

Sustainable Green Business Models in Rural Tourism for Economic Development: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: Abstract: This literature review aimed to explore how sustainable green business models influence rural tourism and its contribution to economic development, emphasizing the importance of this topic in promoting long-term viability and resilience in rural communities. It focused on the critical elements of sustainable rural tourism, including infrastructure, community engagement, resource management, and economic collaboration. Utilizing a systematic review methodology grounded in the PRISMA framework, the study analyzes peer-reviewed literature from developing countries sourced from ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, Taylor and Francis, and ProQuest. From an initial dataset of 20,433 records, 21 high-quality studies were selected based on their relevance to the review objectives. The analysis revealed challenges, such as balancing economic growth with environmental conservation and maintaining rural authenticity while identifying opportunities for economic diversification and support for small businesses. This review advocated a holistic approach integrating eco-friendly practices, community involvement, and technological advancement to achieve sustainable economic growth, environmental preservation, and cultural integrity in rural tourism.



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A. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, sustainable business models have garnered substantial attention as organizations strive to harmonize economic success with environmental and social responsibility. These models emphasize value creation, delivery, and sustainable value capture across diverse contexts (Nosratabadi et al., 2019). Adopting a triple-bottom-line approach addresses economic, social, and environmental dimensions, fostering innovation that promotes sustainability and enhances competitive advantage (Kneipp et al., 2021; Siregar et al., 2022). Such frameworks seek to fulfill societal and environmental needs while generating value for customers and firms (Bocken et al., 2019). This literature review investigates how sustainable green business models influence rural tourism and contribute to economic development. By analyzing the existing research, this review elucidates how sustainability-driven business models shape rural tourism practices, enhance economic resilience, and foster environmental and cultural preservation. This topic holds significant importance, as sustainable tourism is pivotal in addressing global sustainability goals, particularly in rural areas that rely on tourism for local economic growth.

Sustainable business models are vital, as they align economic, environmental, and social objectives, fostering long-term value creation. In the context of rural tourism, such models mitigate adverse environmental impacts, bolster local economies, and promote social cohesion. By integrating eco-friendly practices and innovations, these models enable rural communities to balance economic growth and conservation of their natural and cultural assets, thereby supporting sustainable development. In response to the increasing demand for sustainable travel experiences emphasizing environmental conservation and cultural heritage preservation, rural green tourism is particularly relevant for areas where natural and cultural resources are integral to economic development. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has unveiled significant vulnerabilities within the rural tourism sector, including diminished visitor numbers, economic losses, and the pressing need for diversified business models. Addressing these challenges requires innovative strategies incorporating sustainability principles, local empowerment, and adaptive management to ensure long-term resilience.

Digital technologies and innovative approaches have gained prominence in reshaping rural tourism practices, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Innovations like digital marketing, online booking platforms, and intelligent tourism infrastructure empower rural destinations to reach broader audiences, enhance service delivery, and improve visitor experiences. Furthermore, these technologies facilitate sustainable tourism by optimizing resource utilization, minimizing environmental impacts, and promoting the digital transformation of rural enterprises. This literature review explores how integrating digital tools can empower rural communities and drive the evolution of sustainable tourism models.

This literature review comprehensively analyzes the factors and strategies underlying sustainable business models in rural tourism, emphasizing their implications for economic development. This underscores the necessity of an integrated approach to sustainability that encompasses biological-ecological, economic, socio-cultural, and political dimensions to ensure the long-term viability of rural tourism. Moreover, it highlights the pivotal role of stakeholders, particularly local communities, in managing tourism practices that are economically viable, environmentally responsible, and socioculturally authentic.

By examining a range of business models, this review elucidates the potential of social enterprises and community-based tourism in advancing social, environmental, and economic objectives. Additionally, it explores the challenges and opportunities associated with green innovation in tourism, emphasizing the importance of sustainable practices to achieve competitive advantages. The review concludes by advocating alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to foster shared value creation and enhance impact measurement, thereby bolstering competitiveness and reinforcing the societal contributions of rural tourism to sustainable economic development.

