

Stakeholder Conflicts in Sustainable Rural Tourism: Perceptual Differences between Local Communities and Local Governments in the Context of the Green Economy¹

Esra Cesur / Lect. Dr. 

Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Marmaris Tourism Vocational School, Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Services
esrancesur@mu.edu.tr

Abstract

This study seeks to explore, within the framework of the green economy, the perceptions of local communities and local governments regarding the development of sustainable rural tourism. The research is based on in-depth interviews conducted with a total of 31 participants-local community members and local government representatives-across 14 rural neighbourhoods in the district of Marmaris (Türkiye). Adopting a phenomenological research approach, the data were analysed through content analysis using MAXQDA software. The findings underscore substantial perceptual differences between the parties across the economic, environmental, socio-cultural, and green economy dimensions of sustainable rural tourism. In terms of economic sustainability, local communities tend to view rural tourism as a livelihood strategy, whereas local governments view it as part of planned development. Perceptions of environmental sustainability among residents are micro-level and experience-based, while local govern-

ments emphasise strategic planning and carrying capacity. In the socio-cultural domain, the desire to preserve cultural heritage is intertwined with concerns about commodification; in governance, residents reported that their involvement in decision-making remains largely symbolic. The green economy is both insufficiently understood at the conceptual level and limited in terms of implementation capacity. The study recommends harmonizing stakeholder perceptions through participatory governance, the contextual adaptation of green-economy instruments, and the establishment of capacity-based thresholds for rural destinations to ensure the effective development of sustainable rural tourism.

Keywords: Sustainable Rural Tourism, Green Economy, Stakeholder Conflict, Marmaris, Türkiye.

JEL Codes: Z32, Q56, O13, L38

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the escalating environmental threats, the depletion of natural resources, and persistent socio-economic inequalities on a global scale have rendered a sustainability-oriented transformation of development processes. Within this framework, many countries have embraced the concept of the "green economy," which integrates environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic growth into a holistic approach (Hidayattuloh et al., 2020). The primary aim of the green economy is to safeguard the rights of future generations by promoting the efficient use of natural resources while reducing the ecological footprint of economic activities (UNEP, 2011). Beyond balancing environmental and economic dimensions, the green economy also offers a critical framework for advancing sustainable development objectives in sectors with significant environmental and cultural implications, such as tourism (UNEP, 2011; UNWTO, 2012).

The tourism sector has emerged as a strategic domain in the implementation of green economy policies. According to UNEP (2011) and UNWTO (2012), tourism not only contributes to economic growth but also plays a pivotal role in advancing sustainable development objectives such as the conservation of natural resources, the enhancement of social welfare, and the preservation of local cultural values. Within this framework, sustainable rural tourism is increasingly recognized as a key tourism modality that resonates with the fundamental principles of the green economy by enhancing local communities' economic well-being, fostering the safeguarding of cultural heritage, and reinforcing environmental sustainability (Guaita Martínez et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021).

However, the sustainable development of rural tourism is a complex process due to its multi-stakeholder structure. The perceptions, interests, and priorities of diverse actors—such as local communities, local governments, entrepreneurs, and non-governmental organisations—often diverge, leading to various forms of conflict (Mcareavey & McDonagh, 2011; Podovac & Jovanović Tončev, 2016). Particularly between local communities and local governments, perceptual differences regarding sustainability policies are salient; economic expectations, degrees of environmental sensitivity, disparities in administrative capacity, and societal values are among the primary drivers of these differences (Gkoumas, 2019; Wijijayanti et al., 2020). While the planning, financing, and regulatory roles of local governments are critical for the sustainability of rural tourism, the direct impacts on residents' quality of life, cultural values, and livelihoods often lead these two stakeholder groups to adopt divergent priorities at times (Wilson et al., 2001; Kantar & Svržnjak, 2017).

Although the number of studies addressing the re-

lationship between the green economy and tourism has been steadily increasing, research specifically focusing on the nexus between the green economy and rural tourism remains limited. The study by Vuković and Roljević-Nikolić (2018) explored the mutual interdependence between rural tourism and organic farming, revealing that the integration of these two activities constitutes a key mechanism for achieving the goals of the green economy. While Mukhambetova et al. (2019) identified the socio-economic conditions necessary for the development of rural tourism in Kazakhstan, Li et al. (2022) examined green-economy practices at the village level and demonstrated the critical role of mobilising local resources, strengthening local identity, and fostering community participation in transforming rural ecological advantages into economic benefits. Therefore, analysing sustainable rural tourism policies within the context of the green economy through a holistic and inclusive perspective both in Türkiye and internationally is considered essential for addressing the identified gap in the literature and providing an original contribution to the field.

In this context, the present study aims to identify potential areas of stakeholder conflict by examining perceptual differences between local communities and local governments in sustainable rural tourism from a green economy perspective. The research was conducted in the rural areas of Marmaris—one of Türkiye's prominent tourism destinations—and analyzes the dynamics of the multi-stakeholder structure using field data. The findings make a significant contribution to understanding divergent perspectives among local actors in the policy development processes for sustainable rural tourism. The study also seeks to offer an original perspective on the sustainability of rural tourism within the green economy framework and to formulate strategic recommendations for local governments.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of the Green Economy and Its Implications for the Tourism Sector

The green economy is a transformation-oriented development model in which economic activities are conducted with multiple objectives, including environmental sustainability, social equity, and resource efficiency. This model encompasses priorities including reducing dependence on fossil fuels, lowering carbon emissions, increasing energy efficiency, and conserving natural capital (Howson, 2021). The most prominent definition of the green economy is that provided by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2011). UNEP (2011) defines the green economy as a low-carbon, resource-efficient, and socially inclusive economy that improves human well-being and social equity while reducing environ-

mental risks and natural resource scarcities. In this regard, the green economy is not merely an approach focused on environmental objectives; it also performs an integrative function by aligning economic development with social justice (Bilgaev et al., 2021; Jackman & Moore, 2021).

The scope of the green economy is not confined to sectors such as industry, energy, or agriculture; it is also an approach that demands transformation within the service sector. Within the green economy, the tourism sector stands out as one capable of simultaneously supporting economic growth, environmental sustainability, ecosystem conservation (Li & Cao, 2024), and social inclusion (Liu et al., 2023). The green economy-aligned transformation of tourism denotes a strategic domain of change that contributes not only to the sector's internal dynamics but also to global sustainability objectives (Law et al., 2016, 2017). Within this scope, under UNEP's Green Economy Initiative the tourism sector has been designated as one of the eleven priority sectors capable of supporting the transition to a green economy (UNEP, 2011). In particular, the environmental degradation, resource overuse, and carbon emissions driven by mass tourism highlight the need for a sustainability-based restructuring of the sector (Gössling et al., 2012; Su et al., 2023). In this context, rural tourism-regarded as a sub-form of sustainable tourism-closely aligns with green economy principles through its nature-compatible modes of operation, small-scale entrepreneurial structures, and the active involvement of local communities (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015).

2.2. The Strategic Role of Sustainable Rural Tourism in the Green Economy

Rural tourism constitutes a strategic alternative development option for rural environments in line with sustainable development goals. The diversification of tourism activities contributes to achieving more balanced economic and social development in rural regions (Shtaltovna, 2007). It is also a form of tourism that promotes a region from specific geographical and socioeconomic perspectives, makes sustainable development a primary objective, and emphasizes the importance of local communities and the need to offer rural experiences (Priatmoko et al., 2023).

Sustainable rural tourism is a tourism approach that targets sustainable development in rural areas across environmental, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Sharpley, 2007). This approach encompasses policies and practices that plan tourism development in ways that enhance the well-being of local communities while minimizing potential environmental adverse effects throughout the process (Ertuna & Kırbaşı, 2012: 18). Sustainable rural tourism seeks not only the conservation of the

natural environment; it also aims to strengthen local economies in rural areas, safeguard cultural heritage, and promote social cohesion (Krajnović et al., 2011; Rikalović et al., 2012). Owing to these contributions, it is regarded as a functional development instrument for addressing the economic and social challenges faced by rural regions (Kallmuenzer et al., 2018: 1208; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015).

