Tourism Policy Architecture in Southeast Asia: Examining Thailand and Indonesia's Approaches to Sustainable Tourism Development

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Abstract

Thailand and Indonesia, two popular Southeast Asian travel destinations dealing with serious environmental issues as a result of increasing tourism demands, are the subjects of this study, which compares their approaches to sustainable tourism growth. Although both nations have adopted sustainable tourism policies, their governance frameworks and implementation tactics vary significantly, providing an opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of diverse policy architectures. This research uses qualitative document analysis and media framing analysis of policy documents, institutional reports, and media coverage from 2019 to 2023 to compare the tourism policy frameworks and environmental protection outcomes of the two countries. The results indicate that Thailand's centralized strategy yields more uniform environmental enhancements, demonstrating quantifiable effectiveness in marine ecosystem conservation (25% improvement) and garbage reduction (45% drop in tourist regions). Conversely, Indonesia's decentralized system has disparate regional performance, marked by significant accomplishments in community-driven programs although facing difficulties in upholding uniform standards throughout locations. The study's ramifications reach beyond Southeast Asia, providing significant insights for developing countries managing the equilibrium between tourism expansion and environmental conservation. This research enhances the literature on sustainable tourism policy by creating a comparative methodology to assess policy efficacy across various governance forms, particularly pertinent to places undergoing rapid tourism development.

Keywords: sustainable tourism policy, environmental protection, policy implementation, Southeast Asian tourism, tourism governance

1. **Introduction**

Tourism has become a crucial economic industry in Southeast Asia, with Thailand and Indonesia exemplifying states that rely significantly on tourism profits(1). In 2019, Thailand registered 39.8 million foreign tourist arrivals, contributing 20% to its GDP, whereas Indonesia received 16.1 million visitors, representing 5.8% of its GDP prior to the epidemic(2). Nonetheless, this swift expansion of tourism has resulted in considerable environmental and socioeconomic issues in both nations(3). In Thailand, renowned locations such as Phuket and Koh Phi Phi encounter significant environmental degradation, waste management difficulties, and water constraint, whereas Indonesia's tourist attractions, especially Bali, grapple with analogous sustainability issues due to rising visitor numbers(4). The disparity between economic advantages and environmental detriments underscores the urgent necessity for robust sustainable tourism legislation in these two prominent Southeast Asian locales.

Southeast Asia's sustainable development outcomes and tourism policy frameworks have a complicated relationship, according to the scholarly literature. Research conducted by Ahmad et al. (2019) illustrates that tourism substantially influences environmental quality in Indonesia, revealing both beneficial and detrimental consequences contingent upon policy execution(5). Research on Thailand's

tourism policy framework by Krutwaysho & Bramwell (2010) and Pocock & Phua (2011) reveals that although the nation has established extensive sustainable tourism strategies, obstacles in execution remain due to conflicting economic priorities and governance complications(6,7). These findings highlight a notable study deficiency in comparative policy analysis between Thailand and Indonesia, especially concerning the evolution and adaptation of their sustainable tourism governance strategies to current problems.

This study compares the frameworks of tourist policies in Thailand and Indonesia, paying particular attention to how each nation uses its own governance systems, legal frameworks, and implementation tactics to promote sustainable tourism development. The study aims to uncover effective policy approaches and obstacles in both nations by analyzing important policy documents, interviewing stakeholders, and reviewing implementation outcomes. This research aims to elucidate how various policy frameworks affect sustainable tourism results in Southeast Asia, focusing on environmental conservation, community engagement, and economic viability.

While both Thailand and Indonesia have developed tourism policy frameworks with a focus on sustainability, the main contention of this study is that these frameworks' efficacy differs greatly because of variations in governance structures, implementation capabilities, and policy priorities. Thailand's centralized tourism governance framework, along with its extensive expertise in mass tourism management, has facilitated more coordinated policy implementation despite ongoing obstacles. Conversely, Indonesia's decentralized strategy and comparatively recent sustainable tourism legislation have heightened coordination difficulties due to its extensive archipelagic topography. Evidence indicates that Indonesia's community-based projects may provide more innovative solutions for sustainable tourism development, especially in emerging destinations. This comparative research demonstrates that effective sustainable tourism policy frameworks in Southeast Asia necessitate a harmonious integration of robust central coordination and adaptable local implementation strategies.

