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Towards green cities – a systematic literature review of policy models for sustainable urban tourism development in tourism destinations

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Towards Green Cities – A Systematic Literature Review of Policy Models for Sustainable Urban Tourism Development in Tourism Destinations

Abstract

Urban tourism is a growing phenomenon that increasingly calls for strategic alignment between tourism planning and urban policy. Research on integrative policy models for this alignment remains limited. This study aims to identify, classify, and compare urban tourism policy models discussed in the academic literature, with particular attention to their potential contribution to sustainable urban tourism planning and their contextual applicability. This study conducted a systematic literature review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method as a reporting and selection framework to identify and analyze 29 peer-reviewed sources from SCOPUS, Web of Science (WoS), and EBSCO, and extract 12 distinct urban tourism policy models. A consistent search criterion and data extraction across these databases addresses the risk of bias. The inclusion criteria are: an urban tourism study area and a thematic focus on urban tourism policy, planning, or governance. Rather than evaluating the implemented outcomes of these models, the review synthesizes how the selected literature conceptualizes policy integration, stakeholder involvement, sustainability, technological maturity, and transferability across different urban tourism contexts. The findings reveal a conceptual evolution from traditional policy models focused on heritage conservation and marketing to holistic policy frameworks for tourism sustainability, ultimately leading to a technology-driven smart tourism city model. The context-based comparison of the models suggests that none of the reviewed models can be treated as universally implementation-ready without adaptation to local institutional, technological, socio-cultural, and environmental conditions. While the smart tourism city model shows promise as a conceptual framework for strengthening stakeholder integration and supporting data-informed sustainability-oriented governance, its applicability remains constrained in urban contexts with limited technological infrastructure and governance capacity. The study therefore contributes a comparative lens for assessing the contextual fit of urban tourism policy models, while also acknowledging that further empirical and post-implementation research is needed to evaluate their actual sustainability outcomes. The study highlights the need for context-sensitive and adaptable policy approaches in future urban tourism planning. However, the review is limited by a small sample size, which restricts geographical coverage in regions with scarce literature, such as Africa.

Keywords: Sustainable urban tourism, urban tourism policy, urban tourism models, tourism policy framework

JEL Codes: R58, Z38, L52

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1. Introduction

Cities are increasingly positioning themselves as preferred destinations for global tourism, leading to significant growth in urban tourism (AlShaalan & Durugbo, 2025; Spirou, 2011). This growth has turned into overtourism in iconic tourist cities. It is being driven by the increasing number of international arrivals. In 2024, international arrivals totaled 1.4 billion and are projected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 (World Tourism Organization, 2025). Europe has the top urban destinations, followed by Asia and North America (Euromonitor International, 2024). Leading cities in these regions are facing severe congestion. Further growth exacerbates environmental strain, housing challenges, inflation and cultural erosion (Grah et al., 2020; Pasquinelli, 2017; Uğur, 2017; Zmyślony & Kowalczyk-Anioł, 2019). In response, cities have introduced urban tourism policies to manage trade-offs between economic development, social equity, cultural preservation and environmental sustainability. However, a disconnect exists between urban tourism policy and urban planning (Klepej & Marot, 2024; Stamatiou, 2024; Uğur, 2017). On one

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hand, tourism policies prioritize short-term economic benefits, while urban planning focuses on the long-term sustainability and livability of cities. Failing to embed urban tourism policies within urban planning frameworks impedes sustainable urban development. This study, therefore, asks: how are urban tourism policy models conceptualized in the literature, and how can they be compared in terms of their potential contribution to sustainable urban tourism planning?

The purpose of this study is to analyze policy models used to align urban tourism policy with urban planning and to assess their conceptual relevance and contextual applicability for sustainable urban tourism in cities**.** This paper defines urban tourism policy model as a structural, conceptual and operational guide that maps the relationships between actors, policy instruments, and implementation mechanisms for tourism development in cities (Caffyn & Jobbins, 2003; Edgell & Swanson, 2024; Pforr, 2005). Understanding the integrative urban tourism policy models can facilitate the selection of suitable approaches for streamlining tourism strategies in urban planning. It can also facilitate the customization of the approaches to address unique characteristics and needs presented by cities

The primary achievement of this review was to derive policy models from the selected articles using the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The policy models retrieved indicate a conceptual shift in three phases. The first is the traditional policy model, which focuses solely on the development of tourism elements (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; De Bres, 1994). Secondly, the holistic policy models highlight the dimensions of sustainable development, stakeholder participation, and types of urban tourism (Grah et al., 2020; Koodsela et al., 2019). Lastly, the smart tourism city models are integrating tech-driven disruptive solutions in tourism planning. These models may support urban sustainability through enhanced stakeholder engagement and data-informed policies, although their actual outcomes depend on local implementation conditions (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023; Nishigaki et al., 2024; Porfido et al., 2023). However, none of these models is a ready-made solution. Therefore, a comparative analysis is performed to assess the adaptability of the policy models to the context-specific circumstances of cities**.**

The next section presents the context analysis, which examines the conditions under which urban tourism policies were established. The methodology section details the review process. The results section then highlights the identified urban tourism policy models and the comparative framework. The discussion section follows, and afterwards, the paper's theoretical and practical contributions are explained.

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2. Context Analysis

The fragmentation of policymaking across urban tourism and urban planning often leads to missed synergies(Bellini et al., 2017; Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024). Integrating them requires local-based approaches. Analysis of situations within which urban tourism policies are integrated into urban development is crucial for understanding how coordinated approaches can effectively address sustainable urban tourism development. In this review, context analysis is used to clarify the temporal, geographical, and tourism-scenario conditions under which policy models are discussed, rather than to evaluate their implemented outcomes. In this section, the temporal (historical) and geographical locations, as well as tourism scenarios, are presented.