Findings from Yue et al. (2021) and Moise et al. (2021) suggest that adopting green economy approaches in tourism villages increases local residents' income levels, expands markets for environmentally friendly products, and makes a substantial contribution to the development of sustainable tourism. Similarly, Bhaduri and Pandey (2020) show that implementing the green economy in tourism villages can yield significant benefits for community incomes. In this context, shifts in individual consumption habits, the diffusion of eco-friendly accommodation systems, and tourism models that contribute to local economies constitute key components of this transformation (Kline et al., 2011; Brel et al., 2020). On the other hand, the literature also includes critical assessments of tourism's role in achieving green economy objectives. Some scholars (Toubes & Araujo-Vila, 2022; Han & Li, 2021) argue that current tourism policies are primarily shaped by an environmental sustainability discourse and insufficiently incorporate the goals of social transformation. This tension highlights local-level resistance and perceptual discrepancies regarding the applicability of green economy principles. Accordingly, the successful implementation of the green economy in rural areas requires a robust governance mechanism with local actors and alignment among stakeholders (Gkoumas, 2019; Pan et al., 2018; McDonagh, 2011).

2.3. Stakeholder Conflicts and Perceptual Differences in Sustainable Rural Tourism

The success of sustainable rural tourism hinges not only on achieving environmental and economic objectives but also on cooperation, consensus, and governance alignment among diverse stakeholders (Beritelli, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). In this regard, Stakeholder Theory provides a basis for participatory governance by advocating that the interests of all parties involved in tourism decision-making-local communities, public institutions, the private sector, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)-be taken into account (Freeman, 1984; Lapointe, 2020). Tourism systems, particularly in rural contexts, are characterized by multi-level, multi-actor structures in which conflict and collaboration may arise simultaneously within the pursuit of sustainability goals (Jamal & Stronza, 2009; Nunkoo, 2016).

Several factors underlie stakeholder conflicts that arise in sustainable rural tourism. These include

divergent economic priorities, varying levels of environmental sensitivity, differences in administrative capacity, information deficits, opportunities for participation, power asymmetries, and conflicting interests (Garrod et al., 2012; Su & Swanson, 2017; Eagles et al., 2013). Perceptual differences-particularly between local communities and local governments-shape these actors' views, priorities, and objectives regarding sustainability and may limit the implementability of tourism policies (Byrd, 2007; Nunkoo, 2015; Tolkach & King, 2015). One of the most common perception misalignments in rural tourism concerns differing understandings of sustainability between local communities and local governments. While local residents primarily focus on economic benefits, cultural preservation, and quality of life, local governments tend to view rural tourism as a macro-level development instrument and a place-branding strategy (Ribeiro & Marques, 2002; Ibanescu et al., 2018; Lee, 2013; Ribeiro et al., 2017). These perceptual differences introduce governance vulnerabilities and sustainability risks in tourism practice (Wanner et al., 2020). Recent studies emphasize the need for more effective representation of local communities in decision-making processes and for more inclusive governance mechanisms to mitigate these gaps (Su et al., 2023; Strzelecka et al., 2017). In practice, however, stakeholder participation often remains symbolic, with local residents in particular not effectively included in the process (McAreevey & McDonagh, 2011; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2016).

From a green economy perspective, these perceptual differences can be both deepened and transformed, as the green economy prioritizes not only environmental benefits but also social inclusion and local participation (UNEP, 2011; OECD, 2020). In this regard, adopting green economy strategies in rural tourism can foster more effective participation by local communities while, at the governance level, necessitating more holistic planning (Ruhanen et al., 2015; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Sampling

This study was designed within a qualitative research framework to examine, in depth, the stakeholder conflicts that arise between local communities and local governments from a green economy perspective sustainable rural tourism. A phenomenological research design was adopted. Phenomenological research seeks to uncover the shared meaning of several individuals' lived experiences concerning a phenomenon or concept (Altunışık et al., 2023, p. 478). Accordingly, this approach is well suited to revealing how a given phenomenon is experienced and perceived by different stakeholders (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The district of Marmaris, located in Muğla Province in southwestern Türkiye, was se-

lected as the study area. Marmaris is a major coastal tourism destination situated at the intersection of the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. In geographical terms, it comprises a complex natural structure that includes bays, coves and coastal ecosystems as well as forests, mountains and rural settlements (Marmaris Chamber of Commerce, 2019). Although Marmaris has long been characterised primarily by mass tourism based on the sea-sand-sun triad, over the last decade it has been transforming into a destination where alternative forms of tourism such as rural tourism, nature-based tourism, ecotourism and agro-tourism have begun to develop (Doğanay, 2001). The local economy of Marmaris is largely dependent on tourism, and the destination occupies a significant position in the tourism market due to its diverse tourism supply resources. According to the Ministry of Tourism statistics, as of 2024 the total number of tourists entering Marmaris via land, sea and air borders reached 2,168,103 (Muğla Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2025).

Marmaris was selected as the case study area due to its rich natural resources, strong tourism infrastructure, and the expanding rural tourism activities in its rural settlements. Moreover, the region constitutes a suitable setting for examining the local-level implementation of green economy policies and, in this respect, offers a highly representative field for research focusing on sustainable rural tourism and stakeholder relations. In this regard, within the scope of the "Rural Tourism Inventory of the Marmaris Tourism Union Villages" Project-prepared by the Marmaris Tourism Union and supported by the South Aegean Development Agency-fourteen designated neighborhoods around Marmaris were included in the sample. The 14 rural neighbourhoods in question are Akçapınar, Gökçe, Çetibeli, Çamlı, Karaca, Hisarönü, Orhaniye, Turgut, Selimiye, Söğüt, Taşlıca, Bayır, Osmaniye and Adaköy.

Purposive sampling was employed in determining the sample. Purposive sampling is a strategy in which the researcher selects cases from which the most can be learned in order to explore, understand, and gain insight. The primary aim is to gather in-depth information about the persons, events, or situations that constitute the research topic (Altunışık et al., 2023, p. 481). This study was conducted with a total of 31 participants: 15 from the local community and 16 from local administrations (neighborhood headmen [muhtars], Marmaris Municipality, and the Marmaris District Governorship).

3.2. Data Collection Technique and Process

In line with the purpose of the study and to elicit detailed perspectives from different stakeholder groups, a semi-structured interview technique was employed in the data collection process. In se-

mi-structured interviews, “a set of questions and topics is prepared prior to the interview to guide the researcher” (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018, p. 184). In this method-where participants are allowed limited deviation from the interview guide-“the researcher can both proceed in accordance with the guide and, when necessary, probe for in-depth information” (Merriam, 2018, pp. 85-86).

In developing the semi-structured interview form, an initial pool of questions was generated by first reviewing existing studies that examine the relationships between the green economy, rural tourism

and community-based development (e.g. Mukhambetova et al., 2019; Vuković & Roljević-Nikolić, 2018; Li et al., 2022; Waluyo & Gurinto, 2023). The draft interview form was then sent to five experts in the field in order to obtain their evaluations in terms of content validity, clarity and appropriateness. Based on the expert feedback, overlapping questions were combined, repetitive statements were removed and the wording of several items was revised, resulting in the final version of two distinct interview forms. The questions included in the interview form are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Questions

Questions addressed to local government	Questions addressed to the local community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your opinion, what are the positive and negative environmental impacts of rural tourism? • What kinds of physical infrastructure arrangements do you consider necessary in the region for the development of rural tourism? • In your view, what are the positive and negative economic impacts of rural tourism? • How has the development of rural tourism affected social life and social relations in the area? • Do you carry out any activities aimed at revitalising and preserving cultural heritage in rural areas? If so, what are these activities? • Are there any stakeholders (in terms of local participation) with whom you cooperate or conduct joint initiatives regarding rural tourism activities in the region? If so, with which stakeholders do you collaborate and in what forms? • What problems and barriers do you encounter in ensuring sustainable rural tourism? What are your proposed solutions and expectations regarding these issues? • What financial and human resource constraints do local governments face in realising the green economy? What opportunities exist in this regard? • In your opinion, can there be a relationship between the development of sustainable rural tourism and the green economy? Why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you assess the environmental awareness and sensitivity of local residents? • In your opinion, what are the positive and negative environmental impacts of rural tourism (for example, on natural resources, agricultural land, ecosystems, etc.)? • What are the positive and negative economic impacts of rural tourism? • With the development of rural tourism and the resulting increase in demand for the area, what do you think about the preservation and continuation of local traditions? • How do the tourists who come to this area affect your way of life? • Do you support rural tourism activities in the region? If so, could you indicate their positive and negative aspects, in terms of what they bring and what they cause you to lose? • What are your expectations regarding the sustainable development of rural tourism in this area? In your opinion, what should be done? • Do you think there is a relationship between the sustainable development of rural tourism and the green economy? Could you explain? • In your view, is the green economy important for ensuring that the existing tourism resources and attractions in the area are managed in a sustainable way? What are your thoughts on this?

