

Municipal tourism management and sustainable development: Evidence from Huánuco, Peru

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Abstract: Tourism has become a strategic axis for local development in Latin America, combining economic growth, cultural preservation, and social inclusion. In this context, municipal governments play a decisive role in managing tourism as a multidimensional activity that requires planning, coordination, and sustainability-oriented policies. This study analyzed the relationship between municipal tourism management and the sustainable development of tourism in the district of Huánuco, Peru. The research followed a basic approach with a descriptive–correlational scope and a non-experimental cross-sectional design. The population consisted of 384 visitors, 48 tourism enterprises, and the staff of the municipal sub-management of tourism, with data collected through structured surveys and semi-structured interviews. The reliability of the instruments was confirmed with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.861, indicating high internal consistency. The results revealed a moderate and positive association between municipal management and sustainable tourism development. Visitor-oriented and public-activity-oriented management showed weak correlations, highlighting persistent gaps in infrastructure, promotion, and institutional coordination. In contrast, internal municipal management displayed a stronger association, underlining the importance of governance capacity, leadership, and planning. Furthermore, social sustainability emerged as the most valued dimension, particularly in terms of community well-being and cultural identity, while economic sustainability was rated the lowest, reflecting weak competitiveness and limited recognition of the “Huánuco Brand.” These findings emphasize that municipalities must reinforce their leadership role through inclusive strategies, participatory governance, and targeted investments, ensuring that tourism becomes a long-term driver of economic, social, and cultural sustainability in the region.

Keywords: Governance, Municipal tourism management, Sustainable development.

1. Introduction

Tourism has consolidated as a strategic lever for local and regional development, generating economic spillovers, strengthening cultural identity, and enhancing territorial competitiveness [1–3]. In Latin America—where territories such as Huánuco combine Andean and Amazonian assets—tourism is increasingly framed as a catalyst for socioeconomic progress, provided that destination planning converts resource endowments into coherent products [4, 5]. The central challenge is to design and implement policies that add value without over-exploiting resources and while ensuring inclusive participation of local stakeholders [6, 7]. Consequently, recent approaches underscore the need to integrate governance, municipal management, and sustainability into a single actionable agenda [8, 9].

Sustainable development provides the normative framework that orients destination management toward environmental stewardship, social equity, and economic viability [10, 11]. Within tourism, this

implies safeguarding natural and cultural heritage while generating present and future opportunities [12]. Empirical experiences in Mexico and Ecuador illustrate that municipal leadership and community participation are decisive for achieving sustainable outcomes, from governance arrangements to product design and visitor management [7, 13]. In this perspective, local governments act as conveners that balance market dynamics and conservation imperatives [1, 14].

Municipal tourism management has been analyzed as a determinant of destination competitiveness and sustainability through planning, regulation, promotion, and inter-institutional coordination. Public–private cooperation improves investment climates, infrastructure, and service quality [15]. Evidence from Peru and the region suggests that municipalities with clear policies, participatory governance, and institutional capacity are better positioned to mobilize tourism for local development [16–18]. This also requires moving beyond traditional promotion to adopt integrated destination-management models and sustainability indicators [19, 20].

In Peru, Huánuco concentrates both opportunities and structural gaps. Despite its rich heritage and growing interest, the literature reports persistent deficits in planning, infrastructure, and sustainable practices [21, 22]. Although national guidelines by MINCETUR [23] emphasize sustainability and municipal participation, implementation and articulation with local governance remain uneven [23]. Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze the relationship between municipal tourism management and the sustainable development of tourism in the district of Huánuco, in order to identify strategies that strengthen governance, preserve cultural and natural heritage, and ensure long-term benefits for both visitors and local communities.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study of municipal tourism management and its link with sustainable development requires a dual perspective that integrates both international and national contributions. At the international level, Arévalo Martínez and Armas Arévalos [24] emphasize that tourism initiatives such as “Pueblos Mágicos” reveal the role of local governments in strengthening identity and generating opportunities for community development. Similarly, Avila Bercial [25] highlights that sustainable tourism in developed countries must be understood as a multidimensional process that incorporates ecological, social, and economic perspectives. Cohen [26] and Geertz [27] add a cultural dimension, underlining that tourism is not only an economic activity but also a form of cultural interaction where meanings, symbols, and traditions become central to local development. These approaches provide a broad foundation for analyzing tourism as a phenomenon with multiple layers of impact.