Sustainable green business models in rural tourism prioritize ecological practices, economic viability, and community engagement, focusing on reducing environmental impacts while fostering long-term economic growth (Revida et al., 2022). These models incorporate eco-friendly technologies such as renewable energy, waste reduction, and

energy-efficient accommodations (Roman et al., 2024). By adopting sustainable practices, rural tourism enterprises enhance their competitiveness, attract environmentally conscious tourists, and support the preservation of local cultures and natural resources (Lai & Lyons, 2011). Community involvement plays a pivotal role, as local leaders and entrepreneurs ensure that tourism initiatives align with the population's needs, promoting job creation and economic development (Sharpley & Roberts, 2004). This personalized, immersive approach also contributes to the preservation of rural heritage and enhances the well-being of residents. Furthermore, sustainable rural tourism aligns with global sustainability goals, mainly through green marketing strategies and promoting eco-friendly tourism experiences (Cahyanti & Menanti, 2019). Innovations like green supply chains and eco-tourism models balance economic efficiency with environmental sustainability, supporting long-term profitability while reducing resource consumption (Chen et al., 2018). These models foster a symbiotic relationship between tourism and sustainable development, positioning rural tourism as a driver of economic and environmental progress.

Sustainable rural tourism involves several critical dimensions for its development and long-term viability. (1) Infrastructure and Health Facilities: The quality of infrastructure and health services, along with local hospitality and effective visitor communication, is foundational to sustainable rural tourism development (Dhakal, 2021); (2) Community engagement: Residents' active involvement in tourism activities fosters a sense of belonging, pride, and ownership, which is needed to sustain rural tourism initiatives (Handiman et al., 2024); (3) Resource Management: Effective management of natural and cultural resources is essential for ensuring the sustainability of rural tourism development processes (Aslam & Awang, 2016); (4) Economic Impact and Synergies: Rural tourism creates significant synergies with food manufacturing and agriculture sectors, fostering long-term sustainable development (Shin et al., 2017); (5) Integration with Development Goals: For rural tourism to be sustainable, it must align with the broader developmental goals of the regions and communities it serves, ensuring that tourism initiatives contribute meaningfully to local development (Saarinen, 2007), (Revida et al., 2023); (6) Local Engagement and Employment: Activities such as craft beer tourism not only support sustainable tourism development but also provide employment opportunities for residents, stimulating regional economic growth (Murray & Kline, 2015) (Mazdalifah et al., 2024); (7) Dynamic Capability and Performance: The ability of rural tourism enterprises to capitalize on new opportunities and leverage knowledge is positively correlated with sustainable tourism performance, highlighting the importance of adaptability and innovation (Sukaris et al., 2023); (8) Mediation Effect of Urbanization: Urbanization is a mediating factor in the relationship between rural tourism and the sustainability of farmers' income, illustrating the interconnectedness of various factors in achieving sustainability (He et al., 2021); and (9) Holistic Approach and Community Development: A holistic approach to rural tourism is essential for comprehensive community development to ensure that initiatives support overall community well-being and sustainability (Ferreira et al., 2022).

B. METHODS

This study employed a systematic review methodology based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Agrawal et al., 2024). The PRISMA framework is recognized for its rigorous and transparent approach, ensuring a comprehensive and reproducible research process. This systematic review analyzed explicitly the literature from peer-reviewed studies focusing on sustainable green business models in rural tourism, particularly in developing countries. The steps involved in conducting a systematic review include defining a research topic, searching the literature for relevant studies, selecting studies that meet established criteria, extracting necessary data, assessing the quality and potential biases of the studies, and analyzing and synthesizing the results, as shown in Figure 1.