Interviews were conducted face to face between March and April 2024. Before each interview, the study's topic and purpose were explained, and the consent form for voluntary participation was read aloud. Participants were asked whether the interview could be audio-recorded to facilitate subsequent transcription; interviews with those granting permission were recorded. Throughout the process, the researcher also noted participant statements on the interview guide in addition to making audio recordings. Each interview lasted approximately 40-90 minutes. All interviews were carried out in Turkish, the participants'

native language, and care was taken to ensure that they could express their views freely and in a manner in which they felt most comfortable.

Lastly, the data collection process was concluded after a total of 31 participants, as data saturation was deemed to have been reached. Creswell (2020, p. 159) and Miles & Huberman (2019, p. 27) state that “data collection should be completed when there is nothing further to learn and responses begin to repeat.” Information regarding the participants is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	Participant	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Occupation
1	LC1	Male	86	Married	Undergraduate degree	Retired
2	LC2	Male	24	Single	High school	Barista
3	LC3	Male	26	Single	Primary school	Tradesperson
4	LC4	Male	27	Single	Undergraduate degree	Business owner
5	LC5	Female	34	Married	High school	Worker
6	LC6	Male	62	Married	Primary school	Farmer
7	LC7	Male	22	Single	High school	Captain
8	LC8	Male	37	Single	Undergraduate degree	Tourism Professional
9	LC9	Female	22	Single	Undergraduate degree	Business owner
10	LC10	Male	51	Married	Primary school	Beekeeper
11	LC11	Male	24	Single	High school	Receptionist
12	LC12	Male	29	Single	Undergraduate degree	Head waiter
13	LC13	Female	37	Married	High school	Worker
14	LC14	Female	37	Married	Primary school	Worker
15	LC15	Female	26	Single	Undergraduate degree	Business owner
16	LG1	Male	49	Married	High school	Neighborhood head
17	LG2	Male	50	Married	High school	Neighborhood head
18	LG3	Female	46	Married	High school	Neighborhood head
19	LG4	Male	24	Married	Primary school	Neighborhood head
20	LG5	Female	56	Married	Middle school	Neighborhood head
21	LG6	Male	53	Married	Primary school	Neighborhood head
22	LG7	Male	50	Married	High school	Neighborhood head
23	LG8	Male	61	Married	Primary school	Neighborhood head
24	LG9	Male	50	Married	Middle school	Neighborhood head
25	LG10	Male	53	Married	Primary school	Neighborhood head
26	LG11	Male	62	Married	Primary school	Neighborhood head
27	LG12	Male	79	Married	Primary school	Neighborhood head
28	LG13	Male	62	Married	Middle school	Neighborhood head
29	LG14	Male	62	Married	Primary school	Neighborhood head
30	LG15	Female	42	Single	Undergraduate degree	Project officer
31	LG16	Male	43	Married	Undergraduate degree	Director

Notes: LC=Local Community; LG=Local Government.

3.3. Data Analysis

In the data analysis process, content analysis, which is one of the fundamental data analysis techniques in qualitative research, was employed. Content analysis involves constructing categories and counting specific elements in the text according to the extent to which they are associated with these categories (Silverman, 2018, p. 162). In general, qualitative content analysis proceeds through four main stages: preparing the data, coding, categorising/

thematising, and interpreting/reporting (Neuman, 2012; Silverman, 2018). In this study, the content analysis process was carried out by following these stages. First, all interview audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the resulting transcripts were imported into the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA 24. In the second stage of the analysis, the interview texts were read several times from beginning to end, and initial codes were generated based on recurring meanings, emphases and noteworthy expressions in participants' statements.

Although there is no fixed criterion regarding the exact number of codes, the number of codes tends to vary depending on the depth and scope of the data (Neuman, 2012, p. 668). In the third stage, conceptually similar codes were brought together and grouped into higher-order categories and themes. These themes were then structured as a hierarchical code subcode system, with more specific subcodes (e.g. employment, income increase, construction, pollution) placed under broader thematic codes (e.g. economic impacts, environmental impacts). In this way, the data were classified systematically and the relationships between themes were analysed in a more holistic manner. In the final stage, the themes obtained were interpreted by relating them to the research questions and the theoretical framework.

3.4. Validity, Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the qualitative findings in this study, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four trustworthiness criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) were taken as a basis. With regard to the credibility criterion, expert review was first employed in the development of the interview form. Accordingly, before the analysis began, the interview questions were sent to five academics who are experts in the fields of green economy and rural tourism, and the form was revised based on their feedback in terms of scope, clarity and appropriateness. Subsequently, data triangulation was achieved by collecting information from two main stakeholder groups across 14 rural neighbourhoods in the district of Marmaris. In addition, the inclusion of direct participant quotations in the Findings section strengthened credibility by ensuring that the interpretations were grounded in the raw data obtained from the field.

The transferability criterion was supported through descriptions that enable readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this regard, the geographical, socio-economic and tourism characteristics of the Marmaris district, as well as the general features of the stakeholder groups included in the study, are presented. The detailed explanation of the sampling approach, the timing of data collection and the contextual conditions allows readers to evaluate the extent to which the findings may be applied or transferred to other rural tourism contexts within or beyond Türkiye.

The dependability criterion was addressed by presenting the steps of the research process in a clear and traceable manner. In qualitative research, it is noted that reliability can be enhanced through detailed field notes, high-quality audio recordings

and the careful transcription of these recordings (Creswell, 2020, p. 255). In this process, the stages of data collection and analysis were described in detail. The procedures followed transcribing the audio recordings, importing the transcripts into the MAXQDA 24 program, generating open codes, constructing categories and themes from these codes, and developing a hierarchical code subcode structure were reported step by step. In addition, although some studies recommend the use of multiple coders and the establishment of inter-coder agreement (Altunışık, 2023, p. 488), in the present research the raw data were not shared with third parties for ethical reasons (it was confirmed to participants during the interviews that the recordings would not be shared with anyone). Therefore, the consistency between the recordings and the documents was checked solely by the researcher, and the coding schemes and analytic notes were reviewed regularly during the analysis process in order to ensure dependability.

With regard to the confirmability criterion, an objective and data-driven approach was adopted in interpreting the findings. Codes, categories and themes were developed inductively on the basis of participants' statements collected from the field. The perspectives of the participants, rather than the researcher's personal preconceptions, were placed at the centre of the analysis. In the Findings section, each theme is presented together with relevant participant quotations, thereby making it transparent which statements underpin the interpretations. In this way, efforts were made to ensure that the findings are confirmable through the participants' data rather than reflecting the researcher's biases.

Ethical principles were rigorously observed throughout the research process. Ethics committee approval was obtained from Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University (dated 30.11.2023; No. 2023/124); participants were provided with an informed consent form on a voluntary basis, and strict confidentiality was maintained. Prior to each interview, permission for audio recording was obtained, no sensitive personal information was collected, and all participants were coded anonymously. The findings are presented in accordance with ethical standards, using direct participant statements and an objective tone.

