

Towards sustainable tourism: Exploring the role of entrepreneurship through an integrative review

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of the article is to evaluate the extant literature on tourism entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainability, and argues for developing a more unified framework to explain these important and interconnected areas.

Research Design & Methods: The study adopted an integrative review methodology to systematically synthesise and critically evaluate the conceptual and empirical literature. We employed a structured review process involving literature selection, appraisal, and thematic integration to enable theory development and advance novel scholarly perspectives.

Findings: The study used thematic and inductive analysis and provided an aggregated insight into the six thematic areas pertinent to the tourism entrepreneurship and sustainable development nexus by aggregating them into three overarching dimensions: tourism entrepreneurship, sustainable value creation, and inclusive development. The nexus comprised sustainability perspectives, economic and social impact, entrepreneurial orientation, innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems, entrepreneurial opportunities, and sustainable tourism development.

Implications & Recommendations: The study constitutes a powerful message for a long-term global strategy to reshape tourism from a hyper-consumptive industry into a sustainable one focused on knowledge and science tourism, nature and biodiversity preservation, and global exploration.

Contribution & Value Added: The study adds future research and policy development conceptual framework by illustrating the strategic underpinning of entrepreneurial orientation and innovation in relation to the institutions and sustainable tourism development.

Article type: literature review
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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, tourism has evolved and diversified to become one of the world's fastest-growing economic sectors, comprising an increasing number of new destinations (Saura *et al.*, 2024a). Tourism has risen to the rank of a vital driver of socio-economic improvement as a result of these processes. This evolution needs entrepreneurs and new business start-ups to serve rising markets, contributing to value creation while also being sustainable (Lordkipanidze *et al.*, 2005). Sustainability has become a global issue, including environmentalism, social equity, and economic development, as many industries began to change processes and products to achieve sustainable goals, including tourism. The sector transforms dynamically because of shifting consumer preferences and the advent of new technology. The structural

transformation and transition to more experience-based products in tourism, in particular, necessitate entrepreneurial action to execute sustainable innovations (Sundbo *et al.*, 2007).

The UN Tourism (formerly United Nations World Tourism Organization) defines sustainable tourism as being linked to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural issues underlying tourism development (UNWTO, 2016). The UN Tourism's goals include enhancing the living standards of the host people in the short and long term, meeting the needs of tourists, and protecting the natural environment (Işık *et al.*, 2022). There are two schools of thought on sustainable tourism, as there are in most study theories and fields. According to researchers on the opposing side of sustainable tourism, sustainability is not always applicable in tourism because there are too many competing interests and trade-off judgements that prioritise certain interests over others (Ratten, 2020). The number of tourists, meaning the number of people who can be successfully accommodated, remains a critical concern for the detrimental consequences of excess tourism on the destination's sustainability (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020). While admitting the problems, many researchers contend that sustainable tourism is attainable in all destinations, for both mass and small-scale tourism, because sustainability is a long-term goal regardless of scale. To attain this goal, destinations must reconsider tourism's goals and shift away from selfish, individualistic, and hedonistic goals and instead allow tourism to serve as a facilitator of education, cross-cultural engagement, ecological appreciation, and spiritual development (Bichler *et al.*, 2020).

With these two schools of thought in mind, as well as the recent COVID-19 outbreak, new obstacles have arisen in the pursuit of sustainable tourism growth (Streimikiene *et al.*, 2021). With this in view, we may suppose that tourism planning and development should be done consciously, sustainably, and in terms of new and cutting-edge concerns, challenges, policies, and strategies. Scholarship in this vital area is evolving at a rapid pace. To that end, most research into sustainability in the sector is contemporaneous or forward-looking (Job *et al.*, 2017), albeit recent works consider the development and history of sustainable tourism by analysing the role of entrepreneurs in this process (Jones *et al.*, 2016).

Prior studies attempted to summarise the available literature on the topic. For instance, in a more or less descriptive, bibliometric manner, Andrade-Valbuena *et al.* (2022) provide an overview of economic well-being with environmental, social, and cultural sustainability in the field of hospitality and tourist research. Belias *et al.* (2022) conducted another systematic study, examining the effect of social tourism entrepreneurship on the sustainability of the tourist industry. However, analysing just 20 publications on the topic appears insufficient to make any substantial advancements in the field. While Ratten (2020) discusses tourist entrepreneurship research, she does not address sustainability, whereas Santos *et al.* (2021) discuss sustainability and innovation, but do not address entrepreneurship. Given these startling results and the lack of a holistic strategy, it is clear that additional study is needed in this area, which follows the increasing interest in sustainable industries as a whole. Indeed, there are several significant gaps in our understanding, such as the unique motivations, challenges, preferences, and benefits that various parties would encounter, such as governments, public and private sector enterprises, or individuals.

