to consider social phenomena such as race, gender and cultural impacts. For example, Sharpley (2018) emphasized that tourism can mirror societal changes, such as issues related to social class, globalization, and cultural exchanges. This highlights the need to study tourism's social implications, including topics like sex tourism, social inequality and discrimination (Jevtovic, 2019). Tourism as a form of leisure, is closely tied to local cultures, providing both benefits and challenges. The sociological perspective sees tourism as part of a broader global interaction, impacting both host communities and tourists. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing sustainable tourism policies that consider the complex social and cultural interactions at play.

Recent developments in tourism sociology suggest a focus on emotional and sensory experiences, highlighting how tourists engage with their environment and how these interactions shape their perceptions and satisfaction (Urry & Larsen, 2011). This broader view also involves considering the socioeconomic and cultural effects of tourism on both the visitors and the host communities. Despite the diversity of perspectives in tourism sociology, there is no single, unified theory of tourism. Instead, the field integrates various sociological insights to understand the complexities of tourism, including both its positive and negative social impacts. Future of tourism sociology involves intercultural understanding of local heritage and addressing the socioeconomics of tourism to create sustainable practices.

A key theme in tourism sociology is the search for authenticity, where tourists seek genuine experiences, which are often marketed and consumed in specific ways. Scholars like Cohen (1988) and Urry (1994) have explored how these authentic experiences are valued and sought by tourists. Modern theories, such as those by Dredge and Jenkins (2012), examine how tourism interacts with broader social and economic developments. Contemporary research integrates sociological, psychological, and economic perspectives to understand tourism's effects on societies, including its role in exacerbating social inequalities. It also looks at how physical spaces and objects influence tourist experiences. Tourism impacts local economies by creating jobs, generating income, and developing infrastructure, but heavy reliance on tourism can make economies vulnerable to global disruptions, such as pandemics or economic crises. Additionally, tourism has environmental impacts, like pollution and resource depletion, leading to a focus on sustainable tourism practices. The field of tourism sociology has evolved from traditional theories of leisure and motivation to newer approaches that explore the complex relationships between identity, culture, and global mobility. There is now a trend towards interdisciplinary research combining sociology, economics, environmental science, and cultural studies to better understand the diverse effects of tourism.

Sociological insights can explain stakeholder behaviour in Royal Belum State Park (RBSP) by highlighting the complex dynamics among tourists, local communities, conservationists, government authorities, and tourism operators. Applying tourism sociology helps understand how each group's motivations, social dynamics, and economic interests influence the park's use and management. Tourists seek authentic experiences with nature and local culture, which pressures local communities to adjust their lifestyles

and tourism operators to market "authentic" encounters. This can lead to the commodification of local culture, raising ethical concerns. Tourism can shift power dynamics within communities, especially among indigenous groups like the Orang Asli (OA), potentially leading to social inequalities (Chin, 2024). Understanding these changes helps ensure that tourism respects local cultures while providing economic opportunities. Tourism generates income and infrastructure but creates economic vulnerabilities due to over-reliance. This can lead to inequalities, with benefits flowing to external stakeholders rather than local communities, making equitable distribution of tourism benefits crucial.

3. Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory introduced by Freeman (1984), conceptualizes stakeholders as any groups or individuals who can influence or be influenced by the objectives of an organization. Carroll (1993) further expanded this concept, emphasizing the interaction between stakeholders and the organization. Donaldson and Preston (1995) refined the theory, stating that stakeholders must have a legitimate interest, but not necessarily equal participation in decision-making processes. Stakeholder theory has become integral to ecotourism research, particularly concerning sustainable tourism. The World Tourism Organization's (WTO) Global Ethics for Tourism highlights the involvement of stakeholders as one of the core principles of sustainable tourism, emphasizing informed participation, socioeconomic benefits, and minimizing conflicts (WTO, 2004). Scholars have shown that involving stakeholders in decision-making helps improve tourism management, enhance public awareness, and reduce long-term conflict. However, the level of involvement can depend on the nature of interests, openness of decision-makers, and various contextual factors (Marsden & Murdoch, 1998).