4. Findings

As a result of the interviews conducted to identify stakeholder perceptual differences in sustainable rural tourism within the context of the green economy, five main themes were obtained. These themes in rural tourism are: (1) environmental sustainability, (2) economic sustainability, (3) socio-cultural sustainability, (4) barriers, expectations, and support, and (6) perceptions of the green economy.

Theme 1: Environmental Sustainability

Under this theme, there are a total of 15 codes, com-

prising both common and divergent codes. The theme and sub-codes are presented in Figure 1.

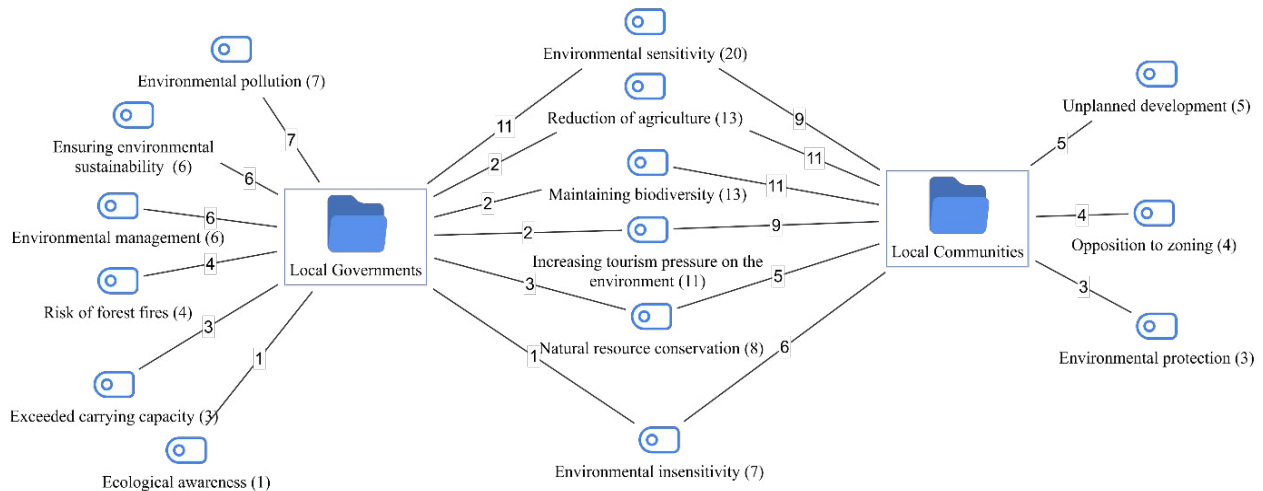


Figure 1. Comparative Statistics of Two Stakeholder Groups' Perceptions of the Environmental Dimension of Sustainable Rural Tourism

Among the shared codes, "environmental sensitivity" is the most dominant, followed by "loss of agricultural land," "conservation of biodiversity," and "the increasing pressure of tourism on the environment." This indicates common ground between local governments and residents in prioritizing environmental stewardship. Many local officials affirm that villagers are environmentally conscientious. For example, one participant emphasized the community's protective stance: "Whenever things get dirty around here, the villagers all speak up together; they're really sensitive about the environment" (LG12). This suggests an intrinsic motivation among local communities to protect the environment. A resident similarly noted, "To be honest, they're not really damaging the environment. This place is a second-degree protected site, so whatever was built here was done under strict control..." (LC1). Participants also frequently expressed the belief that rural tourism can help protect nature and biodiversity. As one participant stated, "You know, tourists already come here for the greenery, so tourism here ends up being more about protecting nature than harming it." (LC5). At the same time, under the environmental sustainability theme, shared concerns highlighted the decline of agriculture and the environmental pressures created by tourism.

Examining the divergent codes shows that local governments focus primarily on institutional responsibilities such as "environmental pollution" (7), "ensuring environmental sustainability" (6), and "environmental management" (6). They note that an increase in tourist numbers makes pollution inevitable. As one participant put it, "There used to be only about a hundred people living here; as the number of people goes up, of course the environment gets dirtier." (LG10), reflecting concerns that unplanned

growth may threaten environmental sustainability. While expressing anxiety over mounting pollution alongside rising visitation, local governments also maintain that environmental sustainability can be achieved through rural tourism and reported implementing several environmental management practices within their means. These include environmental clean-up and maintenance, participation in a sustainable tourism program, zero-waste initiatives, awareness-raising trainings, and recycling efforts. Nevertheless, some local government participants complained of constraints stemming from limited budgets and authority: "We can't really do anything because we don't have a budget... to be honest, our biggest problem here is the budget." (LG11, LG14, LG15).

Among local communities, the divergent codes are "unplanned construction" (5), "reactions to zoning practices" (4), and "environmental protection" (3). A prevailing perception is that the absence of zoning plans and oversight harms the environment. One participant criticized unplanned building, stating, "Local governments need to set conditions," noting that "People construct as they please. This is a tourism area... requirements should be introduced and limits set" (LC8). Similarly, several participants reported that unlicensed/illegal constructions are later dismissed with fines, which disrupts environmental order (LC2, LC12, LC13, LC15).

Theme 2: Economic Sustainability

Under the theme of the economic sustainability of rural tourism, there are a total of 13 codes, comprising both shared and divergent codes. The theme and sub-codes are presented in Figure 2.

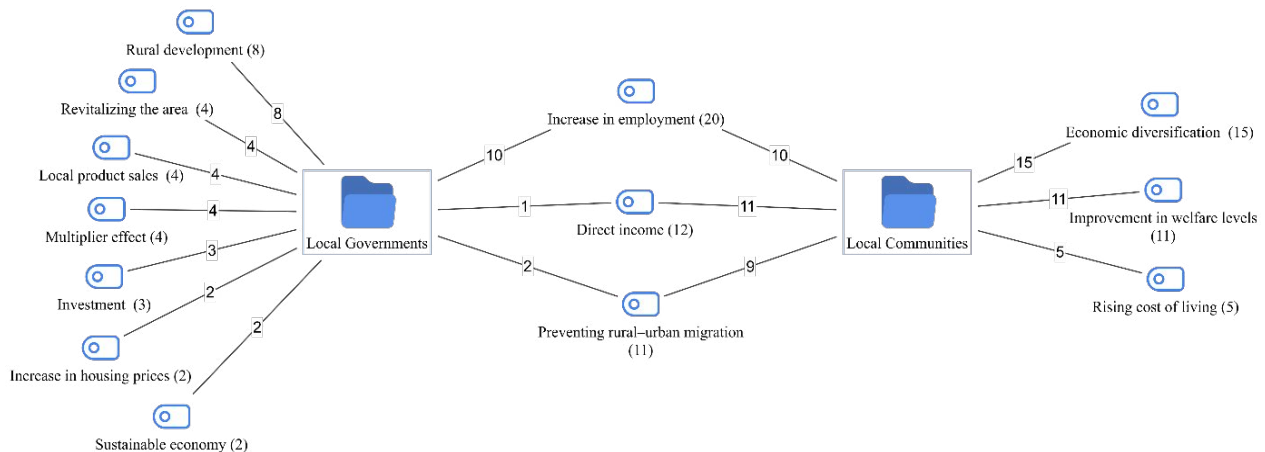


Figure 2. Comparative Statistics of Two Stakeholder Groups' Perceptions of the Economic Dimension of Sustainable Rural Tourism

Within the economic sustainability dimension, the shared codes across local governments and local communities are "employment growth," "direct income," and "preventing out-migration from rural areas." The largest number of mentions concerned employment growth (20). Local residents emphasize that rural tourism brings economic dynamism to the village and creates jobs; the inflow of cash from tourism is perceived as a vital infusion for the village economy. With the development of rural tourism, new occupations beyond traditional agriculture have emerged. As one participant noted, "A lot of different kinds of jobs are emerging" (LC8), indicating a diversification of economic activity. Similarly, local government representatives acknowledge the potential positive economic effects of rural tourism. One official stated, "It would help a lot financially. New jobs would open up, and people wouldn't have to go away to find work" (LG7). Another remarked, "Each business employs at least 10-15 people, and the number of businesses is increasing" (LG9).