To address these research gaps and integrate the fragmented findings of the previous literature, we aimed to evaluate the relevance of global tourist entrepreneurship, concentrating on the roles of innovation and sustainability in this sector, and how entrepreneurial possibilities in tourism and entrepreneurial orientation contribute to sustainable tourism growth. This article's novelty lies in our conceptualisation of entrepreneurship as a transformative mechanism for achieving sustainable tourism by integrating economic, environmental, and social dimensions into a unified framework, thereby moving beyond the fragmented and sector-specific approaches prevalent in existing literature. By highlighting novel hypotheses and challenges for the development of sustainable tourism enterprises, the current article hopes to give direction for future research. Based on study results, we may write that a new, worldwide strategy for sustainable tourism is necessary to create a robust future path. The current article advances the theoretical understanding of sustainable tourism by synthesising entrepreneurial orientation and innovation ecosystem perspectives within sustainability transition frameworks. The article views entrepreneurship as a major force behind innovation-led sustainability in tourist systems, building on recent extensions of entrepreneurial orientation and sustainable entrepreneurship (Kraus *et al.*, 2018). Addition-

ally, the study findings contribute to how entrepreneurial ecosystems facilitate the co-creation of economic and social value through institutional support and resource integration, drawing on sustainability transitions and ecosystem-based approaches (Geels, 2019). The synthesis in this article contributes to theory by linking micro-level entrepreneurial processes with macro-level sustainability outcomes, particularly in emerging domains such as rural and inclusive tourism development.

The article achieves its objective by finding answers to two key questions: how entrepreneurial opportunities in the tourism sector shape entrepreneurial orientation and contribute to sustainable tourism development, and how innovation and socio-economic engagement transform tourism entrepreneurship into broader sustainability outcomes at both firm and destination levels. We examined the literature on tourist entrepreneurship, including a focus on sustainable practices, and an examination of the factors that have contributed to the expansion of this field. We project the literature in several ways, including a thematic map, and an inductive analysis using aggregate dimensions. The thematic map highlights six key areas, including 'sustainability perspectives,' 'economic and social impact,' 'entrepreneurial orientation,' 'innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem,' 'entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism,' and 'sustainable tourism development.' We studied the literature to integrate these themes into aggregate dimensions, namely 'tourism entrepreneurship,' 'sustainable value creation,' and 'inclusive development.' Through thematic and inductive analysis, we have also presented a conceptual framework demonstrating how entrepreneurial opportunities in the tourism industry lead to an entrepreneurial orientation and, when combined with disruptive innovation and the industry's socio-economic impact, can contribute to the industry's long-term sustainability.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

To produce new theoretical frameworks and viewpoints, we based our research approach on a comprehensive review strategy of integrative review (Bansal *et al.*, 2022; Klarin & Suseno, 2021). Unlike a standard systematic literature review (SLR) that primarily aggregates existing data, an integrative review approach exponentially expands the corpus of research by offering a conceptual framework and identifying future research prospects based on our theme and inductive analysis (Lim *et al.*, 2024). Although our results are based on bibliometric data (such as the number of publications and citations over time) to visualise the intellectual structure of the field, we based them primarily on an integrative review, providing the more thorough theoretical interpretation required for identifying future research opportunities.

Data Collection

For this study, our primary database was the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection. Even though Scopus has a wider coverage of the social sciences citation index, we prioritised WoS because of its stringent indexing criteria and highly impactful metadata necessary to ensure the quality of sampled literatures in a transdisciplinary field in sustainable tourism entrepreneurship (Martín-Martín *et al.*, 2018). Using a PRISMA diagram, we have illustrated the entire data-collection process (Figure 1). We conducted the search in January 2026. We divided the entire process into four steps: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Using search terms such as tourism and entrepreneur* and 'sustainabl*', we identified 838 articles during the identification phase. Following the initial screening, we eliminated 57 records based on article type (we selected only article and review articles), leaving us with 781 articles. We then refined the database again to include only English-language articles, resulting in the removal of eight articles. To ensure thematic precision, we refined the subject category to focus on pertinent areas: management, business, economics, environmental studies, and sociology, which led to the exclusion of 425 articles. We assessed the remaining 348 articles for relevance based on their titles, abstracts, keywords, and the unavailability of full-text, leaving us with 311 articles for the final analysis.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, we used a hybrid analytical approach to find out the intellectual structure of the field. We manually reviewed each of the 311 publications to provide a deeper understanding of the intellectual structure of the field of tourism entrepreneurship and sustainability, from which we

