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Public Private Partnership for Sustainable Tourism in Oman

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore the role of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in promoting sustainable tourism development in the Sultanate of Oman, emphasizing on their significance in terms of pooling of knowledge and capital, building the needed tourism infrastructure, safeguarding the ecosystem, heritage and the country's rich culture and traditions, etc. The study employed a quantitative research methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of PPPs in fostering sustainable tourism in Oman. A survey was administered using a structure questionnaire to assess the alignment of PPPs with Oman's sustainable tourism initiatives. Using snowball sampling, data was collected from 35 key stakeholders involved in sustainable tourism in Oman. Multiple regression analysis was employed using SPSS software to study the impact of PPPs on sustainable tourism. The study affirmed that PPPs would ensure pooling of knowledge and environmental protection thereby having significant impact on tourism development in Oman, while the influence of PPPs on infrastructure development and capital accumulation for tourism growth is found to be negligible. The study revealed that stable political environment, prudent governance and social/community support to be the critical success factors for strengthening PPPs while emphasizing on the need for effective risk management practices and accurate cost-benefit analysis to further strengthen the partnership between the two sectors. The study concludes by offering both theoretical and practical implications to the policymakers and industry leaders for positioning Oman as one of the preferred global tourism destinations.

Keywords: *Critical Success Factors, Economic Diversification, PPP, Sustainable Tourism, etc.*

Introduction

Tourism is one of the key industries in the world with regard to its contribution to the global GDP, employment that it generates, infrastructural development that it propels and the international connections that it builds. It plays a vital role in relation to sustainable development as it boosts economic progress, social welfare and conservation of nature and environment (Ibanescu, B.C. et. al., 2018). Across the globe, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are playing a dominant role in developing travel infrastructure and tourism promotion alongside mitigating the tourism challenges like resource depletion, ecosystem conservation, etc. (Hall, 2019; OECD, 2021; UNWTO, 2019). The governments in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region are eyeing to diversify their economies to reduce their dependency on hydrocarbons. PPPs are considered by the economies like the Saudi Arabia and UAE in their initiatives to emerge as global tourism destinations (Oxford Business Group, 2022).

The Sultanate of Oman is a land of unparalleled tourist attractions like the scenic wadi's, golden deserts, beautiful beaches and mountains, alongside other tourist attractions like sand skiing in the desert, trekking, camel racing, etc. Also, events like the Muscat Festival, Kharif Festival held in Salalah during the month of August, etc. are noteworthy tourist attractions that the country owns. The versatility in Oman's topography and the hospitality of the Omani's makes it an interesting place for tourism. Such tourist attractions can significantly encourage tourist footfalls as well as stimulates other socio-economic activities (Ifegbo, 2005), thereby leading to the progress and prosperity of the country (Cooper, 2006).

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The accelerating demand for entertaining activities in locations with huge tourism possibilities have required the private sector contribution in tourism growth (Swarbroke, 2006). Oman is not an exception for the same. This makes PPPs in tourism, the need of the hour in Oman. This collaboration requires the stakeholders to operate towards a common goal and vision of promoting tourism by sharing the risks, costs, responsibilities and authority to bring in mutually benefiting results (Wang, H., Xiong, W. and Wu, G., 2018). This process of collaboration has the potential to allow both the sectors to bring together a rewarding blend of their resources, knowledge, skill and investment (Plummer et al.,2006) for achieving a common vision. Also, factors like good governance, staunch leadership and managerial know-how, when properly executed, guarantees the success of such partnership formula (Mulyani, S., 2021).

This study is an attempt to examine the possible benefits of PPPs in accelerating sustainable tourism in Oman, with emphasis on their contributions towards tourism infrastructure development, pooling of resources like knowledge, capital, etc. and environmental protection while suggesting the policy makers with the strategies and best practices to propel Oman's sustainable tourism initiatives.

Statement of the Problem

Tourism undoubtedly contributes to the conservation of environment, historical and cultural heritage of a country, brings in the most needed economic and social change, promulgates peace through interaction and dialogue, creates employment and income, etc. Thus, tourism can become a vital tool in socio-economic development of a nation (Scheyvens, R. and Biddulph, R., 2018).