Key stakeholder groups in ecotourism include tourists, local residents and those with recreational or community interests (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999). Studies such as those by Kruja and Hasaj (2010), also emphasize benefits like better decision quality, generation of new ideas, and ensuring fairness across stakeholders. Nevertheless, the involvement of stakeholders in tourism planning requires careful management of interests to ensure a balanced approach that reduces conflict and promotes sustainable tourism development. Stakeholder theory plays a critical role in sustainable tourism by promoting the involvement of various groups, such as tourists and local communities, in decision-making processes. This ensures that tourism development addresses diverse interests and minimizes conflicts. Tourism sociology provides a framework to understand the social dynamics of tourism, including how it reflects broader societal issues like globalization, race, and gender. It also addresses how tourism affects local cultures, economies, and social relationships. This sociological approach can help develop more nuanced and sustainable tourism strategies that foster positive exchanges and minimize negative impacts. In summary, the integration of stakeholder theory and tourism sociology provides a holistic understanding of tourism dynamics. By considering both the interests of different stakeholders and the broader social implications of tourism, researchers and practitioners can better manage and promote sustainable tourism development that benefits all parties involved (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999).

Tourism Area Life Cycle

The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) developed by Butler (1980), is a framework that explains the stages of development for tourism destinations, from initial discovery to potential decline or rejuvenation. The framework consists of the following stages. In Exploration there is minimal tourism, with few visitors and no specific infrastructure, where social and environmental impacts are negligible. During the Involvement stage, local communities start to get involved and basic infrastructure is developed to accommodate tourists. Next is the Development stage, where external investments lead to significant growth and tourism becomes a major economic driver. This is also the phase were environmental and social impacts increase. Forth is Consolidation, where tourist numbers stabilize but dependency grows, environmental and social issues may intensify. Stagnation is where the destination reaches its peak, but faces diminishing appeal due to over-

saturation and environmental degradation. Finally Decline or Rejuvenation occurs where visitor numbers decrease, but the destination may undergo infrastructure updates and marketing efforts (Butler, 1980).

In the context of RBSP, the TALC framework described above assesses how tourism develops through various phases and the impacts on the environment and local communities. By applying this model, the study aims to understand the current tourism stage in RBSP, evaluate its alignment with conservation goals, and develop strategies for sustainable tourism management. Key insights are that the literature highlights the under-use of mixed methods in ecotourism research, particularly in SE Asia. These methods could provide a more comprehensive understanding of stakeholder dynamics and improve research reliability. The TALC framework is useful for assessing the stages of tourism development in destinations like RBSP, offering insights into potential impacts and strategies for sustainability, including rejuvenation efforts if necessary. This review serves as a guide for future research in ecotourism, especially in developing SE Asian nations, emphasizing the integration of social theories and mixed methods to foster more sustainable and transformative tourism practices.

Case Studies

Stakeholder Theory proposed by Freeman (1984), emphasizes the importance of including diverse groups who can influence or be influenced by an organization's objectives. This is especially relevant in ecotourism, where multiple stakeholders are involved in decision-making. Real-world case studies highlight the role of stakeholder involvement in creating sustainable tourism models. Royal Belum State Park in Malaysia serves as a key example. Interviews with local OA communities and government officials revealed a tension between ecological conservation and community development. While local communities expressed concerns over their limited representation in decision-making, government authorities emphasized the need for tourism revenue to support conservation efforts. This scenario demonstrates the importance of balancing diverse interests, as outlined by Freeman's theory on stakeholder legitimacy. Another case the Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary in Sabah, illustrates similar challenges. Research by Pimid et al. (2020) revealed that local agricultural communities had mixed views on ecotourism—recognizing its economic benefits but also fearing overdevelopment. Structured interviews highlighted the need for participatory planning to minimize conflicts between economic and environmental goals. In both cases, informed stakeholder participation was crucial for balancing interests and ensuring sustainable tourism development.