Historically, urban tourism was initially incidental, or in other words, a marginal sector, as Bellini et al. (2017) put it. It grew alongside the urban revolution during the Industrial Revolution to date (Spirou, 2011). However, as industrial cities began to decline and some lost their industrial status in the late 20th century (Stojčić et al., 2024; Vojinić & Bečić, 2024), urban tourism emerged as an alternative economic activity to revitalize cities (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; De Bres, 1994). This urban tourism scenario is referred to as surrogate tourism, where tourism serves as an alternative to another economic sector, such as the manufacturing sector (Bellini et al., 2017). In a case where tourism is a primary economic sector in the city, it is a dominant tourism scenario. These scenarios, as presented in the literature, are insufficient to explain the circumstances of tourism in cities. However, these broad scenarios do not fully capture the diversity of urban tourism conditions found in the reviewed literature. This study presents a more specific approach to explaining tourism scenarios both as an opportunity and a challenge in urban planning (see Figure 1).

Regardless of the tourism scenarios in cities, tourist arrivals grew rapidly after the Industrial Revolution. In response, urban planning facilitated the integration of tourism infrastructure into urban development. However, these developments were not balanced in cities. They were concentrated near heritage sites (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000), along major automobile routes (De Bres, 1994) and at prime natural locations to optimize the scenic views despite the sensitivity of the surroundings. Uncontrolled tourist arrivals, tourism resource concentration, and excessive consumption led to *overtourism* that irritated the urban community in some cities, (Guitart & Serrat, 2020; Koens et al., 2021). These examples show why policy models need to be interpreted in relation to specific urban conditions, including heritage concentration, transport accessibility, tourism pressure, and resident livability.

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Despite the evolution of tourism in cities and continued risks of overtourism, the reviewed articles give limited attention to future-oriented urban tourism policy contexts, as shown in Figure A1 (see Appendix A). Twenty percent of the articles addressed antique temporal contexts (prior to the year 2000), and eighty percent addressed contemporary temporal contexts (between 2000 and the present, as of 2024). This review categorizes the temporal contexts in eras with reference to contemporary time. This period is assumed to be from 2000 to the present date (2024), characterized by contemporary issues that influence the policy and planning landscape. They largely include sustainability concerns and technological advancement. Papers whose case studies or research were based only on the urban tourism cases before 2000 were regarded as antiquated because the policy context then was not as complex as that after 2000. Policy models in contemporary times attempt to address the impacts of tourism on sustainable urbanism, but their integrative and adaptive capacity remains uneven across contexts. The review categorizes the spatial contexts based on the continents. As shown in Figure A2 (see Appendix A), 52% of the sources covered European cities, 17% covered Asian cities, 7% covered African cities, and 7% covered North American cities. The bias in geographical coverage by urban tourism policy model literature is owed to different urban tourism growth rates. The geographical concentration of the literature may reflect differences in urban tourism development, destination maturity, and research coverage. The old and developed cities have a history of industrial development and are predominantly found in Europe and North America. They have undergone urban revitalization. They are also adopting contemporary models of urban tourism policy, and they are already striving for integrative and innovative policy models. Apart from Europe and North America, there are a few examples in Asia and South America. However, some Asian cities have emerged as smart cities without undergoing traditional urbanization (Cano-Suñén & Castejón, 2024), and are adopting smart tourism city models (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024). This geographical distribution and destination maturity of cities present common challenges. For instance, some large European cities face the challenge of overtourism (Bærenholdt & Meged, 2023; Koens et al., 2021). Others face the decline in the city's competitiveness in regional rankings (Dahles, 1998; Quinn, 2010), while others generally address sustainability issues related to tourism as a challenge to progress (Porfido et al., 2023). Notable problems while addressing tourism pressure in European cities are the fragmentation of stakeholders (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024; Maitland, 2022). Although efforts are being made to utilize technology to integrate stakeholders (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024), other cities have established private sector-led tourism bureaus (Nijkamp et al., 2009), which may further exclude urban residents and other key stakeholders from the decision-making and planning processes of the habitat.

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The historical progress in urban tourism, along with the location-based context of urban tourism, reveals that tourism in cities presents both challenges and opportunities. The summary of tourism scenarios in Figure 1 shows that urban tourism poses a significant challenge to environmental integrity. At the same time, it also generates economic benefits for the city, including revenue and employment, among others. However, these scenarios may change over time, as cities are dynamic. Just as the role of urban tourism in urban development may change from one era to another(Spirou, 2011). Therefore, they must be reviewed periodically. These temporal, spatial, and scenario-based differences provide the contextual basis for comparing urban tourism policy models in the following sections.

3. Methodology

The PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021) was used to select academic articles. Figure 2 illustrates the review process in three phases. That is, the identification of articles, abstract screening**,** and the full review. The databases used were Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and EBSCO. Both Scopus and EBSCO databases feature a vast array of international, multidisciplinary academic papers that provide extensive coverage of urban tourism topics, including policy, governance, sustainability, and development (Krabokoukis & Polyzos, 2023). WoS also features interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary content essential for studying urban tourism, integrating with other disciplines such as urban management, sociology, and psychology (A. M. Morrison & Coca-Stefaniak, 2020).

Database-specific search strings and filters are provided in supplementary file ESF_1. It comprises four keywords: “Urban Tourism Governance,” “Urban Tourism Policy,” “Urban Tourism Models,” and “Tourism Policy Framework.” On Scopus, the search was performed on 23rd November, while on WoS and EBSCO, it was run on 24th November 2024. The initial search results were exported to MS Excel to create a text database for processing, screening, and extraction (see Electronic Supplementary File 1 *(ESF_1)*).