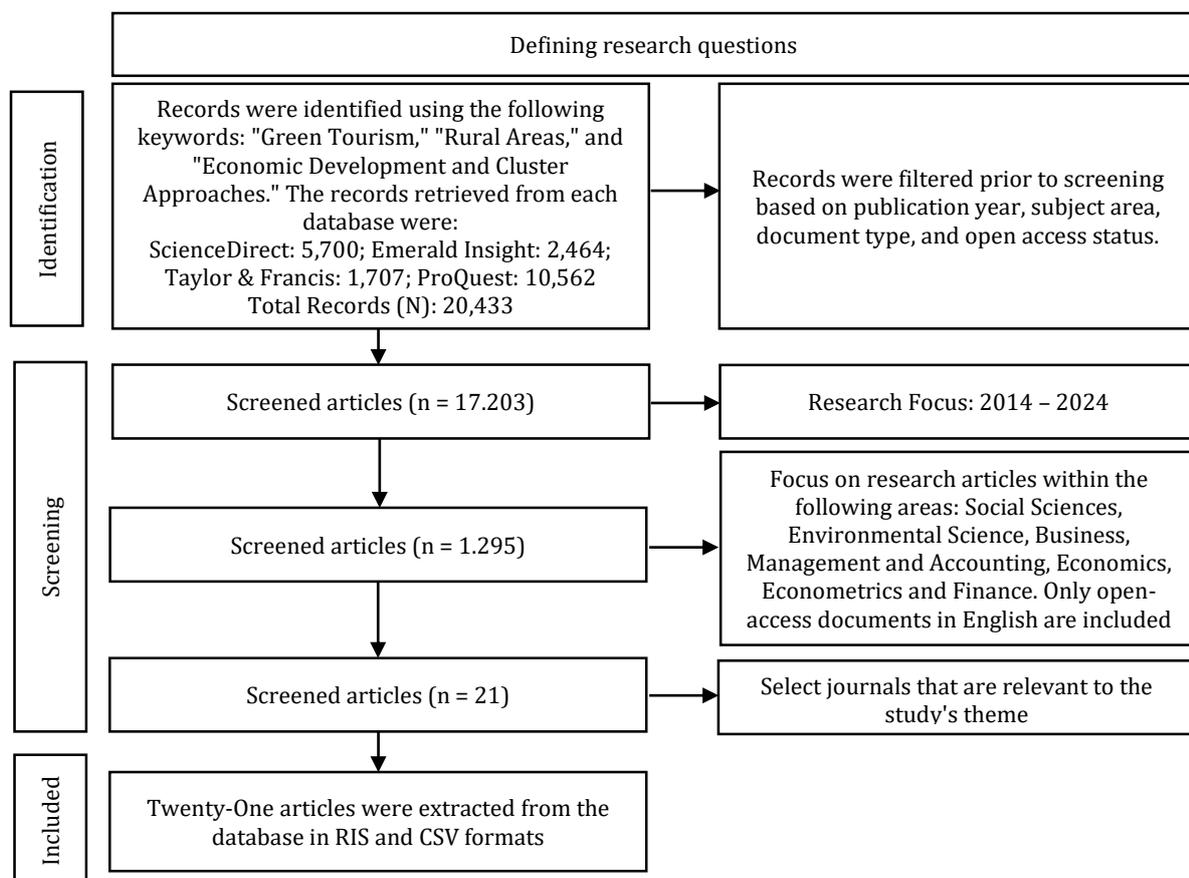


Figure 1. Data processing following the PRISMA protocol

This research utilized multiple academic databases, including ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Taylor & Francis, and Emerald Insight, to explore sustainable green business models in rural tourism. A search strategy using keywords like "Green Tourism," "Rural Areas," and "Economic Development and Cluster Approaches" yielded 20,433 records, which were filtered based on criteria such as publication year, subject area, document type, and open-access status. After initial screening, 17,203 articles published between 2014 and 2024 were identified. In the next stage, further screening was conducted with a focus on research articles relevant to Social Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Business, Management, Accounting, Economics, Econometrics, and Finance. Only open-access

articles written in English were included in this review. As a result of this screening, 1,295 articles were selected, of which 21 were chosen for in-depth analysis. These studies were assessed using established criteria like study design, sample size, and relevance to the research questions, with quality assurance provided by the Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool. The search strategy also employed Boolean operators and manual searches of relevant journals and gray literature to enhance coverage.