In Latin America, several studies have reinforced this multidimensional perspective. Guaipatín [15] argues that public-private cooperation is key to improving territorial development, a lesson that also applies to tourism governance. Teisman and Klijn [28] deepen this view by describing governance as a networked process, where municipal governments must align with private stakeholders to design effective strategies. On the epistemological side, Caripán [29] and Reis [30] argue that tourism requires transdisciplinary approaches to overcome the limits of traditional social sciences, integrating economics, sociology, and anthropology to produce more complete explanations of the tourism phenomenon. In the Peruvian context, Cayotopa Ylatoma [16] and Rodríguez Zamora [18] show that municipal governments play a decisive role in designing integrated and participatory models that strengthen cultural and economic offerings, emphasizing their potential as agents of sustainable development.

At the conceptual level, the definition of tourism remains central. Tourism was defined as a set of activities motivated by leisure outside the usual environment, while Urry [31] introduced the concept of the “tourist gaze” to explain the subjective ways in which individuals perceive and consume destinations. MacCannell [32] complements this idea with the notion of authenticity, pointing out that many tourists seek meaningful experiences rather than superficial consumption. Richards [33] extends this by linking tourism with humanism and personal development, noting that travel contributes to self-

knowledge and intercultural understanding. Together, these perspectives allow a clearer understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of tourism as both a social and cultural practice.

Regarding sustainability, Trindade, et al. [34] analyze how enotourism integrates sustainable practices under systemic indicators, showing the importance of balancing production, consumption, and environmental protection. Ucancela and Velasco [35] propose an updated model of sustainability in Latin America, emphasizing the need to preserve cultural diversity while ensuring economic viability and environmental responsibility. Naredo [36] highlights that the terms “sustainable” and “sustentable” are often debated, but both point toward the rational use of resources and the pursuit of structural changes that guarantee long-term stability. These theoretical contributions are essential for establishing the conceptual dimensions of sustainability as a guiding principle for municipal tourism management.

Finally, the variables of this research can be defined and structured as follows: Municipal tourism management encompasses the organization, regulation, and promotion of tourism activities by local governments, including aspects such as planning, promotion, and regulation [8, 37]. Its dimensions include management oriented to visitors, management of public activities, and internal municipal management. On the other hand, sustainable tourism development is understood as the balance between economic growth, environmental preservation, and social well-being [10, 38]. Its main dimensions are social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability, as identified by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) [39]. The articulation of these variables provides the basis for examining the extent to which municipal management in Huánuco can drive a model of tourism that is both competitive and sustainable.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a basic research approach with a descriptive–correlational scope, aimed at examining the relationship between municipal tourism management and the sustainable development of tourism in the district of Huánuco. Following Hernández, et al. [40], descriptive–correlational designs are suitable when the purpose is to characterize the variables under study while identifying the degree of association between them without manipulating their behavior. Consistent with this rationale, the research employed a non-experimental, cross-sectional design, since data collection was conducted at a single point in time, with no intervention or control of the independent variable.

The study area corresponded to the district of Huánuco, located in the central-eastern region of Peru. Its heterogeneous geography includes both Andean highlands and Amazonian lowlands, offering an array of natural and cultural attractions relevant to tourism development. The analysis considered three distinct populations: (i) 838,186 visitors reported by DIRCETUR Huánuco in 2018, from which a sample of 384 was statistically determined using probabilistic simple random sampling; (ii) 48 formally registered tourism enterprises, including restaurants, hostels, hotels, and tour operators, selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling; and (iii) the entire staff of the municipal sub-management of tourism, given its small size, which justified a census approach.