The study considered three search criteria: first, the publication time range of 1990-2024. This is because, after the articulation of sustainable tourism by the World Tourism Organisation in 1988 (Brych & Galysh, 2020) and the commissioning of Agenda 21 (1992) for the tourism industry, there has been a growing need to integrate sustainability principles into urban tourism management. Therefore, the period from 1990 to 2024 has been a transition from traditional urban tourism management to sustainable urban tourism management. Secondly, the English language was used because it is the primary language for the selected databases (Maynard et al., 2023), and the fact that most of the scientific publications are in English (A. Morrison et al., 2012) Lastly, peer-reviewed literature was considered to ensure reliability.

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Sources were included when they addressed tourism in cities and discussed policy, governance, planning, or model-based approaches relevant to tourism–urban planning integration. Sources were excluded when they did not focus on urban settings, were duplicates, were not peer-reviewed, were not in English, or did not provide sufficient relevance to urban tourism policy or planning.

A total of eighty-six sources were retrieved. Of these, 41 articles were omitted as duplicates. One article was removed due to its language, and one source was disregarded because it was not peer-reviewed. Consequently, abstracts from 43 sources were independently screened by two reviewers against two predefined eligibility criteria. First, sources whose scope included urban tourism, with cities as their primary study areas; second, a thematic focus on tourism policy, planning, and governance. Given these two clear inclusion criteria, there were no discrepancies between the reviewers. Accordingly, fourteen sources were omitted. Therefore, twenty-nine sources underwent a full review. A final database of twenty-nine secondary sources was compiled in Excel, including categories such as author (see Figure B1 in Appendix B), year of publication (see Figure B2), the source's title, publisher name, discipline involved (see Figure B3), volume, number, and page, and source type (see Figure B4). These twenty-nine sources formed the review corpus for the context analysis. From this corpus, a smaller subset was used for policy-model analysis. A source was considered relevant for policy-model extraction when it explicitly or implicitly presented a structured approach that linked urban tourism development to policy actors, planning instruments, governance arrangements, implementation mechanisms, or sustainability objectives. Sources that discussed urban tourism without articulating such a model-based or framework-based logic were retained for contextual interpretation but excluded from the policy-model comparison (see ESF_1*)*.

Based on this procedure, thirteen sources were used to identify and compare twelve urban tourism policy models. The extraction focused on the model name, policy orientation, planning approach, stakeholder involvement, transferability, technological maturity, sustainability orientation, and integrative capacity. These categories informed the comparative framework presented in Table 2. The comparison should therefore be interpreted as a structured conceptual synthesis of the reviewed literature, rather than as an empirical evaluation of the implementation outcomes of the identified models. Moreover, the risk of bias in this synthesis is the differences in the theoretical approaches across the reviewed literature, which may make the empirical findings incompatible with meta-analysis. Therefore, a strict context-mechanism-output (CMO) analysis model was used to extract data for synthesis (see ESF_1*)*.

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CMO framework facilitated the assessment of the urban settings in which urban tourism policy models were applied. In line with De Souza (2013), the elaboration of the CMO configuration, context was examined through spatial, temporal, policy, tourism, stakeholder, and technological dimensions, while mechanisms represented the policy actions and strategic interventions activated within these contexts. Outcomes reflected the effects of these interventions on tourism development and urban governance. By mapping and comparing CMO configurations across cases in the selected articles, this study identified the contextual conditions under which particular mechanisms generated desired or unintended outcomes, thereby providing an explanatory understanding of what works and under what circumstances in urban tourism planning. However, this review was not registered, and no protocol was developed. Nevertheless, the two reviewers followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency and methodological rigor.

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4. Results

4.1. Urban tourism policy models

Table 1 summarizes the policy models. Of the twenty-nine sources included in the full review, thirteen provided sufficient model- or framework-based content for policy-model extraction. These sources were used to identify twelve urban tourism policy models. They are categorized into three types based on comprehensiveness. First, traditional policy models, which focus solely on the development of tourism elements (De Bres, 1994). They form the foundation of all other types of policy models. Secondly, holistic policy models, which are comprehensive, acknowledge the multifaceted nature of urban tourism and foster planning and management that considers the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Thirdly, smart tourism city governance is based on innovative disruptions in the urban tourism system. This classification is used as a conceptual synthesis of the reviewed literature, not as an empirical validation of the models' implementation outcomes.

Table 1. Urban tourism policy models

Model type	Year	Policy Model	Indicative application context
Traditional policy models	1994	Tourist-Historic City model (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; De Bres, 1994)	Heritage cities and historic districts
	1994	The Kansas Tourism Model (De Bres, 1994)	Cities with limited primary attractions and demand for product diversification
	2002	Public-Private Partnership Model (Henning, 2022; Maitland, 2002; Quinn, 2010)	Cities with institutional capacity for public-private cooperation
	2009	Bottom-up and Top-down E-tourism Model (Nijkamp et al., 2009)	Cities developing digital tourism services
Holistic policy models	2015	Event-Led Cultural Tourism Model (Yi-De, 2015)	Cultural and event-led urban destinations
	2019	Holistic Conceptual Model (Koodsela et al., 2019)	Cities aligning tourism with sustainable development goals
	2020	Sustainable Urban Tourism Development Model (Grah et al., 2020).	Cities seeking multidimensional sustainability governance
	2021	Smart City Hospitality Model (Koens et al., 2021)	Cities addressing overtourism and host–guest relationships
	2023	Local-Hood Urban Tourism Model (Bærenholdt & Meged, 2023)	Neighbourhood-based urban tourism contexts
	2023	Crowdsourced Urban Tourism Model (Liu et al., 2023)	Data-rich cities using user-generated tourism data

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Smart Tourism City governance	2024	Entropy Maximization Model (Nishigaki et al., 2024)	Tech-enabled cities estimating tourist flows
	2024	Smart Tourism City Model (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024)	Smart cities with advanced digital governance capacity

Source: Authors' own compilation from the selected sources (2026)

4.1.1. Traditional urban tourism policy models

To begin with, the Tourist-Historic City policy model is based on Ashworth & Tunbridge's (2000) conception of the Tourist-Historic City model. This model encompasses preservation, conservation, and heritage planning. While preservation planning focuses on designated buildings or sites, conservation planning involves a designated area or part of the city, and heritage planning primarily involves heritage marketing. The planning approach is largely top-down, which may limit stakeholder participation. The policy tools include protective monument designation plans, area land-use plans, and marketing plans. These tools can support the management of historical resources, but they may also expose heritage areas to commodification, commercialization, and overtourism if sustainable consumption limits are not incorporated into heritage management plans. The model is therefore most applicable to heritage cities and historic districts with relatively centralized planning institutions, but less suitable for non-historic cities with limited cultural heritage resources.

