



Leadership Dynamics in Managing Sustainable Destination Weddings: A Strategic Framework for Future Tourism Leaders

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Abstract

Destination weddings are emerging as a significant niche within the global tourism industry, immersing experiential travel with personalized commemoration. However, the rapid growth of this sector requires concerns about environmental sustainability, cultural sensitivity, and community inclusion. This study explores the role of leadership in managing sustainable destination weddings and proposes a strategic framework to guide future tourism leaders.

Using a qualitative research approach, the study demands cross-sector collaboration in the study area. It focuses on key stakeholders involved in destination weddings, including wedding planners, tourism boards, and local authorities in popular destinations for destination weddings. The research highlights the importance of adaptive and ethical leadership in balancing stakeholder interests, ensuring sustainability, and enhancing the destination's brand image. The outcome is a strategic framework recommending the LEADS model for the future of the destination wedding industry. This study emphasizes innovation, collaboration, and community-centered planning to support sustainable development in destination wedding.

Keywords

Leadership, Sustainability, Destination Weddings, Tourism Management, Strategic Framework

Introduction

Destination wedding is a niche form of tourism. This has emerged as a great contributor for the development of the destination. This study focuses on how visionary leaders guide planning, coordination and their sustainability practices in destination weddings. It highlights the role of leadership in balancing stakeholder interests, fostering innovation and ensuring cultural and environmental responsibility. Destination weddings have gained significant popularity, driven by emotional and economic factors, as well as the desire for unique experiences. They are unique in its

nature by minimising environmental impact, preserving cultural heritage and promoting local communities. Indian destination weddings motivate couples to select the destination based on the factors such as scenic beauty, cultural uniqueness and overall ambience of the location (Akhil & Deepak, 2023). Along with that wedding are emotional and social motivations, such as the desire to incorporate cultural elements or to create a special bond with family and friends in a unique setting and play a crucial role (Chiappa & Fortezza, 2018). They also often driven by the desire for a unique and memorable experience, which is a significant factor in choosing a destination wedding. This includes the allure of combining the wedding with a vacation-like experience for both the couple and their guests (Chiappa & Fortezza, 2018).

Gesture of welcoming means everything for the couples. Globally the growth of destination wedding created a milestone. Countries like Italy, Thailand, Mexico and Thailand known for its rich cultural heritage and stunning landscapes. Thailand offers a blend of nature and tradition, making it a popular choice for destination weddings. They provide a variety of venues, from beach resorts to historic temples, catering to both traditional and modern wedding styles (Sirivadhanawaravachara, 2024). New Zealand promotes a 'natural' and 'romantic' destination, New Zealand's landscapes, such as glaciers and beaches, are integral to its appeal for destination weddings. These settings are marketed as part of the wedding experience, enhancing the romantic and exotic allure (Johnston, 2006). India is unique country with all potentials competing highly with others. The global destination wedding market was valued approximately \$39.2 billion in 2024(IMRC, 2025). It is projected to see the substantial growth, with some report forecasting the market to reach \$73.38 billion by 2030 and 171.1 billion by 2033(IMRC, 2025). As growth rates are increasing since, destination weddings offer unique experiences, they also face challenges such as legal requirements and cultural considerations, which can vary significantly by location. The major challenges in managing the sustainable destination weddings include the ecological footprint, commercialisation of culture community exclusion and seasonal resource burdens all of which can undermine both environmental sustainability and social equity. (find out any supporting document)

The trend towards destination wedding has led to various impacts on local economies, cultural preservation, and environmental considerations. Destination weddings contribute substantially to local economies through the consumption of goods and services, including attire, food, and entertainment (Sudrajat, 2023). In Thailand, the wedding tourism sector is bolstered by its rich cultural heritage and diverse venues, enhancing economic growth through tourism-related spending (Sirivadhanawaravachara, 2024). The South African wedding industry also reflects this trend, with floral venues being particularly popular, although they face challenges from climate change affecting floral availability (Mahlangu & Fitchett, 2019). Weddings often embody traditional values that reinforce cultural identity, as seen in various global contexts (Sudrajat, 2023). In Thailand, traditional ceremonies and rituals not only attract couples but also serve to preserve local customs and heritage (Sirivadhanawaravachara, 2024). The wedding tourism sector is increasingly vulnerable to climate change, particularly in regions reliant on natural beauty for venues (Mahlangu & Fitchett, 2019). There is a growing need for adaptive strategies to mitigate these environmental threats, ensuring the sustainability of wedding tourism (Mahlangu & Fitchett, 2019). While destination weddings offer numerous benefits, they also pose challenges, particularly regarding environmental sustainability and the preservation of cultural integrity. Balancing these factors is crucial for the future of wedding.