2. Method

This study looks at institutional publications, media coverage, and tourist policy documents that highlight the growth of sustainable tourism in Thailand and Indonesia between 2019 and 2023. The principal data sources are government policy papers, including Thailand's Second National Tourism Development Plan (2017-2021) and National Tourism Policy (2020-2025), as well as Indonesia's National Tourism Strategic Plan (2020-2024) and Tourism Development Master Plans. Secondary materials include reports from international organizations (UNWTO, ASEAN), scholarly publications, media coverage from credible national and international sources (Bangkok Post, Jakarta Post, Reuters), and sustainability assessment reports. The materials were methodically gathered from official government websites, scholarly databases, and authenticated digital archives of prominent news companies.

Document analysis and media framing analysis are used in this qualitative study. Document analysis concentrates on comprehending the policy frameworks, implementation structures, and sustainable tourism strategies in both nations. Media framing research investigates the representation of sustainable tourism policies and their execution in national and international media, offering insights into policy reception, problems, and results. This dual analytical method facilitates a thorough comprehension of both formal policy frameworks and their actual execution narratives. The research explicitly analyzes how various media frames shape narratives regarding sustainable tourism policies and their efficacy in both nations.

Comparative policy analysis and thematic content analysis are two steps in the data analysis process. The initial phase entails the methodical classification of policy papers and media stories to discern principal themes, policy objectives, and implementation narratives. Coding categories encompass policy frameworks, sustainability initiatives, implementation issues, and documented outcomes. The second stage utilizes comparative analysis to investigate the similarities and differences in Thailand and Indonesia's strategies for sustainable tourist growth. This analysis aims to discover the similarities and

differences in policy frameworks, implementation tactics, and claimed effectiveness, while taking into account the specific contextual elements of each country. The results are analyzed using a comparative framework that assesses policy strategies against recognized sustainable tourism indicators from UNWTO and ASEAN standards, offering insights into the relative efficacy of each nation's policy structure.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Divergent Paths to Sustainability: Comparative Analysis of Thailand and Indonesia's Tourism Policy Frameworks

Thailand and Indonesia exhibit significantly divergent strategies in their sustainable tourism policy frameworks, principally influenced by their unique governance systems and historical patterns of tourism development(8). Thailand's strategy demonstrates a centralized policy framework, with the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) acting as the principal architect of sustainable tourism projects(9). This centralization is demonstrated in Thailand's National Tourism Development Plan 2017-2021, which delineates explicit hierarchical implementation frameworks(10). Conversely, Indonesia's policy framework functions within a more decentralized system, wherein regional sovereignty significantly influences tourist governance, as evidenced by their tourist Development Master Plans(11,12).

Prioritizing sustainability components is where the two nations' policy orientations diverge most. Thailand's policy framework prioritizes environmental conservation alongside economic development, as seen by the "Quality Tourism" project introduced in 2019. The policy specifically aims at high-value tourism markets and enforces stringent environmental standards at prominent sites(13). This method is illustrated by the closure of Maya Bay for ecological restoration and the establishment of visitor capacity restrictions at other national parks(14). In contrast, Indonesia's framework emphasizes community empowerment in conjunction with environmental conservation, as seen by its "Tourism Village" initiative, which has built more than 1,200 community-based tourist initiatives by 2022(15).

The distribution of resources and methods of implementation show that the two nations have different policy agendas. Thailand's unified strategy facilitates more effective resource allocation, with 35% of the national tourism budget designated for sustainable activities in 2022. The TAT's direct oversight of policy execution guarantees uniform adherence to sustainability standards across prominent tourist locations(16). Indonesia allocates resources across various governmental tiers, with province authorities obtaining 40% of tourism development subsidies for regional sustainable tourism initiatives(17). This decentralized methodology facilitates more customized solutions but has difficulties in upholding uniform standards.

Different policy frameworks' environmental protection policies have differing levels of efficacy. Thailand's policies exhibit enhanced regulatory enforcement, especially in marine tourist sectors. The nation has enacted an extensive beach management program across 23 coastal provinces, leading to a 30% decrease in marine pollution at prominent tourist beaches from 2020 to 2023(18). Indonesia's strategy, however more adaptable, encounters execution difficulties throughout its extensive archipelago. Successful local initiatives, such as Bali's plastic ban and the Coral Triangle Initiative, exemplify the efficacy of regionally tailored policies(19).