The Kansas Tourism policy model (De Bres', 1994) reflects private sector-led planning, in which investors respond to demand for tourist services by developing secondary attractions where primary attractions are limited. The model requires strategic land-use planning, zoning, and tourism regulation; otherwise, it may lead to uneven concentrations of tourism components within cities. It is particularly relevant for cities with limited cultural or natural heritage that seek to diversify their tourism offerings, although its sustainability implications depend on how effectively tourism development is embedded in wider urban planning.

The Public-Private Partnership (PPP) policy model integrates public and private stakeholders to address urban tourism development and related urban challenges (Henning, 2022; Maitland, 2022; Quinn, 2010). PPPs offer a collaborative framework for delivering tourism infrastructure and services, mobilizing private-sector capital, innovation, and investment capacity. Beyond funding projects, PPPs may support the co-creation of urban tourism policies and strategies (Maitland, 2022) and allocate risks to partners better placed to manage them (Henning, 2022). Although partnerships may produce unequal benefits, effective institutions, transparent contracts, long-term vision, and open communication can support co-

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learning and trust-building. The PPP model is therefore most relevant in cities with well-defined institutional and legal frameworks that facilitate stakeholder cooperation.

The Integrated Bottom-up and Top-down E-tourism model combines top-down planning of e-service packages with bottom-up data collection and analysis for managing cultural heritage and tourism elements (Nijkamp et al., 2009). The top-down component facilitates the development of national or city-level digital platforms through tourism agencies, open data, digital information centers, and technological infrastructure. The bottom-up component supports local computer and mobile applications for sites, products, services, or heritage. However, the model applies participation unevenly: planning remains largely top-down, while bottom-up data are mainly sourced from tourists through digital applications. This limits the involvement of local communities in decision-making. The model is therefore useful for understanding early digital tourism governance, but its participatory capacity remains limited unless residents and community stakeholders are also included in platform design, data generation, and policy decisions.

4.1.2. Holistic urban tourism policy models

The Event-Led Cultural Tourism Model (Yi-De, 2015), derived from the European Capitals of Culture concept, is a five-factor tourism model involving the experience economy, cultural provision, city image, urban regeneration, and partnerships. The model may support tourism development, city branding, competitiveness, and urban revitalization. However, it may also increase the commodification of culture and the risk of overtourism when city attractiveness rises**.** It is therefore most applicable to culturally rich cities that already have comprehensive urban plans, tourism strategies, and cultural management frameworks.

The Holistic Conceptual Framework (Koodsela et al., 2019) focuses on integrating urban tourism development with sustainable development. It emphasizes social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability (Purvis et al., 2019), stakeholder participation (Koens, 2019), and sustainable tourism indicators (Rajaonson & Tanguay, 2016). This governance approach links urban tourism development with national policies, urban plans, and sustainability dimensions. Its applicability depends on the presence of national, municipal, and tourism institutions capable of coordinating stakeholders and monitoring sustainability indicators.

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The Sustainable Urban Tourism Policy Model operationalizes the holistic conceptual approach through a multidimensional governance framework (Grah et al., 2020). It integrates sustainability, stakeholder networks, urban tourism, and city management functions (see Figure 3). The urban tourism layer refers to the specific type of tourism experienced by a city, while stakeholder collaboration is used to connect tourism management with sustainability principles. However, the model's assumption that the dimensions of sustainability can be balanced may reflect a weak sustainability perspective. For this reason, the model may need to be adapted in contexts where ecological limits, resident livability, and socio-cultural integrity require stronger priority in tourism governance.

This paper presents a sustainable urban tourism governance model that can be enhanced to address sustainability dimensions rather than merely balancing them. Figure 3 should therefore be interpreted as a conceptual refinement based on the reviewed literature, not as an empirically tested model. It emphasizes environmental integrity as a foundation for sustainability, followed by social and economic dimensions. This reflects the argument that urban tourism governance should consider socio-ecological limits, community participation, and conservation when managing tourism consumption (Fuchs et al., 2021). The model provides a conceptual basis for the later comparison of sustainability orientation across policy models.

The Smart City Hospitality Policy Model (Koens et al., 2021) illustrate a milestone towards starting sustainable tourism consumption. While the risk of overtourism remains, it promotes the host community's participation and ownership in the sector. Smart City Hospitality policy emphasizes and positions the city as a "good host" to all the stakeholders, including the residents and tourists. First, Policies enhance the city's livability by offering high-quality living and working conditions. Secondly, the quality of experience, authentic visitor experiences, and citizens' recreation, and lastly, the quality of life and healthy living. The focal facet of this policy model is resilience in social, economic, and political transformations, which requires deep stakeholder involvement to sustain a city as a 'good host'. Given this, the model can be adaptable in cities with highly collaborative and empowered societies.