However, in countries with accelerating tourism traffic, the intangible and indirect economic costs of tourism are very much evident. As tourism involves the amalgamation of other components like transportation, communication, accommodation, etc., it cannot be managed solely by the government. Therefore, the PPP is a must for leading tourism practices to achieve greater sustainability (Liburd, J., Duedahl, E. and Heape, C., 2022) and achievement of other sustainable development objectives (Cheng, Z. et. al., 2021; Wang, N. and Ma, M., 2021).

This study emphasizes on filling the gap in knowledge about public private collaboration in the area under study. The study specifically focuses on the issues like exploring the priority areas of collaboration between the two sectors in tourism, retaining the socio-economic advantages of tourism development, mitigating any unwanted consequences of tourism development on the nature, heritage, culture and society.

Objectives

This research is based on the following aims.

- To identify and prioritize key areas where PPPs can contribute to sustainable tourism development in Oman.
- To study the critical success factors that impact the effectiveness of PPPs in promoting sustainable tourism in Oman.
- To provide strategic insights for leveraging PPPs in priority areas and ensure success in Oman's sustainable tourism initiatives.

Literature Review

This section gives a clear picture of past literature analyzed on the priority areas for PPPs role in sustainable tourism development along with critical success factors.

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Priority areas for PPPs in sustainable tourism development

PPPs are emerging as essential mechanisms for promoting global sustainable tourism initiatives. They are playing a dominant role in areas like developing tourism infrastructure, safeguarding the ecosystems, conservation of cultural and heritage sites, etc. (UNWTO, 2019). The development of Costa Rica's eco-lodges which emphasizes on renewable energy, the Kakadu national park of Australia which is inclined on biodiversity conservation and tourism promotion are examples of some successful PPP projects that demonstrate how these partnerships can amalgamate the sustainability objectives with economic growth and environmental protection (Hall, 2019; Spenceley, 2018).

In the GCC, PPPs are gaining traction owing to the governments' efforts for economic diversification to reduce oil dependency in those countries. With increasing inclination of these countries towards sustainable tourism initiatives, areas like luxury eco-resorts, sustainable infrastructure and cultural tourism, etc. are gaining momentum (Oxford Business Group, 2022). Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Project, is one such huge PPP initiative that is aimed at developing a sustainable tourism destination powered by renewable energy which is both luxurious while at the same time preserves marine biodiversity (Saudi Vision 2030, 2021). By investing in green tourism infrastructure and smart city technologies, UAE is aiming to position itself as a global leader in sustainable tourism (UNWTO, 2020). Despite the relentless efforts, GCC is facing challenges with regard to integrating sustainability initiatives into large-scale tourism projects, monitoring inconsistencies, involving local communities, etc. (Hall, 2019). Henceforth, governments are paying attention to capitalize on PPP frameworks that align with global sustainability standards (OECD, 2021).

Oman started leveraging PPPs for sustainable tourism in line with its Vision 2040, which highlight tourism as one of the pillars of economic diversification (Oman Vision 2040, 2020). The priority areas for PPPs in the Sultanate of Oman include tourism infrastructure development, eco-tourism, preserving the country's rich culture and heritage. Another key area is the development of Oman's transport infrastructure specially in places like Jebel Akhdar and Dhofar. Due to the rugged landscapes in these areas, ample investments in eco-friendly transportation systems are needed to improve accessibility while minimizing the environmental impact. PPPs have marked their success in the Sultanate by building its national highway network and integrated public transport systems (World Bank, 2018).

PPPs have a larger scope to boast Oman's cultural tourism, given the Sultanate's rich heritage and other UNESCO listed sites like the Bahla Fort. Investments can be pumped towards restoring these popular historical sites through PPPs. Oman has experienced the governments partnership with private heritage foundations in restoring Muttrah Souq, which is now a famous tourist destination in the country (UNESCO, 2020). Oman is considering PPPs in sustainable waste management systems and renewable energy projects. Furthermore, there are areas like sustainable desalination plants, solar=powered resorts, tourism infrastructure development, eco-friendly initiatives, etc. where PPPs can be emphasized on to emerge as a leading tourism destination in the Middle East (Spenceley, 2018; Oman Vision 2040, 2020).