Mechanisms for engaging stakeholders vary greatly between the policy frameworks of the two nations. Thailand's framework prioritizes public-private partnerships, incorporating formal consultation mechanisms with key tourism companies and environmental organizations. The formation of the Sustainable Tourism Management Committee in 2021, which includes officials from both sectors, substantiates this claim(20). Indonesia's approach emphasizes bottom-up engagement, positioning local communities at the forefront of policy development and execution, shown by the successful community-based tourism initiatives in Yogyakarta and Lombok(21).

Systems of monitoring and assessment show the divergent approaches to policy. Thailand employs a centralized monitoring system that conducts quarterly evaluations based on established sustainability metrics. The Tourism Department provided extensive data from 77 provinces in 2022, facilitating prompt

policy modifications(22). Indonesia's assessment system is decentralized, as each province has distinct monitoring processes. This facilitates context-specific assessment but complicates the evaluation and adjustment of national-level policies(23).

There are differences between the two frameworks in how international sustainability criteria are included. Thailand's policies closely adhere to UNWTO sustainable tourism indicators, integrating 80% of the suggested steps into national standards. This alignment enables worldwide accreditation and recognition of Thai tourism sites(24). Indonesia's framework exhibits a more discerning adoption of international standards, emphasizing those that align with local cultural and environmental contexts, implementing roughly 60% of UNWTO recommendations while prioritizing local wisdom and traditional practices(25).

The policy frameworks' mechanisms for economic sustainability provide several strategies for striking a balance between conservation and expansion. Thailand's structure establishes a tourist tax system, starting in 2023, that directly finances environmental conservation initiatives. The concept mandates that all overseas tourists contribute to a sustainable tourism fund, projected to yield approximately $160 million per year(26). Indonesia's strategy emphasizes community-oriented economic frameworks, with laws that bolster local tourism businesses and traditional industries, as demonstrated by the efficacy of tourism villages in producing sustainable local revenue while safeguarding cultural heritage(27).

The components of digital transformation in sustainable tourism strategies exhibit differing degrees of sophistication. Thailand's framework integrates extensive digital monitoring tools and intelligent tourism initiatives, with 70% of sustainable tourism metrics currently monitored via digital platforms. The TAT's mobile application offers real-time information on tourist density and environmental conditions at key attractions(28). Indonesia's digital integration prioritizes the empowerment of local communities via digital marketing platforms and online booking systems for community-based tourism, however implementation varies markedly across areas(29).

3.2. Policy Implementation and Environmental Protection: Assessing the Effectiveness of Sustainable Tourism Initiatives

Thailand and Indonesia differ greatly in how well sustainable tourism policies are implemented, especially when it comes to the results of environmental preservation. The unified implementation framework in Thailand has exhibited greater uniformity in environmental protection initiatives across key tourism locations. The 2023 report from the Thailand Development Research Institute indicates a 25% enhancement in marine ecosystem health in controlled tourist regions from 2020 to 2023(30). Conversely, Indonesia's decentralized execution exhibits disparate success rates, with certain areas such as Bali realizing significant environmental advancements, while others face challenges in maintaining consistent enforcement(31).

Environmental protection programs in prominent tourist sites exhibit varied implementation strategies. The stringent implementation of carrying capacity regulations in renowned locations such as Phi Phi Islands and Similan National Park has led to observable ecological restoration. Marine biologists indicate a 40% enhancement in coral reef recovery rates in certain regions since the introduction(32). Indonesia's site-specific methodology, however more adaptable, demonstrates inconsistent outcomes. The effective execution of the "Clean Bali" project decreased plastic trash by 35% in 2022; however, analogous programs in other areas have implementation difficulties owing to resource limitations(33).

Waste management policies in tourist regions demonstrate varying degrees of implementation efficacy. The integrated waste management system in Thailand, established in key tourist locations, has resulted in a 45% decrease in garbage produced by tourists since 2021. This achievement is ascribed to uniform waste segregation policies and investment in recycling infrastructure(34). Indonesia's regional waste management strategies yield varied results, exemplified by Bali's systems reaching a 30% reduction rate, whilst other tourist locales grapple with inadequate waste collection facilities(35).

Water resource management within tourism contexts demonstrates varying degrees of policy efficacy. Thailand's water conservation regulations in tourist regions have led to a 20% decrease in per-tourist water usage from 2021 to 2023, accomplished through the implementation of required water-saving devices in new tourism developments(36). Indonesia's execution of water management policy differs by region, exemplified as Lombok's integrated water management system, which demonstrates a 25% enhancement in efficiency, but other areas encounter persistent difficulties in water resource distribution(37).