The Local-hood tourism policy model (Bærenholdt & Meged, 2023) is a discourse-based strategy that disperses tourists widely and evenly throughout the city. It promotes the integration of tourists into local life by regulating mobility and addressing issues of over-tourism. It encourages tourists to experience the city as a local, enhancing their connection with its heritage and people. It demonstrates the tourism economy's benefits for the local community, thanks to its deep community involvement (Koens et al.,

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2021), which integrates local neighborhoods (by managing mobility) and connects with local life (Bærenholdt & Meged, 2023). Community and tourist engagement, coupled with government and expert involvement, help to understand the socio-ecological limits of urban tourism, and the enactment of control mechanisms can be facilitated. In this information era, integrating information technology can facilitate the monitoring of socio-ecological indicators to inform tourism economic decisions. The adoption of this model also requires the host society to be well-equipped and willing to participate in the progress of urban tourism. Thus, it can be adapted in cities with adequate transportation infrastructure, a collaborative society, and a medium to high level of technological maturity. The following section presents the governance models that integrate technological advancements to enhance data-based decisions and policies.

4.1.3. Smart urban tourism policy models

Data-driven approaches are increasingly discussed as tools for urban tourism governance. Although data estimations are helpful for policymaking, accurately quantifying urban tourism consumption remains a challenge (World Tourism Organisation, 2024). The adoption of digital technologies may enable cities with advanced infrastructure to capture real-time data on tourist flows, visitor behaviour, and pressure points. However, these models should be interpreted as offering data-informed governance potential rather than guaranteed sustainability outcomes.

The crowdsourced urban tourism model proposed by Liu et al. (2023) integrates user-generated data into decisions related to tourism resources, marketing, and regional inter-city cooperation. Real-time data from online platforms, such as reviews and ratings, provides insights into visitor behaviour and preferences, enabling more responsive urban tourism management. However, user-generated content may overrepresent tourists while underrepresenting residents. The model would therefore be strengthened by including host-community data and multiple digital platforms, rather than relying only on visitor reviews or a single platform. Despite these limitations, it offers a responsive policy approach for cities with advanced technological infrastructure.

The Entropy Maximisation Model estimates tourist numbers for specific activities, including tour starting times, places visited, and the duration of recreational activities (Nishigaki et al., 2024). This approach may support data-informed policies for tourist mobility, resource use, and impact management. However, it does not fully account for real-time consumption data from local communities. Its applicability is

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strongest in tech-enabled cities with Wi-Fi hotspots, transport GPS systems, mobile data policies, and the capacity to integrate tourism data with wider urban management systems.

The Smart Tourism City model proposed by Ivars-Baidal et al. (2024) is comprehensive, highly integrative, and technology-supported. It highlights synergies between urban development and urban tourism by linking smart city technologies with tourism governance. These technologies include intelligent mobility, the Internet of Things, virtual tourism information centers, e-tourism solutions, and artificial intelligence for real-time data on tourist distribution and occupancy in sensitive areas. By using these technologies, tourism stakeholders may integrate business and governance platforms and support collaboration for sustainable urban tourism.

The Smart Tourism City model offers a conceptual solution for stakeholder integration, data creation and sharing, and context-specific sustainability decisions. However, its reliance on advanced technological infrastructure limits its transferability, especially in cities with lower technological capacity. It has also not yet been fully realized even in highly developed cities (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024). This finding supports the need to compare smart models with traditional and holistic models, rather than treating technological advancement as a universally applicable solution. The next subsection provides a comparative summary of the policy framework.

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4.2. Policy model comparison

Table 2 provides a summary of the evaluation, comparing the policy models based on nine criteria. The comparison was conducted as a qualitative conceptual synthesis of the reviewed literature, rather than as an empirical assessment of implementation performance. The first criterion is the planning approach, which refers to the dominant mode of decision-making and policy coordination. Secondly, transferability was assessed based on the models' context-sensitivity and the extent to which they can be adapted beyond their original urban setting. Thirdly, stakeholder involvement was examined based on whether the models provide participatory platforms in destination planning. Fourthly, flexibility refers to the model's potential for modification in response to changing urban dynamics. The fifth criterion is temporal scope, as explained in the context analysis section. Sixthly, city harmony considers whether the model conceptually addresses both tourist needs and residents' quality of life. Seventh, technological maturity was assessed based on the models' reliance on information technologies, especially smart city technologies. Technological maturity is based on the Focus Area Smart City Maturity Model (Aljowder et al., 2023), whose scale consists of five stages: Initial (1), Developing (2), Defined (3), Managed (4), and Optimised

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(5). These were summarized as low maturity = 1, medium maturity = 2–3, and high maturity = 4–5. Eighth, the sustainability criterion was analyzed based on the models' sustainability orientation, including whether sustainability is overlooked, balanced across dimensions, or linked to socio-ecological limits and data-informed management. Lastly, integrative capacity was analyzed in terms of the model's conceptual contribution to embedding the tourism agenda in urban planning. It was evaluated based on the model's ability to link tourism planning with broader urban governance objectives and to coordinate actors, sectors, and policy domains. The assessment drew on conceptual evidence on cross-sectoral integration, stakeholder collaboration, sustainability integration, technological coordination, and the alignment of tourism policies with broader urban development goals. Models characterized by isolated or sector-specific interventions were judged to have low integrative capacity, whereas those demonstrating comprehensive governance structures and strong coordination across tourism, planning, technology, and sustainability domains were judged to have moderate or high integrative capacity.

The coding logic behind these criteria is grounded in the extracted Context-Mechanism-Outcome configurations (see ESF 1). Each of the three broad categories of policy models was coded against nine comparative dimensions: planning approach, transferability, stakeholder involvement, flexibility, temporal scope, city harmony, technological maturity, sustainability, and integrative capacity. Judgments were derived from the dominant patterns identified across the contextual conditions, governance mechanisms, and outcomes associated with each model. Models demonstrating limited stakeholder engagement, sector-specific objectives, and weak integration of sustainability and technology were coded as having lower capacity, whereas models exhibiting multi-stakeholder governance, cross-sectoral coordination, sustainability orientation, adaptive planning, and integration of digital systems were coded as having higher capacity. The coding was interpretive and conceptual-evidence-based rather than score-based, with classifications reflecting the prevailing characteristics argued across the reviewed studies.