Research Gaps: Community involvement serves as a central pillar of tourism development and effective leadership plays a crucial role in fostering this engagement in sustainability. This is essential for the sustainable development of tourism destinations, including those hosting destination weddings (Than et al, 2020). There is limited research exists on how leaders' demographic and psychological

traits influence their commitment to sustainability. Future studies should investigate these dimensions to provide deeper insights into the dynamic of sustainable leadership (Mahran, et al 2025).

Research questions

How do leadership styles influence the integration of sustainable practices in managing destination wedding?

What leadership competencies are essential for future tourism leaders to balance stakeholder collaboration, cultural sensitivity and environmental sustainability in destination wedding management?

Literature Review

To understand the role of leadership in sustainable destination management and to support the research paper on leadership dynamics in managing sustainable destinations literature provides several insights and frameworks synthesised.

There is a demand for expanding and refining leadership theories to better account for the complexities of the tourism sector, with a focus on digital transformation, sustainability, and the long-term effects of global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Ishani & Arun, 2024). Effective destination management requires the development of collective leadership capacity to build stakeholder networks that drive sustainable change at various levels (Yoon, 2024). Effective stakeholder participation is crucial for sustainable tourism, and frameworks like the Multi-Stakeholder Involvement Management (MSIM) framework can guide the integration and management of stakeholder involvement (Yaohua, 2022). Transformational and Responsible Leadership theories are frequently employed to understand the impact of leadership on sustainability performance in organizations, particularly in the hospitality sector (Yoong, 2024). Sustainable Leadership style emphasizes balancing economic, social, and environmental goals, highlighting the importance of leaders in integrating these aspects (Piyachat, 2019 & Yaohua, 2022). Effective governance structures are essential for implementing sustainable practices. These structures should be transparent, participatory, and capable of coordinating among various stakeholders (Sofik, 2024). The role of DMOs as leadership networks is fundamental in influencing destination development trajectories through management, governance, and leadership interactions (Dean & Anita, 2015) 10. Destination governance support in integrating smart tourism approaches with governance theory can enhance sustainable competitiveness by ensuring effective coordination and community involvement (Luisa & Roberto, 2021).

Theoretical Background for the study

The study of leadership dynamics in managing sustainable destination weddings is supported by several theories from the fields of leadership and sustainable tourism. Through this understand how leadership can influence sustainability and its outcomes in destination weddings.

Distributed Leadership (DL): Distributed leadership involves shared leadership responsibilities across multiple stakeholders, promoting collaboration and resource sharing.

The application of DL is particularly relevant in the context of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), where it provides a framework for coping with changes in funding and governance landscapes (Nick, et. al., 2021). This approach helps in embedding shared forms of leadership to manage sustainable destination weddings effectively.

Relational Leadership Theory (RLT): Relational leadership theory highlights the importance of relationships and collaboration in driving sustainable practices.

In application to RLT can magnify the dynamics involving individuals who implement corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices, emphasizing collectivity and collaboration (Ofelia, et. al, 2023). This theory can be used to understand how leaders in destination weddings can motivate and retain employees through sustainable practices.

Responsible Leadership Theory: Responsible leadership involves responding to stakeholder needs and innovating considering new challenges. Responsible leadership is crucial in transforming the tourism and hospitality industry towards sustainability, especially in response to crises like COVID-19 (Mehmet, et. al, 2023). Leaders in destination weddings can adopt responsible leadership to balance stakeholder interests and drive sustainable practices.

Challenges Leaders Face in Promoting Sustainable Destination Weddings

Promoting sustainable destination weddings presents several challenges for leaders, which can be categorized into social, environmental, and operational aspects. Here are the key challenges identified:

Social Challenges

Convincing Stakeholders: One significant challenge is persuading traditional stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices. For instance, convincing older generations to accept digital invitations instead of traditional paper ones can be difficult (Leah, 2009).

Community Engagement: Leaders must foster community participation and ensure that local communities are involved in sustainable tourism development. This requires effective communication and collaboration among various stakeholders, including community leaders, government officials, and local businesses (Daycho, et.al,2023).

Environmental Challenges

Carbon Footprint: Destination weddings often involve travel, which increases the carbon footprint. Leaders need to address the environmental impact of guests traveling long distances (Mc Laren,2009).

Sustainable Practices: Implementing sustainable practices such as using organic materials and reducing waste can be challenging due to higher costs and limited availability of eco-friendly options (Mc Laren,2009) (Kevin & Donqui,2025) .

Operational Challenges

Coordination and Governance: Effective governance and coordination among multiple stakeholders, including governmental and non-governmental organizations, are crucial. Leaders must ensure continuity and long-term commitment to sustainable practices (Nancy et.al, 2018) (Marco et.al, 2023).