Data collection combined quantitative and qualitative techniques. Structured surveys were administered to visitors and service providers to measure perceptions of municipal management practices and dimensions of tourism sustainability. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with municipal officials to obtain qualitative insights into policies, strategies, and constraints affecting local tourism governance. These instruments were developed in alignment with prior research in tourism management [16, 18] and validated through expert judgment, involving three specialists in research methodology and tourism management who reviewed consistency, clarity, and relevance of items.

The reliability of the survey instrument was established through a pilot application to 50 visitors and 15 enterprises, with results analyzed using SPSS v22. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient reached a value of 0.861, indicating high internal consistency. This result confirmed that the instrument was robust enough to ensure stable and coherent responses.

For data analysis, the study relied on descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency distributions, percentages, and graphical representations were used to summarize participants' responses. To test the hypotheses, non-parametric correlation techniques were employed, specifically Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, which allowed the identification of the strength and direction of the association between municipal tourism management and the sustainable development of tourism. The interpretation of results followed Spiegel [41] correlation ranges, distinguishing between very low, moderate, and high associations. Ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality of data, and respect for respondents' autonomy, ensuring the integrity of the research process.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Results

The descriptive results were systematized into five consolidated tables in order to provide a clearer overview of how municipal management practices in Huánuco are perceived in relation to sustainable tourism development. The original dataset included responses from service providers and visitors across more than sixty questions. For analytical clarity, the data were grouped into three categories—positive, neutral, and negative—allowing for a comprehensive interpretation of tendencies in areas such as municipal management, visitor perception, sustainable development, cultural identity, and economic impact.

Table 1.
Perception of municipal tourism management (businesses).

Aspect	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)
Information dissemination	35	40	25
Tourist facilities	21	58	21
Promotion of activities	35	44	21
Technical studies and investment	25	38	37
Collaboration with associations	25	56	19
Public investment	29	48	23
Training programs	25	44	31
Technical assistance	21	52	27
Planned management	23	46	31
Regulatory inspections	21	42	37

Source: Survey conducted with tourism service companies.

The analysis of business perspectives highlights that most aspects of municipal management are rated as regular or neutral, with percentages between 38% and 58%. The highest neutrality was observed in the evaluation of tourist facilities (58%) and technical assistance (52%), which suggests that these services exist but are perceived as inefficient or lacking sufficient quality. Positive assessments, although present, rarely exceed one-third of responses, reaching their highest point in information dissemination and promotion of activities (35%). Negative responses are also significant, ranging from 21% to 37%, with particular dissatisfaction in the area of technical studies and regulatory inspections, which are considered weak and inconsistent. Overall, the business sector perceives municipal management as present but ineffective, failing to establish itself as a strategic partner in tourism development.

Table 2.
Perception of municipal tourism management (visitors).

Aspect	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)
Information dissemination	29	46	25
Tourist facilities	21	43	37
Promotion of activities	27	39	33
Technical studies and investment	11	55	33
Collaboration with associations	20	59	22
Public investment	31	32	37
Training programs	20	43	37
Technical assistance	25	33	42
Planned management	18	55	26
Regulatory inspections	21	32	42

Source: Survey conducted with visitors.

Visitors' evaluations reinforce the perception of municipal management as predominantly neutral, especially in aspects such as technical studies (55%) and collaboration with associations (59%). Positive evaluations are modest, fluctuating between 11% and 31%, with the highest recognition given to investment promotion (31%) and information dissemination (29%). However, negative perceptions are more pronounced compared to businesses, with dissatisfaction peaking in technical assistance and inspections (42%). These results suggest that visitors do not perceive municipal action as sufficiently visible or effective in improving their tourism experience. The predominance of neutral and negative ratings indicates a lack of confidence in municipal institutions, as well as an urgent need for improved infrastructure, better promotional strategies, and more efficient regulatory control to align municipal performance with visitor expectations.

Table 3.
Perception of Sustainable Tourism Development (Businesses).