The TALC framework introduced by Butler (1980), also assesses the evolution of tourism destinations. RBSP offers a practical example of this framework. Initially in the Exploration stage, with few visitors and minimal infrastructure, the park faced little environmental impact. However, as tourism increased and moved into the Involvement and Development stages, concerns about overexploitation and insufficient infrastructure emerged. Interviews with local residents revealed a growing awareness of these issues as the park became more dependent on tourism. Similarly, the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) case, within an urban ecotourism context, demonstrates the Consolidation stage, where the destination's visitor numbers stabilized, but concerns about land-use changes and overdependence on ecotourism revenue grew. Interviews indicated that these developments created social pressures, which reinforced the importance of managing tourism growth to avoid negative impacts (Abdullah et al., 2015).

4. Past Literature: A Synthesis

Sociological Developments in Tourism Studies

Tourism studies have evolved significantly in recent years, incorporating increasingly complex sociological perspectives. Reflexivity in tourism research involves critically reflecting on how tourism practices and trends influence both academic inquiry and real-world practices (Lai & Li, 2015). As global contexts shift rapidly, tourism research adapts to these changes, acknowledging how tourism impacts various stakeholders like tourists, local communities and service providers (Sharma, 2020). Each group engages with tourism differently, requiring an understanding of multiple perspectives. As suggested by Canosa et al. (2017), future research could examine of tourism doctoral dissertations from additional countries and regions (Figure 1).
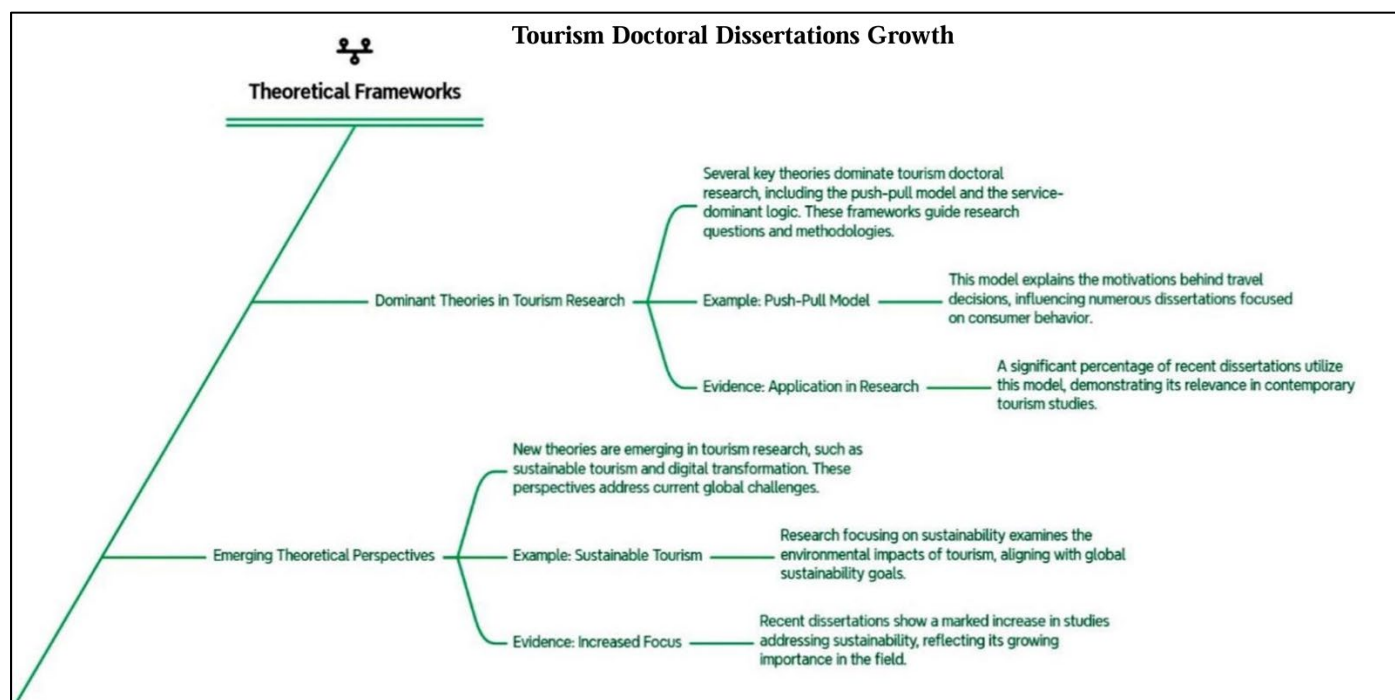
Figure 1. Analysis of tourism doctoral dissertations growth
Source: modified from Canosa et al. (2017)