The review adhered to the PRISMA framework, a 27-item checklist that ensures transparent and systematic reporting. Critical elements of PRISMA included identifying the study as a systematic review, providing a structured abstract, defining eligibility criteria, and detailing the search strategy and data extraction methods. A flowchart guided the selection process, and potential biases in the research were evaluated. This structured, comprehensive approach aimed to identify effective green business models that support economic development in rural tourism, focusing on best practices in developing countries. Limitations such as the exclusion of gray literature were acknowledged, ensuring a clear understanding of the scope and implications of the findings.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic review identified 20,433 records from sources including ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Taylor and Francis, and Emerald Insight (see Figure 1). A backward snowballing method was employed, which involved discovering additional relevant articles by examining the references of selected studies. This iterative process continued until no further relevant articles were identified, ensuring thorough literature coverage, involving systematic data extraction forms, thematic coding to identify recurring themes, and the creation of categories or domains based on these codes. The analysis used open, axial, and selective coding techniques to uncover commonalities across the 21 selected studies, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Selected Articles

Ref.	Key Characteristics	Findings
Martini (Martini et al., 2020)	Evaluates female entrepreneurs in rural tourism.	Female entrepreneurs show innovation community engagement, and prioritize sustainability.
Villanueva-Álvaro (Villanueva-alvaro et al., 2017)	Assesses rural tourism management and sustainability.	Environmental sensitivity varies; sustainability planning is essential.
Ohorodnyk (Ohorodnyk & Finger, 2024)	Examines agritourism in post-war Ukraine.	Agritourism supports local economies and cultures but needs policy support.
Ming-Lang (Ming-Lang et al., 2019)	Evaluates agritourism and sustainable agriculture integration.	Agritourism aids economies and conservation; models highlight sustainability attributes.
Gabor (Gabor et al., 2023)	Examines tourism's environmental impact in the EU.	Tourism causes pollution; circular economy principles and consumer awareness are crucial.

Astawa (Astawa et al., 2018)	Reviews the "Cultic" model in Bali's rural tourism.	The model engages communities and enhances environmental awareness through local culture.
Rosalina (Rosalina et al., 2023)	Assesses tourism resource management in Balinese villages.	Customary involvement and community participation are essential; the pandemic opened new opportunities.
Hussain (Hussain et al., 2023)	Develops a framework for evaluating rural tourism sustainability.	The framework shows relationships between mobility and tourism; indicators support SDG achievement.
Minin (Minin et al., 2022)	Implements environmental aspects in rural development.	Innovation in agriculture must align with ecosystem preservation; waste management is crucial.
Zulvianti (Zulvianti et al., 2023)	Examines pro-environmental behavior's impact on tourism.	Pro-environmental behavior enhances satisfaction and sustainable practices; education is critical.
Bozhinova (Bozhinova & Georgieva, 2023)	Develop alternative tourism forms for Bulgaria.	Diversifying tourism enhances benefits; promoting sustainability certification is essential.
Damnet (Damnet et al., 2024)	Transforms agritourism through innovation in Thailand.	Innovation boosts attractiveness and revenue; technological advances are crucial.
Sunarya (Sunarya et al., 2024)	Designs health-focused architecture for rural tourism.	Health-supportive design improves appeal and cultural preservation.
Mallick (Mallick et al., 2020)	Designs ecotourism strategies for Rameswaram.	Infrastructure improvements are needed for ecotourism development.
Alonso-Munoz (Alonso-Munoz et al., 2023)	Proposes a holistic approach to tourism sustainability.	Calls for more profound studies on community involvement and stakeholder perceptions.
Xu (Xu et al., 2022)	Builds a circular economy-based ecological tourism system.	The DPSIR model offers insights into ecological tourism strengths and weaknesses.
Yutthaworakool (Yutthaworakool et al., 2024)	Implements community-based cultural tourism.	Enhances cultural identity and community well-being; requires collaboration and infrastructure.
Kim & Chan (Kim Lian Chan, 2023)	Reviews rural tourism practices from local stakeholders' perspective.	Economic, environmental, and government factors drive the adoption of sustainable practices.
Chi (Chi & Pham, 2024)	Investigate eco-destination image's impact on tourism motivation.	Eco-destination image enhances motivations and does not significantly affect social motivations.
Hermanto (Hermanto et al., 2023)	Assesses the impact of digital payment and tour guide performance.	Digital payment and guide performance improve satisfaction and revisit intentions.
Liu (Liu et al., 2023)	Explores agri-food value chains' interaction with rural communities.	Dynamic interactions build community resilience; knowledge sharing is crucial.