Table 2. Comparison Framework for Policy Models

	Traditional policy model *1-THC, 2-KTM, 3-PPP, 4-Bu-Td*	**Holistic policy models** *1-ECT, 2-HCF, 3-SUT, 4-SCH, 5-LUT*	**Smart Tourism City governance** *1-CUT, 2-EM, 3-STC*
Planning approach	Preservation and conservation planning; heritage marketing; product-oriented tourism development	Multidimensional and sustainability-oriented planning; moderate technology adoption	Data-informed and technology-supported planning; comprehensive governance orientation
Transferability	THC is mainly applicable to heritage cities; KTM is linked to cities seeking tourism product diversification; PPP and Bu-Td are less context-rigid	ECT depends on a cultural or creative base; HCF and SUT are less context-rigid; SCH and LUT require active community participation	Transferability depends strongly on technological infrastructure and data governance capacity

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Stakeholder involvement	Mainly top-down, with limited participatory mechanisms	Hybrid top-down and bottom-up participation	More integrated stakeholder coordination, often supported by digital platforms
Flexibility	Limited flexibility in responding to rapid urban dynamics; strong reliance on heritage or product-based tourism assets	Can be realigned with development paradigms, policy changes, and community-based planning needs	Relatively high flexibility where data systems and institutional capacity are available
Temporal scope	More applicable to slower urbanization, heritage tourism, and earlier urban tourism development contexts	Applicable to contemporary and emerging urban tourism governance issues	Contemporary and future-oriented; depends on the destination's technological evolution
City harmony	Resident quality of life is weakly addressed; tourist experience is often prioritized	Addresses quality of life, work life, community participation, and visitor experience	May support city harmony through collaborative, data-informed decisions, where resident and visitor data are both included
Technological maturity	Low	Medium	High
Sustainability	Economic benefits are often prioritized; risks of excessive tourism and limited sustainability integration remain	Sustainability is more explicit, but often framed through balance among social, economic, and environmental dimensions	Potential for stronger sustainability orientation through data-informed tourism limits, conservation, and real-time policy feedback
Integrative capacity	Limited integrative capacity and adaptability	Moderate integrative capacity	Potentially high integrative capacity, depending on technological and institutional readiness

Key

THC: Tourist-Historic City model

KTM: The Kansas Tourism Model

PPP: Public-Private Partnership Model

Bu-Td: Integrated Bottom-up and Top-down e-tourism Model

ECT: Event-Led Cultural Tourism Model

HCF: Holistic Conceptual Model

SUT: Sustainable Urban Tourism Development Model

SCH: Smart City Hospitality Model

LUT: Local-Hood Urban Tourism Model

CUT: Crowdsourced Urban Tourism Model

EM: Entropy Maximisation Model

STC: Smart Tourism City Model

Source: Authors' Own editing, (2026)

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Discussion

This review enhances understanding of tourism integration in sustainable urban planning by using the PRISMA 2020 framework to analyze policy models that align tourism policy with urban planning**.** The findings should be interpreted as a conceptual synthesis of the reviewed literature rather than as evidence of the implemented effectiveness of the identified models. The findings reveal a shift in urban tourism

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policy models from traditional, tourism-product-oriented approaches to more flexible, participatory, and technology-supported models. This suggests that urban tourism policy models are increasingly expected to respond to changing urban dynamics, although no single model is universally ready for implementation across all city contexts. Rather than challenging previous models as invalid, the review shows that the Tourist-Historic City model (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000), sustainable urban tourism policy models (Grah et al., 2020), and smart tourism city models (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2024) each depend on specific contextual conditions for adoption and transferability. The results highlight the need for context-specific comparison of policy models to identify suitable adaptations for integrating tourism into urban planning. This adds to prior studies by explicitly linking policy-model selection to temporal, spatial, technological, institutional, and sustainability-related conditions.

Two aspects of these findings warrant attention. First, the challenges and benefits of urban tourism are not addressed equally across the policy models. Traditional policy models tend to prioritize heritage management, product diversification, and tourism growth, while holistic models more explicitly include stakeholder participation and sustainability dimensions. Smart tourism city models add data-informed governance capacity, but their applicability depends on technological infrastructure and institutional readiness. Therefore, the comparative framework established in this review can support a more systematic consideration of how different models may help cities anticipate, minimize, or manage tourism-related pressures. Secondly, the proposed comparative framework brings together the conditions necessary for urban-tourism policy integration (see Table 2). When used cautiously, it can help policymakers and researchers assess the contextual fit of policy models in relation to tourism demand, resident quality of life, sustainability priorities, stakeholder structures, and technological capacity.

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5.2. Theoretical Contribution

The review introduces a three-tier classification of policy models based on dimensional complexity and integrative capacity. Firstly, the traditional policy model category highlights the challenge of linear planning and limited participatory mechanisms in urban tourism. Secondly, the holistic policy model category acknowledges stakeholder networks and the integration of sustainability dimensions, although technological innovation remains limited. Lastly, the smart tourism city policy model category demonstrates the potential of data-informed governance for stakeholder integration and sustainability-oriented decision-making, although this potential has not yet been fully realized in practice.

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The review refines the sustainable urban tourism policy model (see Figure 3), which previous studies developed around interconnected layers of sustainability, stakeholders, and types of tourism. This review reorganizes these layers by emphasizing the environmental dimension of sustainability to reduce the risk that ecological limits are subordinated to economic objectives. This refinement is conceptual and should be further tested through empirical case studies.