Tourist Participation in Ecotourism
Tourists' motivations significantly influence their travel decisions, impacting destination choices and activities. Researchers like Alegre et al. (2011) and Jang and Cai (2002) emphasize the importance of understanding both push and pull factors in tourism. Additionally, understanding tourist satisfaction is key for service providers and destination management (Wang et al., 2009). Tourists' participation has a direct effect on the sustainability of ecotourism destinations. Their perceptions may differ from local residents', potentially leading to varied expectations and behaviours toward ecotourism development (Gezici et al., 2004; Deng & Bender, 2007). The role of local residents is crucial in the success of ecotourism. Positive attitudes and active participation contribute to the sustainability of ecotourism, while minimal involvement or opposition can hinder its success (Ap, 1990; Sirakaya et al., 2002). Local support is often gauged through social exchange theory, which examines how residents perceive the costs and benefits of ecotourism (Easterling, 2004). Negative perceptions can lead to resistance, especially if residents feel that the benefits of tourism development do not outweigh the costs (Latkova, 2008). Residents' attitudes toward ecotourism evolve over time, passing through stages from euphoria to antagonism (Kwon, 2008). This highlights the dynamic nature of local perceptions and the need for ongoing engagement and adaptation of policies.

Ecotourism at Royal Belum State Park
As noted by Somarriba-Chang and Gunnarsdotter (2012), protected areas provide critical environmental services and serve as crucial spaces for human habitation, especially for Indigenous populations who rely on these areas. The role of Indigenous communities in ecotourism is essential, as they often possess deep knowledge of local ecosystems and can contribute to the development of ecotourism initiatives in ways that benefit both the environment and the local population. However, existing studies on ecotourism at RBSP and similar sites often overlook the complexities of stakeholder participation, particularly the factors that drive local community involvement and the adoption of sustainable tourism practices. Previous research has not adequately explored the values and motivations that encourage or discourage stakeholder participation in ecotourism initiatives at RBSP. Furthermore, there is a lack of theoretical integration in the field of ecotourism, particularly in terms of applying sociological principles to understand the dynamics of tourism. While social

theory has been applied to tourism research, the application of sociological frameworks in ecotourism studies remains underdeveloped (Canosa et al., 2018). The integration of these sociological perspectives with contemporary tourism theories could provide deeper insights into the socio-cultural, economic, environmental impacts of ecotourism, developing more inclusive and sustainable tourism models.

Moreover, there is a need for a more unified theoretical approach to understand the multi-dimensional nature of tourism. This includes the complex interactions between tourists, local communities, tour operators and government authorities. While scholars like Kunjuraman et al. (2022) and Sharma (2020) have called for greater attention to the social aspects of tourism, there remains a gap in addressing how social and cultural factors intersect with environmental sustainability in the context of ecotourism at protected areas like RBSP. The present study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the roles and perspectives of various stakeholders in RBSP ecotourism, with a focus on understanding why stakeholder participation is limited, and how sociological principles can be integrated into ecotourism research and management. Key issues include limited research on the involvement of local residents, tourists and tour operators in the ecotourism governance of RBSP. The park's biodiversity is under threat due to climate change, affecting its ecological functions and the potential benefits of ecotourism. The traditional, top-down approach to ecotourism development may not address the needs of local communities and Indigenous peoples, resulting in inequitable socioeconomic outcomes. Ecotourism research lacks an integrated theoretical framework that accounts for the complexities of stakeholder interactions and sociological dynamics in tourism development. This study will address these gaps by providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing stakeholder participation and the role of sociological theory in shaping ecotourism practices, ultimately contributing to more sustainable and equitable tourism development at RBSP.