draw conclusions and recommendations for future study and policy. In line with grounded theory, we distilled and coded our concepts by grouping them into themes based on their prevalence and growth over the last two decades in the literature (Nangia *et al.*, 2023). To reduce subjectivity in thematic mapping, based on co-occurrence frequencies, we evaluated the themes according to their 'centrality' (the strength of links to other clusters) and 'density' (the internal strength of a cluster's tie). We were then able to classify themes into four sections: 'motor' (good development and core), 'fundamental' (core, but basic design), 'niche' (specialised), and 'emerging/declining.' We identified six notable themes, namely, sustainability perspectives, economic and social impact, innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem, entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial opportunities and tourism, and sustainable tourism development. The integration of thematic analysis allows for a comprehensive identification of both established and emerging research directions in the field. Thematic analysis not only improves the reliability of the intellectual structure identified but also ensures a balanced and holistic interpretation of the evolving literature. We further studied these themes to integrate them into three aggregate dimensions: innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem, entrepreneurial orientation, and economic and social impact. The key result was the proposed conceptual framework for understanding how entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism and entrepreneurial orientation lead to sustainable tourism growth. The derived themes and subthemes contribute to a broader and more nuanced understanding of the research topic. Consequently, the article offers a solid foundation for future empirical and theoretical advancements in sustainable tourism and entrepreneurship research (Figure 1).