There are numerous points of divergence between local governments and local communities regarding economic sustainability. On the economic dimension of rural tourism, local governments most frequently referred to "rural development," "revitalizing the region," "multiplier effects," and "sales of local products." The most frequently mentioned element was the "rural development" code. One participant emphasized rural tourism's contribution to rural development: "Rural tourism brings rural development. When there is rural tourism, people here can sell what they produce... I think that's how we can achieve rural development, because it makes a serious economic contribution to the area." (LG11). A municipal official similarly viewed rural tourism as a development instrument- "Rural tourism can be beneficial for rural development"-but added that "there is no specific implementation or policy in place" (LG3), indicating that no concrete steps have been taken. Local governments also frequently reported

lacking sufficient budgets and support mechanisms in this regard.

In the responses of the local community, three distinct codes were identified. On the positive side, the codes "improvement in welfare level" and "economic diversification" emerged, whereas "high cost of living" appeared as a negative code. Among these, the highest number of references was to the code of economic diversification (15). With the development of rural tourism in the area, new occupations have begun to appear in the village beyond traditional agriculture. One participant explained this as follows: "Thanks to tourism, lots of different kinds of jobs are appearing carpentry, boat building, boat cleaning, laundry work... and also electricians, cooks, waiters and so on." (LC8), emphasising the diversification of economic activities. The tourism sector has also created new job opportunities particularly for women; female employment has increased in such areas as boat and guesthouse cleaning and kitchen work. In addition, it was noted that indirect sectors linked to tourism, such as repair services, transport and guiding, also support the rural economy. It was further reported that rural tourism activities have led to an increase in demand for local agricultural and food products. For example, a villager who runs a restaurant highlighted that tourism supports local producers by telling tourists: "You buy your tomatoes and greens from the village... you get your honey, milk and yoghurt from local people, so it brings income to them." (LC7). However, the same participant also pointed out that the scale of this benefit remains quite limited, noting that because the number of businesses is still low, the increase in employment and income is confined to only a few people.

Theme 3: Socio-Cultural Sustainability

Under the socio-cultural sustainability theme, there are a total of 10 codes, comprising both shared and divergent codes. The theme and sub-codes are presented in Figure 3.

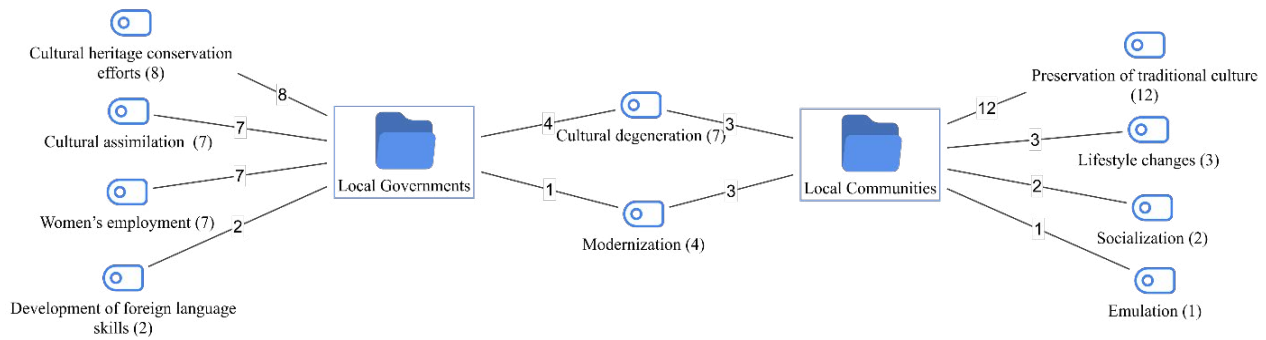


Figure 3. Comparative Statistics of Two Stakeholder Groups' Perceptions of the Socio-Cultural Dimension of Sustainable Rural Tourism

Under the socio-cultural sustainability dimension, two shared codes emerged: “cultural erosion” and “modernization”. Both local governments and local communities indicated that while rural tourism may lead to cultural erosion, it also fosters modernization. A village resident stated that tourism is not effective in preserving traditional culture, remarking, “I think it's getting worse over time” (LC6). Respondents observed that local customs and traditions have weakened over time due to external influences, and that younger generations are less attached to older practices; accordingly, some community members are cautious about the potential for cultural erosion associated with tourism development. Similarly, four local government participants commented, “It's changing our way of life. Things are getting ruined; the old ways are gone now” (LG11) and “After tourism came, our old traditions and customs disappeared” (LG14). With respect to modernization, participants noted, “Actually, they've started to make us more cultured. We're more knowledgeable now, more cultured, and it's made us more social as well.” (LG3), and “Whether we like it or not, the way we talk and behave is changing; we're trying to keep up with them. Rural tourism is making us more modern and changing our culture” (LC11).

Differences were observed in four codes each across the responses of local governments and local communities. Among the divergent codes on the local government side, the most frequently expressed were “efforts to preserve cultural heritage,” “acculturation,” and “women's employment.” Local governments generally stated that they were unable to carry out substantial work to revitalize cultural heritage within the scope of rural tourism. One muhtar, when asked about protecting cultural values such as traditional architecture, folklore, and handicrafts, replied “No,” adding, “I've opened courses before, but they didn't work out” (LG7), attributing the failure to insufficient demand. In many locales, similarly, cultural courses and events could not be sustained due to transportation difficulties or low interest. In support of this, LG2 remarked, “We do have projects, but we don't have any budget, so everything just stays at the planning stage,” and LG3 noted, “From time to time we've tried to organise a harvest festival again, but that also didn't turn out to be sustainable”

On the other hand, according to most local officials, rural tourism has not yet had a marked effect on the villages' cultural fabric. Because tourism activity has remained limited, traditional ways of life largely persist. One muhtar even remarked, “There's no real change in our culture, we don't even have foreign signs; on the contrary, the young people are learning foreign languages” (LG9), indicating that tourism has not produced negative cultural erosion and has in fact yielded a positive outcome such as language acquisition among the younger generation. Officials are also in agreement that rural tourism has increased women's participation in the labor force. As one local government representative emphasized, “Anything a woman touches stands out. If tourism develops, women workers will stand out too and earn an income” (LG4). In another village, a muhtar noted that with tourism “All the women are working; they go to their jobs and their insurance is paid” (LG13).

Among the responses from the local community, the salient codes were “preservation of traditional culture” and “changes in lifestyle.” Some community members indicated that rural tourism can support the preservation of traditional culture. One participant stated, “Our traditional culture is being preserved, our traditions are still continuing; rural tourism hasn't caused any cultural erosion” (LC12). Another noted, “The tourists who come here adapt to this place too; the cultural change has been in a good way” At the same time, there were participants (4) who expressed concerns that rural tourism affects local traditions and identity. One participant stated that tourism is not effective in preserving traditional culture, remarking, “I think our traditional culture is slowly being lost over time” Observations indicated that, over time, local customs and traditions have weakened under external influences, and that younger generations are less attached to older practices (LC13).

Theme 4: Barriers and Expectations in Rural Tourism, and Support for Rural Tourism

Under the theme of barriers and expectations in rural tourism, a total of 17 codes, comprising both shared and divergent codes, were identified. The theme and sub-codes are presented in Figure 4.