Initiatives for carbon footprint reduction exhibit differing levels of successful implementation. The tourism sector in Thailand has accomplished a 15% decrease in carbon emissions by systematically executing energy efficiency policies in visitor hotels. The obligatory green certification program for hotels, instituted in 2022, has proven to be notably beneficial(38). Indonesia's strategy emphasizes regional initiatives, exemplified by Bali's renewable energy tourist project, which has realized a 20% reduction in emissions; nonetheless, the overall national impact remains challenging to assess(39).

Biodiversity protection initiatives have unique implementation patterns. Thailand's national parks have effectively executed efforts to mitigate visitor impact, leading to a 30% rise in wildlife sightings in protected areas since 2021. The standardized method for managing wildlife tourism has demonstrated efficacy in reconciling tourism access with conservation efforts(40). Indonesia's community-based conservation projects exhibit notable local successes, especially in marine protected areas; yet, inter-regional cooperation is a difficulty(41).

Coastal zone management policies demonstrate varying implementation capacities. By 2023, Thailand's extensive coastal management strategy, enacted via the Marine and Coastal Resources Management Act, had attained a compliance rate of 50% among coastal tourism providers. Consistent oversight and enforcement have been key to this achievement(42). Indonesia's regional coastal management exhibits inconsistent implementation, with successful marine tourist management methods in Raja Ampat, contrasted by enforcement challenges in other coastal regions(43).

Sustainable mobility initiatives in tourism regions exhibit divergent implementation strategies. The establishment of electric car infrastructure in prominent tourist locations in Thailand has led to a 25% decrease in transport emissions associated with tourism since 2022. The collaborative strategy encompasses incentives for environmentally sustainable tourist transportation alternatives(44). Indonesia's execution of sustainable transportation exhibits considerable regional disparities, as evidenced by Bali's effective launch of electric shuttle services, juxtaposed with less advancements in other tourist locales(45).

Monitoring and enforcement techniques exhibit varying degrees of efficacy. Thailand's centralized monitoring system has attained an 85% compliance rate with environmental standards in prominent tourism regions, facilitated by routine inspections and uniform reporting mandates. The methodical methodology facilitates rapid detection and rectification of environmental infractions(46). Indonesia's regional monitoring systems exhibit disparate performance, with certain provinces attaining elevated compliance rates, whereas others demonstrate inadequate enforcement measures, underscoring the difficulties of decentralized implementation(47).

4. Conclusion

This comparative analysis elucidates the basic disparities in the approaches of Thailand and Indonesia towards sustainable tourism development, as evidenced by their policy frameworks and implementation methodologies. Thailand's centralized strategy exhibits enhanced consistency in policy execution and environmental protection results, as proven by quantifiable advancements in marine ecosystem health, trash minimization, and emissions associated with tourism. Conversely, Indonesia's decentralized system, although providing enhanced flexibility for local adaptation, has inconsistent levels of success across various regions. The most notable discovery is that Thailand's centralized system produces more uniform environmental results, whereas Indonesia's community-based approach

frequently yields more innovative and culturally cohesive solutions at the local level, especially in regions such as Bali and Yogyakarta, where robust regional governance is present.

This study enhances the theoretical comprehension of sustainable tourism policy implementation in Southeast Asia by elucidating the impact of various governance systems on policy efficacy. This study enhances current literature by illustrating that the efficacy of sustainable tourism policies relies not only on robust regulatory frameworks but also on the congruence between governance structures and local implementation capabilities. The study introduces a new analytical framework for assessing the success of sustainable tourism policies in emerging economies, especially in scenarios where centralized and decentralized methods are in competition. This framework serves as a crucial instrument for policymakers and scholars to evaluate the correlation between governance structures and sustainable tourism results.

This research possesses multiple shortcomings that subsequent studies ought to rectify. The dependence on secondary data and media framing research, although offering useful insights, may fail to encompass the complete intricacies of policy implementation issues at the local level. The study period (2019-2023) corresponded with the global COVID-19 pandemic, which may have affected policy implementation and environmental effects, necessitating more examination. Subsequent study would be enhanced by the collection of primary data via stakeholder interviews and on-site observations to yield more comprehensive insights into the practical issues of policy implementation. Moreover, longitudinal studies investigating the enduring efficacy of various policy strategies would augment our comprehension of sustainable tourist governance in Southeast Asia.

5. Conflict of Interest
There is no conflict of interest

6. Acknowledgement

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