Additionally, the review proposes a comparative framework that enables systematic cross-contextual analysis of policy models. The framework consists of nine criteria: planning approach, transferability, stakeholder involvement, flexibility, temporal scope, city harmony, technological maturity, sustainability orientation, and integrative capacity. These criteria represent key conditions for the sustainable embedment of tourism in urban planning. The sustainability of urban tourism depends partly on the integrative capacity of the policy model, which is influenced by the contextual factors highlighted in Table 2. Researchers can therefore use this framework to structure comparative analysis and to make more cautious, context-sensitive recommendations.

5.3. Practical implications

Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and governments at national and urban-local levels should systematically compare policy models before applying them to urban tourism planning. The framework proposed in this review can help decision-makers assess whether a policy model fits local sustainability goals, technological capacity, stakeholder structures, institutional arrangements, and resident livability concerns. This encourages the selection and adaptation of urban tourism approaches that are more closely aligned with local planning conditions rather than the adoption of ready-made models.

5.4. Limitations and further research directions

The review is limited by relying solely on secondary literature, which restricts the use of empirical triangulation. Future reviews could incorporate primary sources to provide case-specific recommendations. The review is also limited by sample size, as only 29 articles were reviewed. This limits the scope of the contextual analysis, such as the geographical coverage of the literature. Specifically, only 7% of the reviewed publications focused on African urban tourism contexts (see Figure A2), and none addressed South American settings, yet these regions have unique urban contexts. Future research could be conducted, utilizing in-depth interviews to facilitate a more focused analysis. Moreover, case

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studies could be conducted in these regions to examine policy models that enhance the sustainability of urban tourism in their specific contexts.

5.5. Conclusion

This review contributes to the urban tourism literature by synthesizing, comparing, and categorizing policy models for integrating tourism policy into sustainable urban planning and by proposing a comparative framework to support context-sensitive policy selection and adaptation. It highlights the evolution from traditional tourism-oriented approaches to more holistic, technology-enabled models, while emphasizing that no single model is universally applicable across urban contexts.

The study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and a relatively small sample of reviewed publications, which constrain empirical validation and the geographical scope of the analysis. The underrepresentation of some regions, particularly African and South American urban contexts, further limits the generalizability of the findings.

The findings imply that policymakers, urban planners, and destination management organizations should adopt a context-based approach when integrating tourism into urban development strategies. Future research should test and refine the proposed framework through empirical case studies and comparative investigations across diverse urban settings to strengthen its practical applicability and theoretical robustness.

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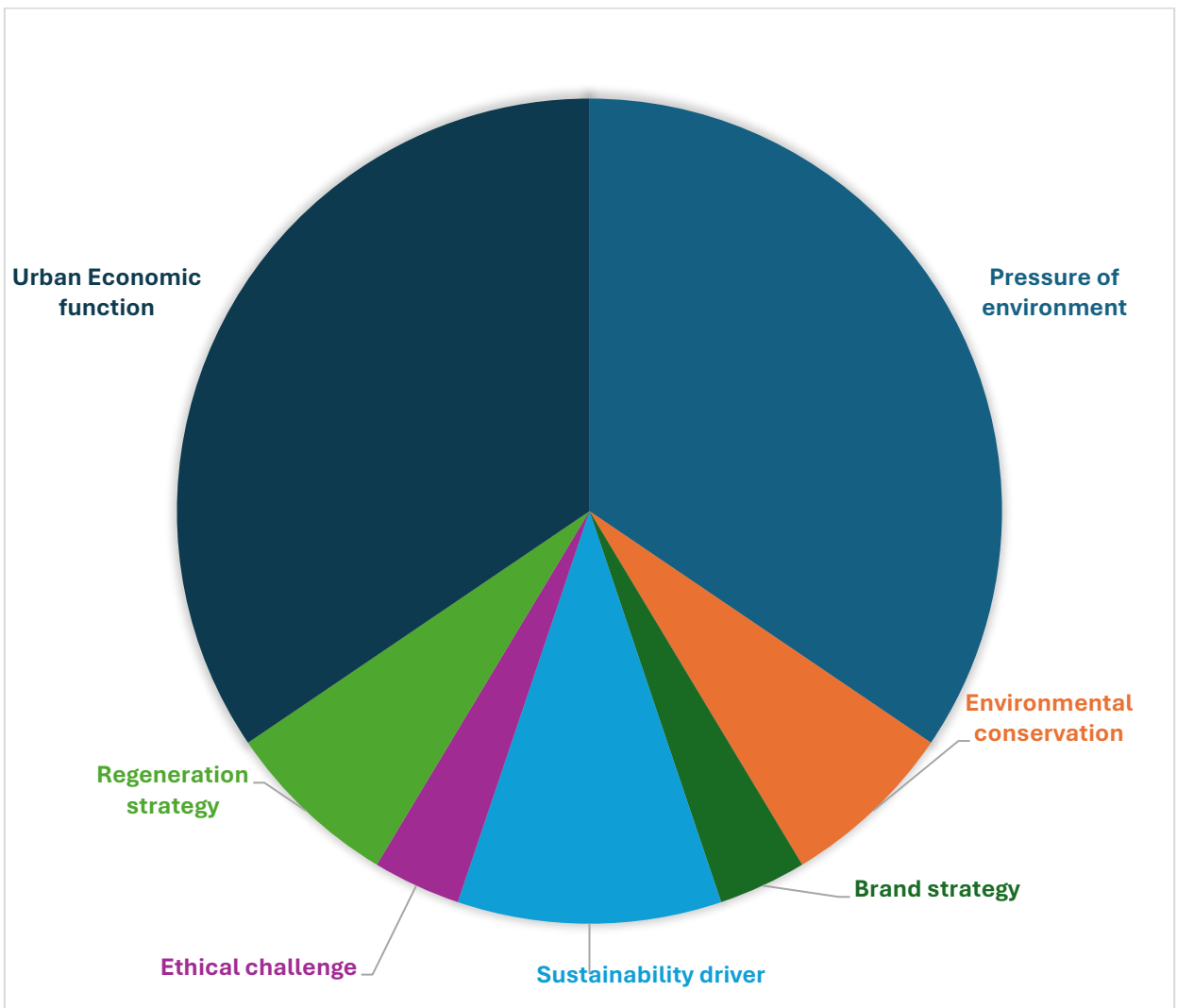
Figure 1. Tourism Scenario in Urban Development



Source: Authors' own editing, 2026

Unlike previous studies that categorize tourism scenarios in cities based on tourism dominance, Figure 1 shows urban tourism scenarios based on the perspectives on tourism in urban planning. For instance, it is widely regarded as both an environmental threat and an economic factor in urban planning, as presented in the literature.