Stakeholder Conflicts in Sustainable Rural Tourism: Perceptual Differences between Local Communities and Local Governments in the Context of the Green Economy

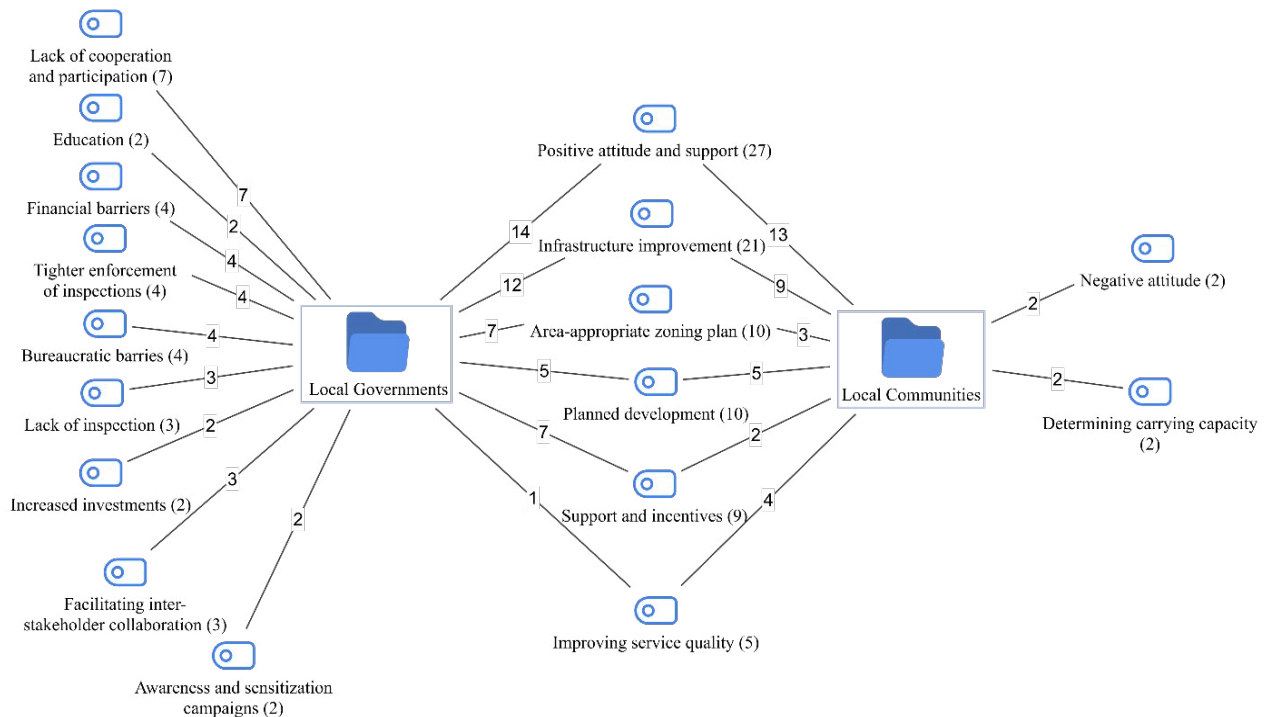


Figure 4. Comparative Statistics of Two Stakeholder Groups' Perceptions of the Barriers to, Expectations of, and Support for Sustainable Rural Tourism

Under this theme, the shared codes comprise "positive attitude and support," "infrastructure improvement," "zoning plans suited to the locality," "planned development," "lack of support and incentives," and "improving service quality." The majority of participants (27) expressed a positive stance toward rural tourism and support related activities. As one participant noted, "We support it. For now it's positive, because money is coming in... we want it to develop even more." While many welcome the economic dynamism brought by tourism, they also stress the need for controlled growth that minimizes adverse environmental and cultural impacts. The same participant cautioned, "On the negative side, it can damage our cultural fabric, but economically it contributes a lot." (LC6). Another similarly emphasized balance: "Of course I support it. I wish tourism would grow more, but it should stay smaller and more careful so it doesn't harm the environment." (LC8).

Regarding expectations, the most frequently cited code was "infrastructure improvement" (21), followed by "zoning appropriate to the locality" (10) and "planned development." The local community calling for the implementation of infrastructure investments and planning to promote tourism. One participant articulated concrete expectations: "First of all, we don't have any infrastructure here. Our biggest problem is the infrastructure. Together with the village headman we even went all the way to the governor; they don't say 'no', but nothing ever gets put into action" (LC1). Another participant commented, "We need proper zoning; without opening up the zoning plan, nothing moves forward. The coastline,

for example, is just sitting idle. The municipality isn't taking an interest. We need development projects to actually be put into practice." (LC5). This statement reflects criticism that the absence of a zoning plan hinders investment, valuable resources such as the shoreline remain underutilized, and the municipality is not proactive. Many residents reported expecting support for roadworks, resolving water supply problems, permits for accommodation, and facility development. Similarly, local officials identified infrastructure problems as the main barrier to rural tourism. In this regard, participants stressed infrastructure upgrades: "First of all, the infrastructure needs to be sorted out. Look, all those tour buses passing by here are coming from Sedir Island. But there's no pier, no toilets, everything is in a really bad state" (LG6).

Distinct from the local community, local governments identified "lack of cooperation and participation," "bureaucratic obstacles," and "financial barriers" as the principal constraints on rural tourism. Among these, the most frequently cited was lack of cooperation and participation (7). As one participant noted, "There's an incredible lack of communication between the institutions here; because of that, nothing has been done..." (LG6), indicating the absence of organized joint efforts with civil society or the private sector. This highlights deficits in the coordination and planning necessary for rural tourism development. Other statements "We keep running into bureaucracy, and the promises they make are never carried out." (LG5) and "There's no budget either; the biggest obstacle is the budget. The state really needs to step in and do something about

this." (LG16) further underscore how the lack of support and incentives hampers progress.

To address these obstacles, participants articulated expectations and recommendations such as "ensuring inter-stakeholder cooperation," "tightening inspections," "awareness-raising and sensitization activities," "increasing investments," and "training." One participant emphasized the importance of collaboration and participation: "They should make sure there is cooperation between institutions and act as a bridge between the institutions and the people to keep the balance" (LG3). Attention was also drawn to gaps in education and awareness, with the suggestion that those who will operate tourism businesses should be trained and certified.

Two divergent codes emerged in the responses from the local community: "negative attitude" and "determining carrying capacity." Only two participants

expressed a negative stance toward rural tourism and did not support it. One such participant stated, "On the negative side, I think nature will be ruined. Financially it's good, it opens up jobs for people, but they end up damaging the environment" (LC14). Unlike local administrations, community members argued that carrying capacity should be determined for the development of rural tourism. As one participant emphasized, "They should only let in a limited number of people and vehicles. It really ought to be completely closed to car traffic, because too many cars means too much pollution" (LC2).

Theme 5: Perceptions of the Green Economy

Under this theme, a total of 13 codes -comprising both shared and divergent codes-were identified. The theme and sub-codes are presented in Figure 5.

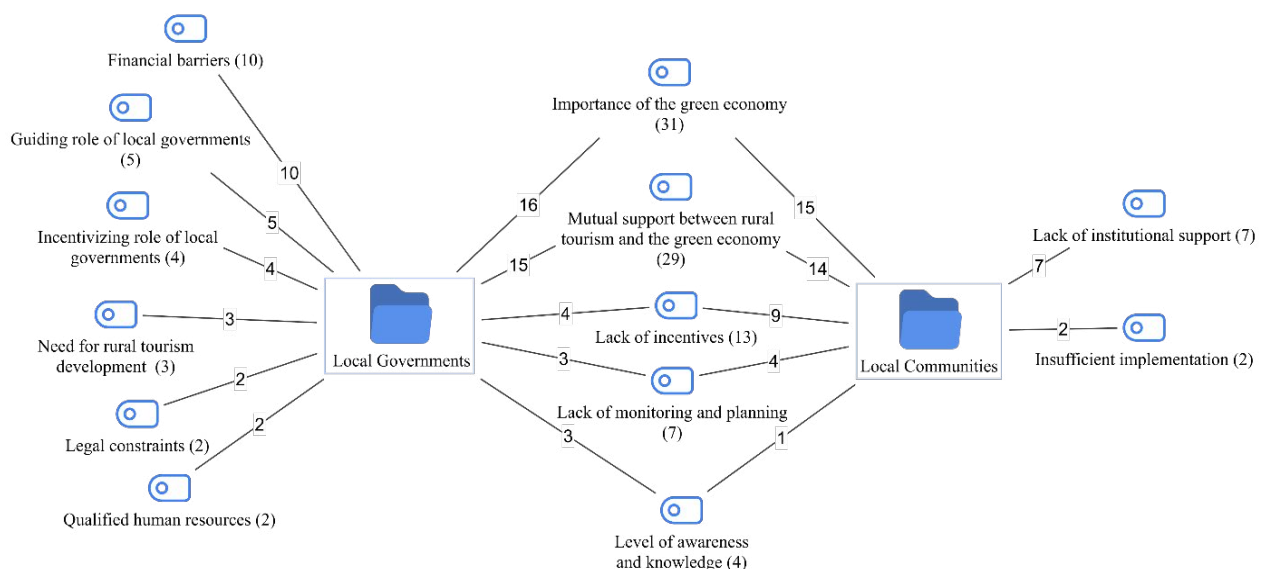


Figure 5. Comparative Statistics of Two Stakeholder Groups' Perceptions of the Green Economy