Royal Belum State Park is a significant conservation area in Malaysia, home to diverse species, including endangered ones. However, the socioeconomic conditions of local communities can influence their perspectives on ecotourism development. The involvement of indigenous groups like the OA especially the Temiar and Jahai, is key to balancing tourism development and environmental preservation. The Park offers a variety of ecotourism experiences such as jungle trekking, birdwatching, and wildlife observation. Ensuring that tourism activities do not harm the park's biodiversity is critical. There is also a need for infrastructure improvements to support tourism while maintaining the park's natural and cultural integrity. This section examines tourists as an important stakeholder, showing that their interests and participation are vital to ensuring sustainable ecotourism practices at RBSP, balancing economic, environmental and cultural factors. The study also emphasizes the importance of sustainable tourism practices, including understanding tourist behaviours and motivations to preserve biodiversity and cultural heritage. Royal Belum State Park is noted for its rich biodiversity, housing endangered species like the tiger and various species of gibbons, hornbills and the Rafflesia. Tourists visit the park for activities such as jungle trekking, birdwatching, wildlife observation and fishing. The Park offers various accommodations to cater to different tourist needs. The following photographs capture the researchers' preliminary field trip to the Pulau Banding Public Jetty in June 2024, aimed at surveying tourists' involvement in ecotourism development at RBSP. They also show proposed future locations for interviews with the OAs at RBSP (Figure 2).

Field Trip to Pulau Banding Public Jetty

(A)

(B)

(C)

(D)

(E)

Images of Potential Sampling Locations within RBSP

(F)

(G)

Figure 2. (A) – (E) The photographs from the June 2024 field trip to Pulau Banding Public Jetty document a survey on tourists' involvement in ecotourism development at Royal Belum State Park (RBSP). The images also include satellite views of potential sampling locations within the RBSP, specifically Kampung (Kg.) Sungai Tiang (F) and Kampung Sungai Kejar (G). Sources: (A) – (E) Sinoretha Sining, Sarah Liung Huei Yi, Xi Li and Mo Lili; (F) & (G) Google Earth (2024).

Conclusion

Suggested specific actions for policymakers include in-depth interviews with local communities (Temiar & Jahai), as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with other major stakeholders. These efforts aim to assess the combined impact of different stakeholders on ecotourism resilience and guide policymakers in creating sustainable tourism practices. The findings from this study will contribute to inform strategies for ecotourism development at RBSP, with a focus on stakeholder engagement, ecological conservation and equitable economic benefits. The review emphasizes the importance of understanding the demographics and engagement of stakeholders in ecotourism in Malaysia (SE Asia). By following best practices in data collection, the study gathered reliable information on tourists, local communities and other stakeholders' preferences, WTP for ecotourism activities, and their overall experiences. This data will provide valuable

insights to inform future policy decisions for sustainable ecotourism development at RBSP. The review highlights the need to consider the demographic profiles and engagement levels of tourists to tailor ecotourism practices to their preferences and motivations. Using structured sampling and efficient data collection techniques, the study ensures meaningful insights. Tourists, local residents, and other stakeholders play crucial roles in the success and sustainability of ecotourism and biodiversity conservation. Ignoring their perspectives could hinder the effectiveness of ecotourism initiatives. The study recommends that government agencies and relevant authorities promote active participation from tourists and stakeholders in both ecotourism and conservation efforts. Acknowledging and incorporating their contributions will improve the ecotourism experience and lead to more successful conservation outcomes. In conclusion, the review stresses the need for an inclusive approach to ecotourism development, one that integrates tourist feedback and engages key stakeholders in creating sustainable tourism practices in Malaysia.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. The study received ethical approval from the UKM Research Ethics Secretariat (Ethics Ref. No.: JEP-2024-618).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

Abdullah, M., Mamat, M. P., Yaacob, M. R., Radam, A., & Fui, L. H. (2015). Estimate the conservation value of biodiversity in national heritage sites: A case of the Forest Research Institute Malaysia. *Procedia Environmental Sciences, 30*(30), 180–185. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proenv.2015.10.032

Alegre, J., Mateo, S., & Pou, L. (2011). A latent class approach to tourists' length of stay. *Tourism Management, 32*(3), 555–563. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.05.003

Ap, J. (1990). Residents' perceptions research on the social impacts of tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research, 17*(4), 610–616.