1. Strategic Implementation

Implementing a sustainable green business model for rural tourism requires a multi-faceted approach. The following strategies outline practical implementation methods supported by concrete examples and case studies that illustrate their effectiveness:

a. Promoting green entrepreneurship

To foster eco-friendly practices in rural tourism, local governments and organizations can provide training programs focusing on sustainable business practices and innovation. For example, the Green Entrepreneurial Network in Costa Rica offers workshops and resources for aspiring eco-entrepreneurs, helping them to understand sustainable tourism practices while building local businesses that emphasize environmental conservation. This network successfully launched several eco-lodges that prioritize local biodiversity and community engagement.

b. Enhancing community involvement

Engaging local communities in tourism planning ensures that initiatives are aligned with cultural values and environmental sustainability. The Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model in Thailand exemplifies this strategy, in which residents are involved in developing tourism products. In the village of Ban Tai, community members collaborate to create authentic cultural experiences such as traditional cooking classes and handicraft workshops. This approach enhances visitor experience and fosters a sense of ownership and pride among residents.

c. Utilizing digital technology

Integrating digital solutions can significantly enhance operational efficiency and the customer experience. The Smart Tourism Initiative in Barcelona is a successful example, where local tourism boards have implemented an integrated platform that offers online booking, virtual tours, and real-time information about attractions. Rural destinations can adopt similar technologies, such as Rural Connect, a U.S. platform that connects rural tourism providers with travelers seeking personalized experiences. This initiative improved the visibility of rural attractions and streamlined visitor engagement.

d. Implementing green marketing strategies

Developing marketing strategies that emphasize sustainable practices is crucial for attracting eco-conscious tourists. An example is the "Green Key" certification program, which helps tourism businesses implement eco-friendly practices and market themselves as sustainable. Several rural hotels in Denmark have achieved this certification, allowing them to attract environmentally conscious travelers while enhancing their brand reputation. Their marketing campaigns highlight their sustainability efforts, such as energy-efficient facilities and local food sourcing, which resonate with the growing demographics of eco-aware consumers.

e. Exploring green start-up finance

Innovative financing models are essential for supporting green tourism ventures. The Green Investment Fund provides financial support for sustainable tourism initiatives in New Zealand. For instance, a rural eco-lodge has received funding to install solar panels and implement water conservation systems. This case

illustrates how collaborative efforts between the government, private sector, and local communities can provide the necessary resources for green tourism projects, enhancing sustainability and financial viability.

f. **Fostering social entrepreneurship**

Social entrepreneurship can address local challenges while promoting sustainability in rural tourism. The "Social Enterprise World Forum" in Scotland highlights successful examples where social enterprises, like "The Good Life," engage local communities in sustainable practices, such as organic farming and eco-tourism. These enterprises create jobs and empower residents by including them in decision-making processes related to tourism development.

g. **Incorporating innovation**

Cultivating a culture of innovation helps rural tourism businesses adapt to market demand and drive sustainable development. The "Innovative Tourism Solutions" program in Canada showcases how rural tourism businesses can develop new products that align with sustainability goals. One successful case involved a rural winery that introduced a line of organic wines, leveraged local agricultural practices and attracted a niche market for eco-conscious consumers. Rural tourism enterprises can enhance their competitiveness and resilience by fostering creativity and innovation.