Under this theme, the shared codes comprise "the importance of the green economy," "the mutually supportive relationship between rural tourism and the green economy," "lack of incentives," "lack of inspection and planning," and "levels of awareness." Both stakeholder groups emphasize the significance of the green economy. As one community member noted: "In tourism, what we do is basically use natural resources to provide services. So if we pay attention to how we use these resources and take precautions, we support the green economy; and if we follow the logic of the green economy, I think tourism activities can also be made sustainable" (LC13).

A frequently expressed point among the shared codes is the supportive interplay between rural tourism and the green economy. Participants indicated that sustainable rural tourism would bolster the green economy, and, conversely, that green economy

practices would support the sustainability of rural tourism. For example: "Nature is already the main attraction in rural tourism, so if we don't damage it, we can make rural tourism much better through the green economy" (LC12); and "If rural tourism is going to be sustainable, it will already come from the green economy. If the green economy is supported, rural tourism will continue" (LC10). In other words, they contend that developing tourism while protecting nature aligns with the goals of the green economy. Similarly, local government representatives stated, "I think it's really strongly connected. In the end, rural tourism has to be in harmony with nature, so it supports the green economy and the balance between using and protecting resources" (LG13), and "They support each other. Nature is already the main source of rural tourism anyway" (LG15).

On the other hand, some participants emphasized that for the rural tourism-green economy nexus to

function optimally, tourism activities must genuinely be conducted with a sustainability mindset. However, they pointed to a lack of incentives, insufficient oversight, and deficiencies in planning. Local government representatives highlighted the absence of effective inspection and planning mechanisms in rural areas as a major problem. The local community also indirectly referred to the lack of planning; for example, one participant criticized the unplanned nature of tourism-related construction *"There's no planning permission, but people put up illegal buildings anyway, thinking there'll be an amnesty sooner or later"* (LC2) drawing attention to the weakness of the rule-setting authority. These findings suggest that both the inadequacy of regulatory rules and restrictions, as well as their weak enforcement, hinder the effective implementation of green economy principles. Another common code emerging from the data is the inadequate awareness of local communities regarding the green economy. Both local community members and local government participants noted that the tourism potential of their villages is not sufficiently recognized and that younger generations do not adequately protect the natural environment.

Examining the divergent codes, the local community holds a shared view that existing institutional support for the green economy and sustainable tourism is highly inadequate. Many community participants emphasized that they receive insufficient backing from either the state or civil society organizations, noting, *"There's no support at the moment... we're doing everything on our own"* (LC1, LC2), indicating the absence of external financial or non-financial assistance. Alongside this lack of support, participants also highlight an implementation gap in the green economy. As one participant remarked, *"Solar energy could be used here to the maximum. We practically have nine months of summer, but nothing is being done to put it into practice"* (LC12).

Conversely, local governments identified insufficient financial resources as the chief obstacle to implementing green economy practices. One muhtar underscored the financing problem: *"You need money first; if there's no money, you can't do any green projects."* (LG5). Another emphasized both budgetary and incentive gaps: *"It takes a big budget; the biggest obstacle is that we don't get any support"* (LG12). A shortage of qualified personnel and legal hurdles were also cited. For example, although some muhtars stated that their areas are highly suitable for renewable energy (solar, wind), they were unable to invest and, even when they prepared projects, faced bureaucratic obstacles. In advancing the green economy, the guiding and incentivizing roles of local governments were highlighted. As some participants noted, *"Local governments need to be strengthened first for the green economy to become a reality. For that, the higher authorities have to*

take encouraging actions" (LG11), and *"Local governments should first directly encourage the local people and then guide them"* (LG14).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study reveals significant perceptual discrepancies between local communities and local governments in the rural areas of Marmaris, particularly within the context of sustainable rural tourism and the green economy. Although both stakeholders converge at the level of principles-environmental protection, socio-cultural continuity, and economic vitality—a marked intention-action gap emerges during implementation (incentives, financing, oversight, institutional coordination, participation). This finding is consistent with evidence that misalignments of interests and priorities in multi-stakeholder destinations weaken sustainability efforts (Byrd, 2007; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; McAreavey & McDonagh, 2011).

In the environmental dimension, both groups articulate similar concerns yet diverge sharply on implementation. Local governments define environmental sustainability mainly through institutional responsibilities, programmes and budget constraints, whereas residents emphasise unplanned construction, zoning practices and illegal building, which they associate with visible degradation. This confirms earlier work showing that rural tourism planning often operates in a top-down fashion and may not align with everyday local experience (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). At the same time, studies from other rural destinations demonstrate that, under appropriate institutional frameworks and trust relations, higher levels of consensus and collaborative tools such as joint planning and voluntary environmental schemes can be achieved (Willmott & Graci, 2012; Wiratno et al., 2022; Taufik, 2023). The Marmaris case thus illustrates how fragile the frequently assumed discourse of shared environmental goals can be when inspection and zoning practices are contested, extending this literature in a more critical direction.

In terms of economic sustainability, both stakeholder groups agree that rural tourism revitalises the local economy. Residents present tourism income as a lifeline that provides non-agricultural jobs, while local governments highlight employment creation and reduced outward migration, framing tourism as part of broader regional development and place-branding strategies. This distinction between macro-level development perspectives and micro-level livelihood concerns echoes previous findings (Ribeiro & Marques, 2002; Ibanescu et al., 2018). However, the most striking divergence in Marmaris concerns negative economic impacts. Residents explicitly refer to inflationary pressures and rising living costs, whereas such adverse effects are largely absent from local government discourse. Although the literature

recognises that tourism can raise prices and exacerbate inequalities (Andereck & Vogt, 2000) and notes that authorities sometimes acknowledge or seek to manage these risks, the silence observed here challenges more optimistic portrayals. The perceptual gap arises from how each group evaluates who benefits, who bears costs and to what extent. In line with social exchange theory, stakeholders interpret tourism's gains and losses differently (Ap, 1992; Nun-koo & Gursoy, 2012).

In the socio-cultural domain, both residents and officials recognise a dual effect: rural tourism may erode traditional culture while simultaneously fostering modernisation and openness. This ambivalence corresponds to studies showing that identity concerns and social modernisation can coexist in tourism-driven rural communities (Özdemir & Yolal, 2017; Strzelecka et al., 2017). Participants noted that interactions with tourists can encourage young people to learn foreign languages, increase women's employment and accelerate social change. Yet, perceptions of cultural heritage protection are more negative. Local governments concede that revitalisation efforts are limited and that attempts to integrate cultural values into tourism products are often absent or unsustainable. This resonates with Turkish rural tourism research highlighting weak institutional support and insufficient local initiative in mobilising cultural assets (Ertuna & Kirbaş, 2012). Overall, the Marmaris case empirically illustrates the widely discussed dual socio-cultural impact of tourism: when well governed, it can enhance cultural revitalisation and self-confidence; under weak governance, it may deepen cultural degradation risks (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

The findings further demonstrate that both stakeholder groups generally support sustainable rural tourism, but this support is highly conditional. For all actors, basic infrastructure and accessibility (such as roads, water, waste management, piers and toilets) are seen as prerequisites for sustainability, corroborating literature that emphasises the foundational role of infrastructure and place-specific planning (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). However, their emphases diverge: residents focus on concrete service deficiencies and the need to respect carrying capacity, whereas local governments foreground governance constraints such as limited interagency cooperation, low participation, bureaucratic hurdles and budget limitations. This confirms research underscoring the importance of collaborative governance and showing that, particularly in developing contexts, structural and operational barriers often restrict participation (Tosun, 2000). While previous studies report cases where inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding and exclusion from decision-making erode support or generate open opposition (Cole, 2006; Sharpley, 2014), the Marmaris findings suggest a still relatively strong yet fragile and conditional support

base. This highlights the context-dependent nature of local acceptance of sustainable rural tourism.