Bramwell, B., & Sharman, A. (1999). Collaboration in local tourism policymaking. *Annals of Tourism Research, 26*, 392–415. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00105-4

Butler, R. W. (1980). The concept of a tourism area cycle of evolution: Implications for resources management. *The Canadian Geographer, 24*(1), 6–12.

Canosa, A., Moyle, B. D., Moyle, C. L., & Weile, B. (2017). Anthropology and sociology in tourism doctoral research. *Tourist Studies, 1–24*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797617737999

Canosa, A., Graham, A., & Wilson, E. (2018). Growing up in a tourist destination: Negotiating space, identity and belonging. *Children's Geographies, 16*(2), 156–168.

Carroll, A. B. (1993). Stakeholder thinking in three models of management morality: A perspective with strategic implications. In J. Nasi (Ed.), *Understanding stakeholder thinking* (pp. 47–74). LSR-Publications.

Ceballos-Lascuráin, H. (1993). Ecotourism as a worldwide phenomenon. In K. Lindberg & D. E. Hawkins (Eds.), *Ecotourism: A guide for planners and managers* (pp. 12–14). The Ecotourism Society.

Chin, Y. W. (2024). Environmental health risks and well-being among the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia: A review. *e-Bangi, Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 21*(4), 463–475. https://doi.org/10.17576/ebangi.2024.2104.36

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Deng, J., & Bender, M. Y. (2007). Visitors' perception of tourism development in West Virginia. In C. L. Blank & C. Vogt (Eds.), *North Eastern Recreation Research Symposium proceedings* (pp. 181–188). Bolton Landing.

Diamantis, D. (1999). The concept of ecotourism: Evolution and trends. *Current Issues in Tourism, 2*(2–3), 93–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683509908667847

Donaldson, T., & Preston, L. E. (1995). The stakeholder theory of the corporation: Concepts, evidence, and implications. *The Academy of Management Review, 20*(1), 65–91. https://doi.org/10.2307/258887

Dredge, D., & Jenkins, J. (Eds.). (2011). *Stories of practice: Tourism policy and planning* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315610849

Easterling, D. S. (2004). The resident's perspective in tourism research. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing, 17*, 45–62.

Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Pitman.

Gezici, F., Gül, A. Y., & Alkay, E. (2004). Potential, thresholds, and threats of tourism development in Bodrum Peninsula (Turkey). In F. D. Pineda & C. A. Brebbia (Eds.), *Sustainable tourism III* (pp. 13–24). WIT Press.

Gursoy, D., Jurowski, C., & Uysal, M. (2002). Resident attitudes: A structural modeling approach. *Annals of Tourism Research, 29*(1), 79–105.

Jang, S., & Cai, L. A. (2002). Travel motivations and destination choice: A study of the British outbound market. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 13*(3), 111–133.

Jevtovic, A. (2019). Sociology of tourism in the globalization process and social networks. *Journal of Economics, Management and Informatics, 10*(2), 43–62. https://doi.org/10.5937/bizinfo1902043J

Kruja, D., & Hasaj, A. (2009). Comparisons of stakeholders' perception towards sustainable tourism development and its impacts in Shkodra Region (Albania). *Turizam, 14*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.5937/Turizam1001001K

Kunjuraman, V., & Hussin, R. (2017). Challenges of community-based homestay programme in Sabah, Malaysia: Hopeful or hopeless? *Tourism Management Perspectives, 21*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2016.10.007

Kunjuraman, V. (2020). Community-based ecotourism managing to fuel community empowerment? An evidence from Malaysian Borneo. *Tourism Recreation Research*. https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2020.1841378

Kunjuraman, V., Hussin, R., & Aziz, R. C. (2022). Community-based ecotourism as a social transformation tool for rural community: A victory or a quagmire? *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, 39*, 100524.