Critical Success Factors for Ppps in Sustainable Tourism

The success of PPPs in promoting sustainable tourism depends on several factors. Politically, supportive policies and government stability are required to facilitate PPPs (UNWTO, 2020). On the economic front, pooling of resources between the two sectors is required to ensure substantial investments in sustainable tourism projects (OECD, 2021). Socially, engaging local communities is essential to guarantee social equity while fostering cultural sustainability through safeguarding heritage and traditions (Spenceley, 2018). With regard to technology, innovation in tourism management systems and environmentally, aligning tourism development initiatives with global standards to minimize damage to the ecosystem are of great importance (Hall, 2019). Strict legal framework ensures that the participants in the PPP adhere to sustainability standards and obtains rightful benefits (Spenceley, 2018).

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In the GCC, the governments are very optimistic about tourism as one of their strategies for economic diversification. Economically, GCC countries has significant wealth accumulated from oil and gas exports that enable governments to offer funding initiatives to attract private partners (OECD, 2021). Also, the growing social awareness about the need for cultural preservation can fetch community participation in sustainable tourism initiatives (UNWTO, 2020). Also, the GCC is investing in smart tourism initiatives, particularly in areas like Dubai, thereby setting new standards in the country's tourism industry (World Bank, 2018). The GCC countries are committed to reduce carbon footprints, particularly in eco-tourism and desert resorts (UNWTO, 2020). Stringent environmental regulations in the GCC can result in Minimizing negative environmental impacts (OECD, 2021).

In Oman, the critical success factors for sustainable tourism includes prudent governance and community involvement. Politically Oman's Vision 2040 paves a strong strategic direction for the country's sustainable tourism initiatives (Oman Vision, 2040, 2020). Public private collaboration can help in materializing large-scale tourism projects in Oman (Oxford Business Group, 2022). From the social perspective, involving local communities is crucial for the success of sustainable tourism projects which is evident from the Ras Al Jinz Turtle Researve project which attracted huge local support (UNESCO, 2020). Environmentally, Oman's landscapes, desserts and coastline provides ample scope for the two sectors to collaborate and work wonders (Spenceley, 2018). Legally, strict regulations with regard to adherence to sustainability principles, laws relating to land use, conservation and waste management are critical for the success of tourism initiatives as well as for the economic growth (World Bank, 2018). Also, the development of smart tourism infrastructure enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of the Sultanate's tourism initiatives.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative research methodology as it allows to quantify variables and statistically understand the relationships between them (Creswell, 2014). The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. Using snowball sampling, data was collected from 35 key stakeholders involved in sustainable tourism in Oman. Questionnaire has been segmented into 3 parts namely:

Segment 1: demographic details of the respondents including gender, age, academic qualification, type and experience in the business.

Segment 2: priority areas for Public Private Partnership (PPP) in sustainable tourism development. The four factors on which data has been collected are: Pooling of Knowledge (POK), Capital (CAP), Infrastructure facilities (IF) and Environment (ENV).

Segment 3: Critical Success Factors for Public-Private-Partnership to promote Sustainable Tourism Development. This segment includes 12 questions statements.

The questionnaire was based on 5-point of Likert-scale questions to enable objective assessment of responses as well as make statistical analysis of trends and patterns faster (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). As SPSS software can handle big datasets and perform both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, it is utilized to examine the collected data (Pallant, 2020). Multiple regression analysis was employed using SPSS software to study the impact of PPPs on Oman's sustainable tourism initiatives.

Results

The results segment gives a summary of data collected and analyzed. The results are divided into 2 segments.

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Segment 1:

Data on priority areas for Public Private Partnership (PPP) in sustainable tourism development has been analyzed and presented.