Under the green economy perceptions theme, both stakeholder groups acknowledge the relevance of the concept and view green economy and sustainable rural tourism as mutually reinforcing. This converges with studies that demonstrate how green economy-oriented tourism can increase local incomes and expand markets for environmentally friendly products (Hidayattuloh et al., 2020; Bhaduri & Pandey, 2020). Nonetheless, in Marmaris substantial implementation gaps are evident. Stakeholders frequently mention a lack of incentives, insufficient oversight and planning, and low awareness levels. The sharpest divergence concerns perceptions of support and resources: residents criticise the scarcity of institutional backing, whereas local governments primarily cite financial constraints. These results indicate missing incentive mechanisms and steering policies necessary to translate green economy principles into rural tourism practice. Existing research likewise stresses the need for multi-level governance and central incentive schemes to enable a green transition (Temirbulatova & Borza, 2015; Vuković & Milorad, 2022). Although other cases show that, where policy frameworks, incentives and stakeholder cooperation are strong, green economy principles can be integrated into planning and enterprise operations (UNWTO, 2012; Wijijayanti et al., 2020; Robby, 2025), the Marmaris case exposes a persistent implementation gap despite high conceptual acceptance, thereby extending this body of work with a critical, context-specific example.

5.1. Recommendations

In an overall assessment, the findings of this study indicate that closing the perceptual divide between local residents and local governments is essential for the success of sustainable rural tourism policies in Türkiye. While residents hold concrete expectations regarding the quality of daily life, livelihoods, and natural and cultural values, local governments pursue macro-level development visions, promotion, and strategic plans. These differing perspectives may impede the attainment of sustainable tourism's multidimensional objectives (Byrd, 2007; Blackstock, 2005). Consistent with this, the Marmaris case demonstrates that achieving sustainable rural tourism goals depends on fostering dialogue, trust, and collaboration among stakeholders. The results offer lessons not only for Türkiye's rural tourism policies but also for international destinations with similar characteristics. Without support from participatory governance and green economy principles, sustainable tourism is unlikely to progress beyond paper targets.

First, institutionalised platforms for regular communication and joint decision-making should be estab-

lished in rural tourism destinations. Local tourism councils or working committees that bring together muhtars, small business owners, farmers, tourism operators and civil society representatives could help narrow perceptual gaps and build trust.

Second, basic infrastructure for sustainable rural tourism roads, waste management, water and energy supply must be improved. In rural Marmaris, poor roads and irregular waste collection both reduce local satisfaction and heighten environmental pressures. Rural infrastructure investments should be prioritised through cooperation between regional development agencies and local governments. Carrying capacity principles should also be operationalised; in peak season, measures such as parking regulation and visitor information centres can help manage visitor flows.

Third, both residents and local governments stress the need to increase awareness of sustainability and the green economy. Targeted training programmes should therefore be developed. Seminars and workshops can be organised on environmental protection, ecotourism, hygiene, hospitality and entrepreneurship, with certified training (e.g. ecological agriculture, local guiding, guesthouse management) aimed particularly at young people and women to broaden the distribution of tourism benefits. Awareness campaigns in schools and village coffeehouses can further promote practices such as recycling, energy saving and the use of renewables, responding directly to the “need for discipline and education” highlighted by muhtars.

Fourth, financial support mechanisms are needed to encourage green and sustainable tourism investments. The “budget shortfall” observed in the study area could be alleviated through grants and incentives from higher administrative levels. Low-interest loans and grant schemes should target entrepreneurs who wish to install renewable energy systems, establish eco-guesthouses or integrate local products into tourism. Existing funding channels of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and regional development agencies can be more strategically mobilised to support green economy-oriented projects.

Finally, in Marmaris and similar rural destinations in Türkiye, the absence of long-term planning constitutes a major gap. A participatory rural tourism master plan should be prepared that specifies carrying capacity, protection zones, permissible activities, infrastructure priorities and emergency strategies. Anchored in green economy principles, the plan should set concrete targets for low-carbon mobility, renewable energy use and waste reduction. Implementation needs to be regularly monitored and publicly reported through annual reviews or meetings, thereby enhancing transparency, strengthening trust between local administrations and residents

and reinforcing a shared sense of purpose.

Although these recommendations are grounded in the specific case of rural Marmaris, they offer broader guidance for comparable rural tourism destinations. Strengthening local participation, fostering multi-sector collaboration and adopting a holistic approach to environmental and cultural planning are widely applicable strategies. If such steps are taken, sustainable rural tourism can, within a green economy framework, simultaneously enhance local well-being and contribute to national development objectives.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

This study primarily contributes to the stakeholder theory framework by empirically demonstrating stakeholder perception differences in the context of sustainable rural tourism. The fact that, at the scale of Marmaris, two key stakeholder groups evaluate the environmental, economic and socio-cultural dimensions of rural tourism through different conceptual lenses indicates that multi-stakeholder structures, as frequently emphasized in stakeholder theory, should be examined not only in terms of participation, but also through the lenses of conflicts of interest, power relations and perceptions of justice. At the same time, the findings on how the green economy is understood in practice show that, at the local level, the concept is framed as a means of balancing environmental protection with livelihood opportunities, and that this framing is closely linked to local governance capacity. Accordingly, this study brings together debates on stakeholder theory and the green economy within an empirical framework that integrates qualitative content analysis and a comparative stakeholder design, thereby providing a theoretical and methodological basis for future research.

5.3. Practical Implications

The research findings also generate a set of concrete policy recommendations for local governments, tourism planners and rural communities. From the perspective of local governments, the results indicate that sustainable rural tourism should not be approached solely through infrastructure investments and zoning regulations, but rather within a participatory planning framework that takes local residents’ expectations and concerns into account. Holding regular information meetings in rural neighbourhoods, involving local stakeholders in the design phase of projects, and sharing budget constraints and priorities in a transparent manner can strengthen trust and cooperation among stakeholders. In addition, enhancing inter-institutional coordination, reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks, and improving the effectiveness of zoning and enforcement processes are

of critical importance for taking concrete steps within a green economy framework. Overall, aligning stakeholder expectations, green economy policies and on-the-ground tourism practices is regarded as a fundamental condition for transitioning towards a more equitable and sustainable model of rural tourism.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in only 14 rural neighborhoods in the Marmaris region and involved 31 participants. Accordingly, the findings cannot be generalized to different geographical regions or larger samples. Second, the research employed a qualitative (phenomenological) design, and the findings are based on participants' subjective perceptions and experiences; thus, the results should be interpreted within an interpretive context. In addition, only local residents and local governments were considered among stakeholders; the views of the private sector and non-governmental organisations were not included. This constrains a holistic treatment of all stakeholder relationships in rural tourism. Therefore, future research should conduct comparative studies in different destinations to enable more comprehensive inferences about the effects of rural tourism on stakeholders. Moreover, the use of quantitative methods or mixed-methods approaches could help corroborate the qualitative findings and enhance generalizability. Expanding stakeholder diversity by including private-sector representatives, NGOs, and tourism investors would also contribute to a more holistic understanding of rural governance and the green economy.

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Stakeholder Conflicts in Sustainable Rural Tourism: Perceptual Differences between Local Communities and Local Governments in the Context of the Green Economy

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