Kunjuraman, V. (2023). A revised sustainable livelihood framework for community-based tourism projects in developing countries. *Current Issues in Tourism, 26*(4), 540–546. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2022.2116563

Kunjuraman, V. (2024). The development of sustainable livelihood framework for community-based ecotourism in developing countries. *Tourism and Hospitality Research, 24*(1), 48–65. https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584221135540

Kwon, H. (2008). *Ghosts of war in Vietnam*. Cambridge University Press.

Lai, K., & Li, X. (2015). Tourism destination image: Conceptual problems and definitional solutions. *Journal of Travel Research, 55*(8), 1065–1080. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287515619693

Latkova, P. (2008). An examination of factors predicting residents' support for tourism development. *Michigan State University, Department of Park, Recreation, and Tourism Resources*, 396 p.

Larsen, J., & Urry, J. (2011). Gazing and performing. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 29*(6), 1110–1125. https://doi.org/10.1068/d21410

Marsden, T., & Murdoch, J. (1998). Editorial: The shifting nature of rural governance and community participation. *Journal of Rural Studies, 14*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.2015.0013

Masud, M. M., Azam, M. N., Mohiuddin, M., Banna, H., Akhtar, R., Alam, A. S. A. F., & Begum, H. (2017). Adaptation barriers and strategies towards climate change: Challenges in the agricultural sector. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 156*, 698–706. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.04.060

McAdam, D., & Paulsen, R. (1993). Specifying the relationship between social ties and activism. *American Journal of Sociology, 99*(3), 640–667. https://doi.org/10.1086/230319

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. (2006). *Multilateral environmental agreements: Capacity building and implementation project (MEA)*. Putrajaya, Malaysia. ISBN 983-42860-1-5.

Murphy, P. (1985). *Tourism: A community approach* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203068533

Pimid, M., Latip, N. A., Marzuki, A., Umar, M. U., & Krishnan, K. T. (2020). Stakeholder management of conservation in Lower Kinabatangan. *Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners, 18*(3), 71–81.

Ponte, J., Couto, G., Pimentel, P., Sousa, Á., & Oliveira, A. (2021). Tourism planning in the Azores and feedback from visitors. *Tourism Management Studies, 17*, 7–15.

Shakthinathan, R., & Kunjuraman, V. (2024). A systematic literature review of resilience approaches in small and medium tourism-based sectors. *e-Bangi, Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 21*(4), 583–597. https://doi.org/10.17576/ebangi.2024.2104.46

Sharma, N. (2020). Role of research in nation building. *NOLEGEIN Journal of Business Risk Management, 3*, 9–13. https://doi.org/10.37591/njbrm.vi0.637

Sharpley, R. (2002). Rural tourism and the challenge of tourism diversification: The case of Cyprus. *Tourism Management, 23*(2), 233–244. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(01)00078-4

Sirakaya, E., Teye, V., & Sonmez, S. (2002). Understanding residents' support for tourism development in the central region of Ghana. *Journal of Travel Research, 41*(1), 57–67.

Smith, V. (2010). Enhancing employability: Human, cultural, and social capital in an era of turbulent unpredictability. *Human Relations, 63*(2), 279–300.

Somarriba-Chang, M. A., & Gunnarsdotter, Y. (2012). Local community participation in ecotourism and conservation issues in two nature reserves in Nicaragua. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 20*(8), 1025–1043. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2012.681786

Urry, J. (1994). Time, leisure, and social identity. *Sage Journals, 3*(2), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X94003002001

Van Der Have, R. P., & Rubalcaba, L. R. (2016). Social innovation research: An emerging area of innovation studies? *Research Policy, 45*(9), 1921–1935.

Wang, X., Zhang, J., Gu, C., & Zhen, F. (2009). Examining antecedents and consequences of tourist satisfaction: A structural modeling approach. *Tsinghua Science and Technology, 14*(3), 397–406.

Wondirad, A. (2019). Does ecotourism contribute to sustainable destination development, or is it just a marketing hoax? Analyzing twenty-five years of the contested journey of ecotourism through a meta-analysis of tourism journal publications. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, 24*(11), 1047–1065. https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2019.1665557

World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). (2024). *Economic impact research (EIR)*.