Financial Constraints: Sustainable practices can be more expensive, and securing funding for these initiatives is often a significant barrier. This includes costs associated with eco-friendly materials, sustainable transport solutions, and other green practices (Kevin & Donqui, 2025) (Alexander, et.al, 2025).

Knowledge and Awareness: There is often a lack of knowledge and awareness about sustainable practices among stakeholders, including wedding planners, vendors, and guests. This necessitates education and training programs to build capacity and promote sustainable behaviours (Kevin & Donqui, 2025) (Ngoni, et. al, 2023).

Technological and Marketing Challenges

Utilizing Technology: Leveraging technology to promote sustainable practices and enhance the guest experience is essential. However, integrating innovative solutions like immersive journalism and metaverse-based content requires significant investment and technical expertise (Xiaozhe, et.al,2023).

Destination Image: Creating a unique and sustainable destination image that differentiates from other locations is challenging. Leaders must address issues of homogeneity and over-commercialization to maintain the destination's unique appeal (Xue, et.al, 2023) (Shilpi, et.al, 2025).

Why is Leadership role required in Managing Sustainable Destination Weddings?

Sustainable destination management requires the involvement and cooperation of various stakeholders, including local communities, businesses, and government entities. Leaders are pivotal in fostering collective leadership capacity, which is necessary to build effective stakeholder networks that drive change at multiple levels (Marcela, et.al, 2022) (Andrus, et.al, 2020) (Richard & Bjarne, 2004). Leaders facilitate communication and cooperation among stakeholders, ensuring that everyone is aligned with the sustainable development goals and working towards common objectives (Andrus, et.al, 2020) (Bozena, et.al, 2016). Leaders are responsible for strategic planning and the implementation of sustainable practices. This includes designing, planning, and organizing events in a way that balances economic, social, and environmental impacts (Gregori, et.al, 2013) (David, 2019). They play a critical role in developing and executing strategies that enhance the resilience and sustainability of tourism destinations, particularly in the face of challenges such as climate change and over-tourism (David, 2019) (Kim, et.al, 2025). Leadership in sustainable destination weddings involves the ability to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances. This includes adopting new concepts and practices that promote sustainability, such as distributed leadership and systemic leadership approaches (Harald & et. Al, 2014) (Nick, et.al, 2021). Leaders must be capable of critical thinking and ethical decision-making to navigate the complexities of sustainable tourism and event management (Siti, 2025). Effective leaders use tools and indicators to monitor and evaluate the performance of events, ensuring that they contribute positively to the destination's sustainability goals (Gregori, et.al, 2013) (Raja & Adnan, 2012). They are also responsible for assessing the impact of events on the local community and environment, making necessary adjustments to improve outcomes (Gregori, et.al, 2013) (Evangelia, et. al, 2022).

Significant Roles Leaders Play in Managing Sustainable Destination Weddings

Facilitating Collaboration:

Leaders bring together diverse stakeholders to collaborate on sustainable initiatives, ensuring that all voices are heard and that there is a shared commitment to sustainability (Marcela, et.al, 2022) (Andrus, et.al, 2020) (Bozena, et.al, 2016).

Driving Change:

By fostering a culture of sustainability, leaders inspire and motivate stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices and make necessary changes to achieve long-term goals (Marcela, et.al, 2022) (Richard & Bjarne, 2004) (Harald & et. Al, 2014).

Ensuring Accountability:

Leaders hold stakeholders accountable for their actions, ensuring that everyone adheres to agreed-upon sustainability standards and practices (Gregori, et.al, 2013) (Raja & Adnan, 2012).

Promoting Education and Awareness: Leaders play a key role in educating stakeholders and the public about the importance of sustainability, promoting awareness and encouraging responsible behaviour (Evangelia, et. al, 2022) (Tazim & Melanie, 2013).

What is LEADS model?

Based on the context of sustainable tourism and event management, it can be inferred that LEADS could be an abbreviation or framework related to sustainable practices in destination management. The study can only hypothesize its components based on common sustainable tourism principles. The LEADS model is not explicitly mentioned or developed by any researcher.

The various literatures supported to frame the given model. By following the LEADS model, destinations can develop in a way that is sustainable, competitive, and beneficial for all stakeholders involved. This model integrates insights from various studies and emphasizes the importance of leveraging unique resources, engaging stakeholders, assessing impacts, developing infrastructure, and promoting sustainable practices (Elitua, et.al, 2024) (Abdul, et. al, 2024) (Martin, 2018) (Bozena, 2016) (Rachel, 2025) (Scherle, 2021) (Seville, 2009) (Irhanida & Chew, 2024). The adoption of this framework support in managing and evident source in the application of sustainability at the destination wedding canterers.

Recommendation of the LEADS Model for Destination Wedding Development.