Table 1. Validity

Factor	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
DES	0.985	0.987	0.987	0.863
CAP	0.787	0.964	0.898	0.815
ENV	0.963	0.964	0.976	0.931
IF	0.901	0.905	0.938	0.835
POK	0.905	0.920	0.940	0.839

Cronbach's alpha assesses the internal consistency of a construct, indicating reliability. A value above 0.70 suggests acceptable reliability. All factors except CAP (0.787) exceed 0.9, indicating excellent reliability. CAP is acceptable but slightly lower compared to the others.

Composite reliability (rho_a and rho_c) measures the construct's reliability, similar to Cronbach's alpha, but is considered more robust. A value above 0.70 is deemed reliable. All factors show excellent composite reliability with rho_a and rho_c values exceeding 0.9, reflecting strong consistency. CAP's rho_a (0.964) highlights its reliability, despite its slightly lower Cronbach's alpha.

Average variance (AVE) indicates the proportion of variance captured by the construct compared to the variance due to measurement error. A value above 0.50 is acceptable, indicating convergent validity. All factors exceed the threshold, with AVE values ranging from 0.815 (CAP) to 0.931 (ENV). This shows that the constructs explain a significant portion of variance and have strong convergent validity.

The constructs DES, CAP, ENV, IF, and POK demonstrate high reliability and validity. While CAP's Cronbach's alpha is slightly lower than the others, its composite reliability and AVE confirm its robustness. All constructs meet the requirements for internal consistency and convergent validity.

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

Factor	DES	CAP	ENV	IF
DES				
CAP	0.376			
ENV	0.730	0.319		
IF	0.665	0.498	0.793	
POK	0.811	0.301	0.587	0.683

Discriminant validity assesses whether constructs are distinct from each other, ensuring that a construct measures what it is intended to, and not overlapping significantly with others. The table likely represents correlation coefficients between the factors. Threshold for Discriminant Validity is typically, correlations below 0.85 suggest acceptable discriminant validity, meaning the constructs are distinct. High correlations (>0.85) may indicate overlapping constructs, requiring further investigation.

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Table 3. Discriminant Validity - Interpretation

Factors	Interpretation
DES and CAP	Correlation = 0.376. Low correlation, indicating distinct constructs.
DES and ENV	Correlation = 0.730. Moderate correlation but still distinct constructs.
DES and IF	Correlation = 0.665. Moderate correlation, showing they are distinct constructs.
DES and POK	Correlation = 0.811. High correlation, nearing the threshold but still within acceptable limits.
CAP and ENV	Correlation = 0.319. Low correlation, indicating clear distinction between constructs.
CAP and IF	Correlation = 0.498. Moderate correlation, showing distinct constructs.
CAP and POK	Correlation = 0.301. Low correlation, confirming clear distinction.

Discriminant Validity is Established, as all constructs show correlations below 0.85, which confirms they are distinct. Higher Correlations Observed: The correlation between DES and POK (0.811) is relatively high, but still within the acceptable range. ENV and IF (0.793) show a strong association but remain distinct. The factors in the study generally demonstrate good discriminant validity, confirming the constructs are distinct and measure unique aspects of the concept being studied. Some higher correlations (e.g., DES with POK) may warrant closer scrutiny to ensure clear differentiation.

Table 4. Structural Model Analysis

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
CAP -> DES	0.104	0.086	0.185	0.565	0.572
ENV -> DES	0.438	0.478	0.256	1.711	0.087
IF -> DES	-0.087	-0.073	0.274	0.317	0.751
POK -> DES	0.559	0.519	0.157	3.566	0.000

Path-by-path analysis is given below:

CAP → DES Path Coefficient (O): 0.104. Indicates a small positive effect of CAP on DES, but the effect size is negligible. T Statistics: 0.565, The t-statistic is well below the threshold of 1.96 (for a 95% confidence level), suggesting the effect is not significant. P Value: 0.572. A p-value greater than 0.05 confirms that the relationship is not statistically significant.

Summary: CAP (Capital) has no significant impact on DES (Dependent Variable). Its small positive coefficient may imply a potential but weak contribution to DES that is not strong enough to be considered meaningful.

ENV → DES Path Coefficient (O): 0.438. Suggests a moderate positive relationship between ENV and DES, indicating that ENV could have an influence on DES. T Statistics: 1.711, The t-statistic approaches but does not exceed the critical value of 1.96, indicating borderline significance. P Value: 0.087. A p-value just above the 0.05 threshold suggests marginal insignificance.