Aspect	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)
Environmental protection	42	33	25
Environmental culture campaigns	19	60	21
Tourist infrastructure	29	42	29
Environmental policies	29	38	34
Tourism satisfaction	39	33	27
Community participation	32	44	25
Public safety	10	67	23
Cultural heritage conservation	29	52	19
Cultural identity strengthening	35	50	15
Cultural identity loss	54	31	15
Visitor influx	21	65	15
Employment generation	19	60	20
Economic benefits	25	54	21
City positioning	29	46	25
Business competitiveness	21	58	21
Tourism organization	33	46	21
Service regulation	33	52	15
New circuits	10	54	36
Tourism diversification	32	29	39
Huánuco Brand recognition	21	44	36
Visitor satisfaction	39	33	27

Source: Survey conducted with tourism service companies.

When assessing sustainable tourism development, businesses also emphasize neutral or average ratings, which predominate across multiple indicators. For instance, 67% of responses regarding public safety and 52% for heritage conservation highlight an absence of decisive policies in these areas. Positive evaluations emerge in certain aspects, such as the perception that tourism has fostered cultural identity

(35%) or contributed to satisfaction (39%), although these remain moderate rather than enthusiastic. Conversely, high negative scores appear in tourism diversification (39%) and Huánuco Brand recognition (36%), indicating deficiencies in innovation and branding. Businesses stress that although some initiatives exist, their scope and impact remain limited, and they fail to respond adequately to the demands of environmental management, cultural preservation, and the creation of competitive tourism products.

Table 4.

Perception of sustainable tourism development (visitors).

Aspect	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)
Environmental protection	34	37	29
Environmental culture campaigns	21	46	33
Tourist infrastructure	27	33	40
Environmental policies	20	45	35
Tourism satisfaction	36	31	32
Community participation	28	41	32
Public safety	27	31	43
Cultural heritage conservation	24	34	42
Cultural identity strengthening	27	33	41
Cultural identity loss	42	34	24
Visitor influx	31	46	22
Employment generation	24	39	37
Economic benefits	35	37	27
City positioning	29	51	21
Business competitiveness	20	48	32
Tourism organization	30	53	18
Service regulation	24	41	35
New circuits	25	50	25
Tourism diversification	31	50	19
Huánuco Brand recognition	41	29	30
Visitor satisfaction	34	30	36

The perspective of visitors mirrors the businesses' assessments, with a predominance of neutral evaluations ranging from 31% to 53%. Nonetheless, visitors recognize certain advances, such as the Huánuco Brand (41%) and general satisfaction with tourism activities (36%). However, weaknesses are evident in areas considered essential for sustainability: 43% of respondents expressed negative views on public safety, 42% on heritage conservation, and 41% on cultural identity. These figures suggest that the absence of effective environmental and cultural policies diminishes the attractiveness of Huánuco as a sustainable destination. Moreover, despite efforts to diversify the offer and create new circuits, visitors perceive that these initiatives are insufficient or poorly articulated. This highlights the need to implement comprehensive policies that not only improve infrastructure but also reinforce identity, safety, and environmental management.

Table 5.

Comparative synthesis: businesses vs. visitors.

Dimension	Businesses (Trend)	Visitors (Trend)	General Conclusion
Municipal tourism management	Mainly Neutral-Regular	Mainly Neutral-Regular	Perceived as insufficient and bureaucratic
Sustainable tourism development	Mainly Neutral-Regular	Mainly Neutral-Regular	Advances recognized but limited impact
Overall assessment	Moderately Negative	Moderately Negative	Need for stronger municipal leadership and planning

Source: Consolidated analysis by the researcher.

The comparative synthesis underscores a shared perception between businesses and visitors: municipal tourism management and sustainable development are evaluated as moderately negative and insufficient. Both groups tend to rate most indicators as neutral, yet negative responses are substantial, especially regarding safety, cultural identity, and regulatory control. While businesses emphasize the lack of technical support, bureaucratic barriers, and weak investment policies, visitors highlight deficiencies in infrastructure, promotion, and effective participation. The convergence of these perspectives demonstrates that municipal leadership is perceived as reactive rather than proactive, with limited capacity to transform tourism into a driver of local development. The general conclusion is that Huánuco requires stronger planning, investment, and institutional coordination to reposition itself competitively as a sustainable destination at national and international levels.