2. Challenges and Opportunities

Adopting sustainable green business models in rural tourism presents significant challenges and promising opportunities crucial for promoting economic development while preserving environmental and cultural integrity. Rural tourism is increasingly recognized for its potential to stimulate economic growth and protect local ecosystems and cultural heritage. However, achieving these outcomes requires the addressing of several complex issues.

a. **Challenges**

(1) **Balancing Economic Benefits and Sustainability:** One primary challenge is reconciling economic benefits with sustainability. Although rural tourism can provide substantial economic opportunities, it is essential to ensure that these activities are conducted to minimize adverse environmental and cultural impacts (Chen et al., 2018). Integrating green supply chain practices into rural tourism frameworks is necessary to achieve this balance without compromising the industry's economic viability (Cahyanti & Menanti, 2019); (2) **Preserving Rural Authenticity:** Maintaining tourism destinations' rural character and authenticity is another critical challenge. Rapid development and commercialization can threaten the unique landscapes, cultural traditions, and heritage that attract tourists. Stakeholders need to prioritize conservation efforts to protect these qualities and ensure the long-term sustainability of rural tourism initiatives; and (3) **Resilience to Crises:** The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for resilient and sustainable practices in rural tourism. The pandemic underscored the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in enhancing business resilience and

continuity. CSR initiatives are crucial for fostering community support and adaptability during economic uncertainty.

b. Opportunities

(1) Economic Diversification: Rural tourism presents a significant opportunity for economic diversification in rural areas. By supporting entrepreneurship and local economic development, rural tourism can reduce reliance on traditional industries and enhance economic resilience (Le et al., 2022). This diversification fosters sustainable growth and strengthens the local economy; (2) Support for Small Businesses: Rural tourism offers substantial opportunities for small family-owned businesses primarily through stakeholder engagement and sustainable practices. By creating an integrated ecosystem in which various stakeholders collaborate toward common sustainability goals, rural tourism can provide a supportive environment for small businesses and broader economic development; and (3) Sustainable Development in Undeveloped Regions: Green rural tourism provides opportunities for sustainable development in previously undeveloped areas through urban-rural integration. By adhering to sustainable development principles and adapting strategies to local conditions, green rural tourism can leverage rural areas' unique cultural and natural resources to drive economic growth and promote environmental stewardship. This approach ensures the preservation of rural landscapes and biodiversity while fostering economic development. In conclusion, successfully implementing sustainable green business models in rural tourism requires addressing the challenges of balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability, preserving rural authenticity, and enhancing resilience through CSR. By overcoming these challenges and leveraging opportunities for economic diversification, small business development, and green tourism, stakeholders can harness rural tourism as a catalyst for sustainable economic development while safeguarding the environment and local cultures.

3. Recommendations

To effectively implement sustainable green business models in rural tourism, stakeholders should prioritize the promotion of green entrepreneurship through training programs that emphasize sustainable practices, similar to Costa Rica's Green Entrepreneurial Network, which has successfully fostered eco-lodges that prioritize conservation and community engagement. ComAsen, in Thailand's Community-Based Tourism model, community involvement in tourism planning is crucial to ensure that initiatives reflect the local culture and traditions. Furthermore, integrating digital technology, such as platforms like Rural Connect, can enhance operational efficiency and visitor engagement, while adopting green marketing strategies, including certifications like "Green Key," can attract eco-conscious travelers. Additionally, exploring innovative financing options inspired by New Zealand's Green Investment Fund and fostering social entrepreneurship can empower local communities and secure resources for sustainable projects. Finally, preserving rural authenticity must remain a priority to protect cultural

heritage and environmental integrity, enabling rural tourism to contribute to sustainable economic development.

D. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This systematic review underscores the critical role of sustainable green business models in enhancing rural tourism as a catalyst for economic development while preserving environmental integrity and cultural heritage. Through a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature, key themes have emerged, highlighting the importance of green entrepreneurship, community engagement, and technological integration in promoting sustainability. By fostering local innovation and prioritizing eco-friendly practices, stakeholders can create a resilient tourism framework that boosts economic opportunities and safeguards the unique characteristics of rural areas. Successful case studies demonstrate that effective collaboration among various stakeholders, supported by innovative financing and green marketing strategies, can address the challenge of balancing economic growth with environmental preservation. Ultimately, embracing these sustainable practices will ensure that rural tourism flourishes economically and contributes to the long-term well-being of communities and ecosystems.

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