Summary: While ENV (Environment) appears to have a noticeable impact on DES, the lack of statistical significance indicates that this relationship is not strong enough to draw reliable conclusions.

IF → DES Path Coefficient (O): -0.087. Reflects a very weak negative relationship between IF and DES, implying an inverse effect. However, the effect size is minimal. T Statistics: 0.317, The t-statistic is far below the critical value of 1.96, indicating no significance. P Value: 0.751, A high p-value confirms that the relationship is not statistically significant.

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Summary: IF (Infrastructure) does not meaningfully impact DES.

POK → DES Path Coefficient (O): 0.559. Indicates a strong positive effect of POK on DES, making it the most influential predictor. T Statistics: 3.566, The t-statistic far exceeds the critical value of 1.96, confirming statistical significance. P Value: 0.000, A p-value of 0.000 (less than 0.01) signifies high confidence in the result.

Summary: POK (Pooling of Knowledge) has a significant and strong positive effect on DES, making it a key driver of the dependent variable.

Overall Summary

Significant Predictor: Among all factors, POK is the only statistically significant predictor of DES, with a strong and positive effect (coefficient = 0.559).

Borderline Significance: ENV shows a moderate positive relationship with DES, but it narrowly misses statistical significance (p = 0.087).

Insignificant Predictors: CAP and IF show no statistically significant impact on DES, with minimal coefficients and high p-values.

Segment 2

Data collected on Critical Success Factors for Public-Private-Partnership to promote Sustainable Tourism Development has been analyzed and presented.

Table 5. Critical Success Factors for Public-Private-Partnership

Statements	SDA	DA	N	A	SA
1. Stable political system and Good Governance	2.86%	2.86%	8.57%	37.14%	48.57%
2. Favorable legal framework and regulations	2.86%	2.86%	8.57%	42.86%	42.86%
3. Effective risk management	2.86%	0.00%	11.43%	42.86%	42.86%
4. Financial feasibility and adherence to budget	2.86%	0.00%	11.43%	48.57%	37.14%
5. Favorable investment environment	2.86%	2.86%	8.57%	42.86%	42.86%
6. A realistic assessment of the cost and benefits	5.71%	0.00%	11.43%	45.71%	37.14%
7. Local economic development	2.86%	5.71%	8.57%	37.14%	45.71%
8. Stable macroeconomic environment	2.86%	2.86%	11.43%	40.00%	42.86%
9. Effective technology transfer and innovation	2.86%	2.86%	8.57%	45.71%	40.00%
10. Reliable and quality service operations	2.86%	0.00%	11.43%	42.86%	42.86%
11. Social and community support	2.86%	0.00%	8.57%	42.86%	45.71%
12. Commitment and responsibility of public and private sectors	2.86%	2.86%	5.71%	45.71%	42.86%

Across most statements, the highest responses fall under Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA) categories. This suggests a positive perception of the factors being evaluated. Neutral responses (N) range between 8.57% and 11.43%, indicating minimal indecisiveness among respondents. Strong disagreement (SDA) and disagreement (DA) combined are low, generally staying below 6%, which indicates minimal negative perception.

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Statements with the Strongest Agreement

Statement 1 (Stable political system and Good Governance): 85.71% of respondents chose Agree or Strongly Agree. Statement 7 (Local economic development): 82.85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Statement 11 (Social and community support): 88.57% of respondents selected Agree or Strongly Agree, showing strong support for this factor.

Statements with the Lowest Agreement

While still positive overall, Statement 6 (A realistic assessment of cost and benefits) had slightly lower agreement, with 82.85% Agree or Strongly Agree and a higher Neutral (11.43%) and Strong Disagree (5.71%).

Statements with the Most Neutral Responses:

Statement 3 (Effective risk management) and Statement 8 (Stable macroeconomic environment) each have 11.43% Neutral responses, indicating some uncertainty or lack of opinion in these areas.