4.2. Inferential Results

Table 6.

General hypothesis test: Chi-square and Kendall's Tau-b.

Test	Value	df	p-value	Interpretation
Chi-square (Pearson)	351.744	16	0.000	Significant association
Likelihood Ratio	285.193	16	0.000	Consistent with Chi-square
Linear-by-linear Association	173.880	1	0.000	Strong linear trend
Kendall's Tau-b	0.596	-	0.000	Moderate positive correlation

Source: Survey on municipal tourism management and sustainable tourism development.

The inferential analysis confirms that municipal tourism management has a significant influence on the sustainable development of tourism in Huánuco. The Chi-square test (Table 6) shows a Pearson value of 351.744 with a p-value < 0.001, which indicates a statistically significant association between the two variables. Likewise, the Kendall's Tau-b correlation ($\tau = 0.596$, $p < 0.001$) reveals a moderately positive relationship, suggesting that improvements in municipal management practices are associated with higher levels of sustainable tourism development. These findings highlight the importance of structured planning, investment strategies, and regulatory actions from local authorities to strengthen tourism outcomes.

Table 7.

Specific hypotheses: Chi-square and Kendall's Tau-b.

Specific Hypothesis	Chi-square (p-value)	Kendall's Tau-b	p-value	Interpretation
Visitor-oriented management	Significant ($p=0.000$)	0.262	0.000	Low positive association
Public-oriented management	Significant ($p=0.004$)	0.119	0.004	Very low positive association
Municipal management	Significant ($p=0.000$)	0.319	0.000	Low positive association

Source: Survey on municipal tourism management and sustainable tourism development.

Regarding the specific hypotheses (Table 7), the results provide additional insights into the different dimensions of municipal tourism management. For the visitor-oriented management dimension, the Kendall's Tau-b coefficient was 0.262 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a low but statistically significant positive correlation. This suggests that municipal initiatives aimed at enhancing the visitor experience have some effect on sustainable development, although the strength of this association is limited.

In contrast, the public-activity-oriented management dimension displayed an even weaker association ($\tau = 0.119$, $p = 0.004$). While statistically significant, this very low correlation underscores the limited impact of public initiatives, such as bureaucratic procedures or infrastructure-related services, on sustainable tourism outcomes. The evidence points to a need for municipalities to redesign and streamline these interventions in order to achieve stronger results.

The strongest association among the specific hypotheses was observed in the municipality's internal management practices ($\tau = 0.319$, $p < 0.001$). Although the correlation is classified as low, it is higher than the other dimensions. This finding suggests that internal planning, policy-making, and strategic

leadership by municipal authorities have a more tangible influence on tourism sustainability, but their overall effectiveness remains modest.

Taken together, these results suggest that while municipal management does play a significant role in sustainable tourism development, the strength of its influence varies considerably across dimensions. The general association is moderate, yet the specific dimensions demonstrate weak to low levels of correlation. This implies that Huánuco's municipality must not only maintain but also reinforce its strategic planning, coordination with stakeholders, and direct engagement with both visitors and the tourism sector to enhance sustainable outcomes.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that municipal management significantly influences the sustainable development of tourism in Huánuco. This aligns with previous literature that highlights the decisive role of local governments in coordinating tourism policies, investments, and partnerships to enhance sustainability [42]. The moderate association between municipal management and sustainable tourism development observed in this research supports the idea that effective planning and governance are fundamental to achieving economic, social, and environmental outcomes, as emphasized by Vera, et al. [3].

The findings of this study confirm that municipal tourism management exerts a significant influence on the sustainable development of tourism in Huánuco. This is consistent with the arguments of Acerenza [1] and Artaraz [10], who emphasize that sustainability requires coordinated governance models capable of integrating environmental, social, and economic dimensions. In Huánuco, the moderate correlation obtained demonstrates that while municipal actions have contributed to cultural preservation and visitor satisfaction, economic aspects such as investment and competitiveness remain weak, reflecting the systemic challenges outlined by Gallopín [11] regarding the multidimensional character of sustainability.