L - Leverage Unique Resources

Valuable, Rare, Inimitable Resources: Destinations should focus on leveraging their unique, valuable, rare, and inimitable resources to create distinctive tourist experiences. This approach ensures sustainable competitiveness by utilizing resources that cannot be easily replicated by other destinations (Elitua, et.al, 2024).

Natural and Cultural Assets: Emphasize the conservation and promotion of natural and cultural assets, which are often the primary attractions for tourists (Abdul, et. al, 2024) (Martin, 2018).

E - Engage Stakeholders

Multi-Stakeholder Involvement: Effective destination development requires the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including local communities, government bodies, and private sector entities. This ensures that diverse interests are harmonized and that development plans are inclusive and sustainable (Bozena, 2016) (Rachel, 2025).

Participatory Management: Engage local communities in the decision-making process to ensure that their needs and perspectives are considered, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards tourism development (Scherle, 2021) (Seville, 2009).

A - Assess and Adapt

Continuous Assessment: Regularly assess the impact of tourism on the destination, including environmental, social, and economic aspects. This helps in identifying areas that need improvement and adapting strategies accordingly (Martin, 2018) (Seville, 2009).

Dynamic Adaptation: Be prepared to adapt to changing circumstances and emerging trends in tourism. This includes addressing issues like overtourism and ensuring that development remains sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders (Rachel, 2025) (Scherle, 2021).

D - Develop Infrastructure and Services

Infrastructure Development: Invest in the development of essential infrastructure such as transportation, accommodation, and communication networks to enhance the overall tourist experience (Abdul, et. al, 2024).

Quality Services: Ensure that the services provided to tourists meet high standards of quality and safety. This includes training local service providers and improving facilities to meet international standards (Elitua, et.al, 2024) (Abdul, et. al, 2024).

S - Sustainable Practices

Environmental Sustainability: Implement practices that minimize the environmental impact of tourism activities. This includes promoting eco-friendly tourism, managing waste effectively, and conserving natural resources (Abdul, et. al, 2024) (Martin, 2018).

Socio-Economic Sustainability: Ensure that tourism development contributes to the socio-economic well-being of local communities. This involves creating job opportunities, supporting local businesses, and ensuring that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed (Bozena, 2016) (Irhanida & Chew, 2024).

Manage Sustainable Wedding Destination

Sustainable destination weddings involve integrating environmental, sociocultural, and economic sustainability into the planning and execution of wedding events. The principles of sustainable tourism and event management provide a comprehensive framework for managing sustainable destination weddings. By focusing on the triple bottom line, involving stakeholders, leveraging ICT tools, conducting impact analysis, and engaging the community, destination weddings can be made more sustainable and beneficial for all involved parties.

Triple Bottom Line Approach: Sustainable weddings should focus on environmental, sociocultural, and economic sustainability. This includes minimizing waste, using local and eco-friendly products, and ensuring that the event benefits the local community economically and culturally (Cynthia & Seung, 2024) (Gregori, et.al, 2013).

Stakeholder Involvement: Effective management of sustainable destination weddings requires the involvement of various stakeholders, including local government, tour operators, and local businesses. This collaborative approach ensures that all parties are aware of their sustainable responsibilities and contribute to the event's success (Monika & Vijay, 2023).

Use of ICT Tools: Information and communication technology (ICT) can play a significant role in managing sustainable destination weddings. ICT tools can help in planning, monitoring, and evaluating the sustainability aspects of the event. They can also facilitate better communication and coordination among stakeholders (Alisha & Andrew, 2014).

Event Impact Analysis: A holistic evaluation of the event's performance in economic, social, and environmental dimensions is crucial. This involves using specific indicators to measure the impact and ensure that the event aligns with sustainability goals (Alisha & Andrew, 2014) (Gian, et.al, 2018).

Community Engagement: Engaging the local community and incorporating their cultural practices can enhance the sustainability of destination weddings. This not only preserves local traditions but also ensures that the economic benefits are distributed within the community (Adisak et.al, 2025) (Kolang, et.al, 2021).

Challenges and Barriers: Financial costs, lack of time, and control over venues are common barriers to implementing sustainable practices in events. Addressing these challenges requires careful planning and resource allocation (Judith & Jennifer, 2012).

Strategic Recommendations

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration: Successful implementation of sustainable practices requires collaboration among all stakeholders, including policymakers, local communities, and businesses (Shilpi, et.al, 2025) (Fernando, et.al, 2020).

Incentives and Support: Governments and organizations should provide incentives and support to encourage the adoption of sustainable practices. This includes financial incentives, regulatory support, and capacity-building programs (Kevin & Donqui, 2025) (Kevin, 2023).

Innovative Communication: Employing innovative communication strategies to educate and engage stakeholders about the benefits of sustainable practices can enhance their adoption and effectiveness (Xiaozhe, et.al, 2023).

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