Minimal Negative Responses

Disagreement levels are low across all statements, with Disagree (DA) responses generally at or below 2.86% and Strong Disagree (SDA) similarly low. This indicates minimal dissatisfaction among respondents.

Overall Analysis

The data reveals strong support for all the listed factors, with most respondents perceiving them positively. This indicates that these factors are generally well-regarded or present in the context being evaluated.

The high percentage of agreement for factors like Stable political system, Favorable legal framework, and Social and community support suggests these are critical strengths in the environment being assessed.

Areas like Risk Management and Realistic assessment of cost/benefits may require more focus to reduce uncertainty among stakeholders, given their relatively higher Neutral responses.

Discussion

The analysis of data on the priority areas for Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in sustainable tourism development revealed insightful findings regarding the factors influencing the development process. The reliability and validity of the constructs used in the analysis were confirmed, with all factors demonstrating excellent reliability, except for the Capital (CAP) construct, which showed slightly lower Cronbach's alpha (0.787), though still acceptable. The high Composite Reliability (rho_a and rho_c) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) further supported the robustness of the constructs.

The analysis of discriminant validity confirmed that all factors were distinct, with correlations remaining below 0.85, thus ensuring that each construct measures a unique aspect of sustainable tourism development. Notably, the correlation between Pooling of Knowledge (POK) and Developmental Environment (DES) was high (0.811), but still within the acceptable range, suggesting that these two factors are closely related but distinct.

The structural model analysis revealed that POK had the strongest and most significant impact on DES, indicating that the pooling of knowledge between public and private sectors is a key driver in advancing sustainable tourism initiatives. Environmental factors (ENV) also showed a moderate influence on DES, though the relationship was not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, while other factors like Infrastructure (IF) and Capital (CAP) did not demonstrate significant effects.

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In the second segment, the Critical Success Factors for PPP in promoting sustainable tourism were evaluated. The results showed that most respondents strongly agreed on the importance of a stable political system, local economic development, and social/community support for the success of PPPs in sustainable tourism. On the other hand, factors such as effective risk management and realistic cost-benefit assessments received a higher percentage of neutral responses, indicating some uncertainty or lack of consensus among stakeholders.

Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the key factors influencing PPPs in sustainable tourism development. The results highlight Pooling of Knowledge (POK) as the most influential predictor for the successful development of sustainable tourism, underlining the importance of collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors. Environmental factors also play a crucial role, though their impact may need further investigation due to marginal statistical significance. Infrastructure and Capital factors were found to have negligible impacts.

The analysis of Critical Success Factors for PPPs indicated strong support for factors such as a stable political environment, effective governance, and social/community support. These factors are seen as vital for fostering a conducive environment for PPPs. However, there is a need for further focus on enhancing risk management practices and ensuring accurate cost-benefit assessments, as some uncertainty remains in these areas.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of sustainable tourism development through PPPs by emphasizing the central role of knowledge pooling between stakeholders. It extends existing literature by confirming that while environmental and infrastructural factors are important, the collaborative knowledge exchange between sectors plays a pivotal role. The findings suggest that the concept of social capital in PPPs, especially in tourism, is a key area for further exploration in the context of sustainability. The study concludes by offering both theoretical and practical implications for policymakers and industry leaders to make Oman as one of the preferred global tourism destinations.

Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that policymakers and industry leaders should prioritize fostering collaborations between public and private sectors to pool resources, share expertise, and promote sustainable tourism development. Special attention should be given to enhancing governance structures, ensuring stable political environments, and securing community involvement to ensure the success of PPP initiatives. Additionally, there is a need for focused strategies to improve risk management practices and more accurate cost-benefit analyses, which will help reduce uncertainties and bolster stakeholder confidence in PPP projects.

Future Research Dimensions

The researchers also suggest the following future research dimensions on the topic.

- Effect of Digital Transformation on PPP in Sustainable Tourism: Investigate how digital tools like AI, Big Data, and IoT can enhance the efficiency and success of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in sustainable tourism development.

Community Engagement in PPP for Sustainable Tourism: Explore the role of local community involvement and stakeholder collaboration in ensuring the long-term success of PPPs in tourism projects focused on sustainability.

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