The weak performance in visitor-oriented management partially mirrors the problems noted by Gamarra Santillán [22], who identified structural deficits in municipal tourism planning, and by Beltrán and Dante [21], who demonstrated similar gaps in infrastructure and policy implementation in the same region. Despite the potential of Huánuco as a cultural and natural destination, the lack of coherent strategies reduces the impact of tourism on local development, echoing the concerns raised by Villena Elescano [4] about the underutilization of new destinations in Peru.

Public-activity-oriented management was the least effective dimension, suggesting bureaucratic inefficiencies and limited investment in facilities. This outcome aligns with González [14], who argued that governance failures weaken municipal leadership in tourism, and with Guerrero-Millán, et al. [43], who stressed that the absence of robust indicators hampers the consolidation of sustainable practices. Moreover, Altschuler [6] had already highlighted that municipalities with fragile institutional frameworks often struggle to translate development policies into measurable progress, a pattern also evident in Huánuco.

By contrast, internal municipal management showed the strongest, albeit moderate, association with sustainable development. This supports the position of Cayotopa Ylatoma [16], who demonstrated that integrated and participatory models designed by municipalities enhance cultural and economic offerings. Similarly, Rodríguez Zamora [18] found that local governments play a decisive role when they adopt strategic planning and participatory governance as tools for destination competitiveness. In Huánuco, however, these practices remain limited, requiring greater institutional capacity and collaboration with private actors.

Finally, the overall moderate relationship observed reflects the complexity of balancing sustainability's economic, social, cultural, and environmental pillars. As noted by Ballesteros [7] in Velarde [5] in northern Peru, tourism development often advances unevenly, with cultural and social aspects being recognized more than economic or environmental ones. The current results also reinforce Vera, et al. [3], who argued that effective destination planning must integrate territorial perspectives

and long-term strategies. Therefore, while Huánuco demonstrates progress in cultural identity and community participation, the municipality still faces significant challenges in transforming tourism into a driver of equitable and sustainable regional development.

In sum, the discussion reinforces that municipal management in Huánuco has a measurable impact on tourism sustainability, but its effectiveness is constrained by bureaucratic barriers, insufficient investment, and weak inter-institutional collaboration. Addressing these limitations requires adopting integrated approaches, as recommended by the World Tourism Organization [39], and prioritizing inclusive governance models that strengthen both economic and socio-cultural dimensions of tourism.

6. Conclusions

The findings of this study demonstrate that municipal tourism management in Huánuco exerts a measurable influence on the sustainable development of tourism, although the strength of the association remains moderate. Visitor-oriented strategies showed only limited effectiveness, reflecting weaknesses in infrastructure and promotional activities that restrict the capacity to enhance the tourist experience. Similarly, public-activity-oriented management displayed a weak correlation, revealing structural gaps in institutional coordination, public investment, and planning. In contrast, internal municipal management exhibited the strongest association, emphasizing the critical role of local governance, leadership, and strategic planning in aligning tourism growth with sustainability objectives. These results confirm that municipal governments are central actors in promoting tourism development, but their capacity remains constrained by bureaucratic inefficiencies and insufficient participatory mechanisms.

Overall, the study highlights the urgent need to consolidate governance frameworks that integrate cultural, social, and environmental dimensions into municipal decision-making. While Huánuco possesses significant cultural and natural resources, its sustainable exploitation requires greater coherence between national policies, such as those promoted by MINCETUR [23], and local implementation strategies. Strengthening collaboration between municipalities, private actors, and local communities is essential to ensure that tourism contributes not only to economic growth but also to cultural preservation and social well-being. The evidence presented underscores that achieving a sustainable and competitive tourism model in Huánuco demands stronger municipal leadership, targeted investments, and an inclusive vision that prioritizes long-term benefits for both residents and visitors.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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