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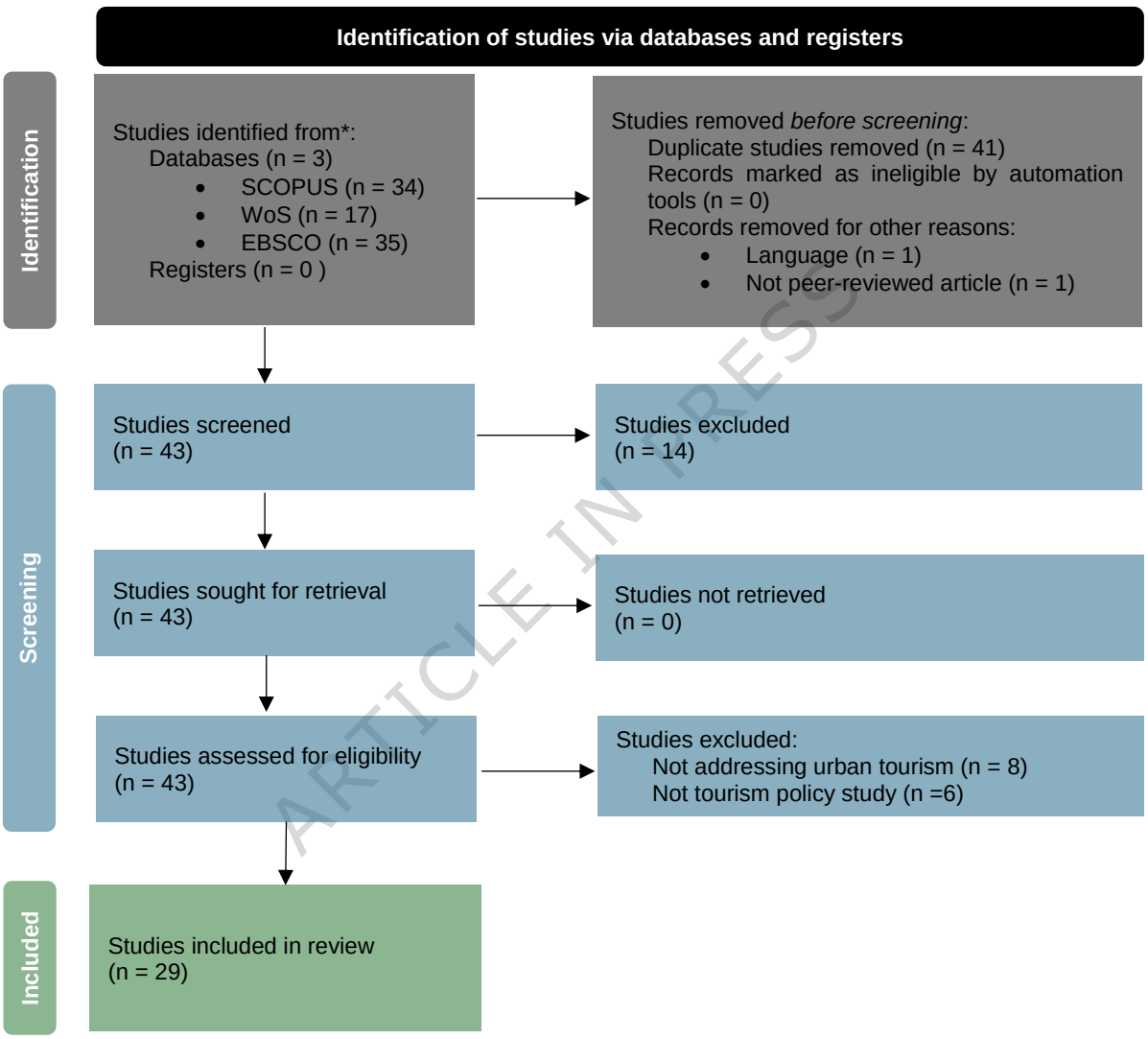
Figure 2

PRISMA Flow Diagram



Source: Authors' own editing (2026) based on PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Page et al., 2021)

Figure 2 is an illustration of the order of steps followed during the review. The literature identification phase encompasses the search criteria, databases, keywords, retrieved records, and records excluded prior to abstract screening. Screening aimed at selecting sources whose scope was urban tourism, with cities as their study areas. The review phase entailed context analysis and policy model analysis.

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Figure 3. Sustainable Urban Tourism Model

Sources: Authors' interpretive conceptual synthesis (2026) based on Doppelt, (2012); Grah et al., (2020); Pearce & Atkinson, (1993)

Figure 3 shows a conceptual refinement of the multilayered model of sustainable urban tourism governance based on the reviewed literature. Unlike emphasizing the balance of environmental, social, and economic dimensions as articulated in previous literature. This review emphasizes prioritizing the environmental agenda, followed by the social and economic dimensions. This is because society is nestled in the environment, and the economy addresses the societal needs. Therefore, it's the authors' interpretive synthesis of sustainable urban tourism governance and not an empirically tested model.