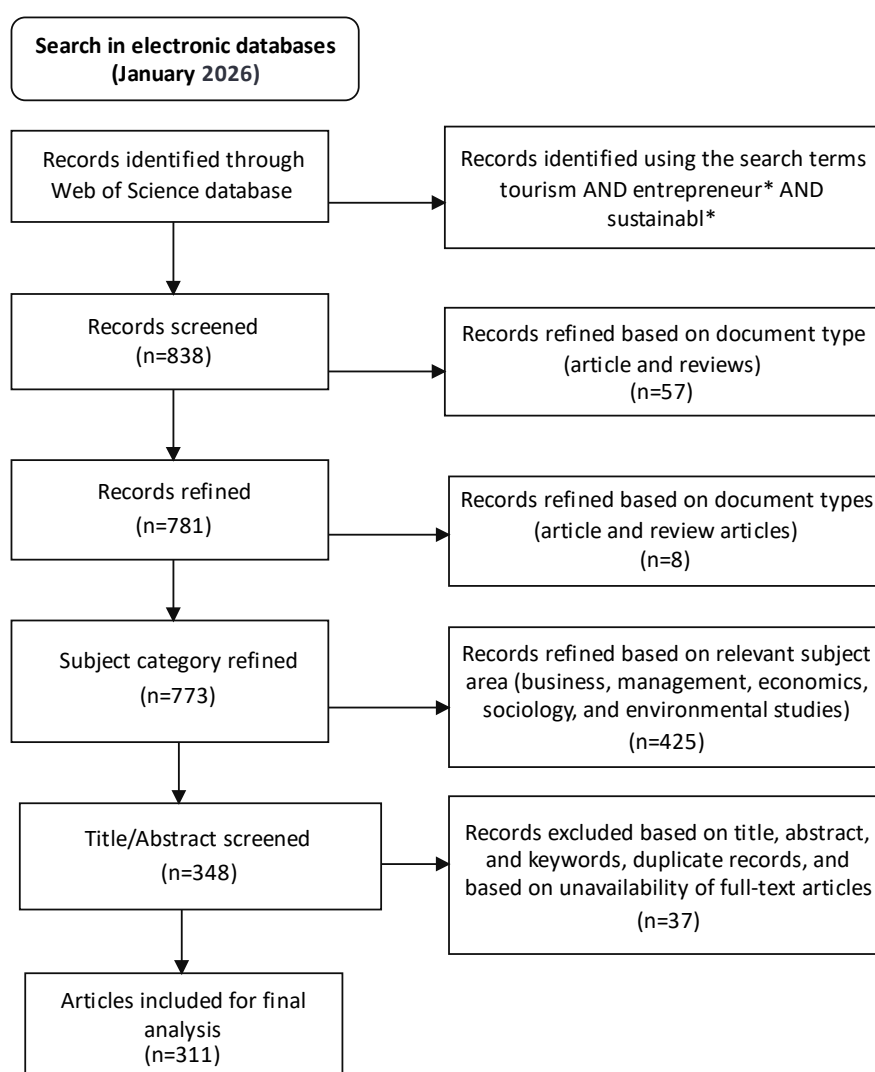


Figure 1. PRISMA diagram

Source: own elaboration.

Publication Growth and Citations

Figure 2 shows the trend in the number of published articles with respective study-related citations annually from 2004 until 2026. Darker orange bars represent total citations, while the blue line shows the number of articles published each year. At the top of the early years (2004-2014), we see a relatively low publication activity, but some articles were cited more than others and some received occasional citation spikes. A general increase in the number of publications began in 2015, followed by a peak in 2021, indicating an emerging academic interest in the area of sustainable tourism entrepreneurship. Over this period, there was also a notable increase in total citations, especially for the years 2019 and 2020, indicating that research published in these years received significant attention from scholars. Nonetheless, citations drop from 2022 to 2026. Much of this reflects the smaller citation window for new publications than any collapse in research quality or relevance. The expanding body of literature in the subject of sustainable tourism entrepreneurship underlines the potential for study in tourist entrepreneurship with a greater proportion of women (Figueroa-Domecq *et al.*, 2020), lifestyle tourism entrepreneurs (Bredvold & Skålén, 2016), tourism businesses (Jørgensen *et al.*, 2021), etc.

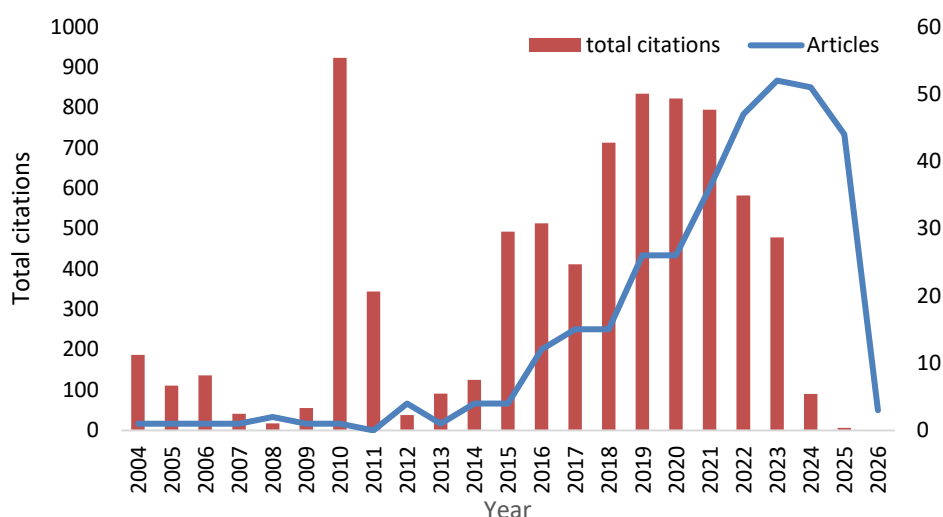


Figure 2. Growth over the years

Source: own elaboration.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY DEVELOPMENT

Recent tourism literature increasingly highlights entrepreneurial potential as a fundamental strategy for fostering rural economic development and sustainable tourism results. Empirical research from rural tourism contexts demonstrates that tourism entrepreneurship fosters job creation, income generation, and economic diversification by allowing communities to leverage local cultural and natural resources (Utami *et al.*, 2023). These entrepreneurial ventures bolster rural economies by diminishing reliance on conventional livelihoods and promoting locally integrated business activity. Moreover, entrepreneurship centred on tourism has demonstrated the capacity to provide extensive socio-economic effects in rural locales. Tourism entrepreneurship fosters inclusive rural development by augmenting employment prospects and invigorating local economic engagement. Such prospects are especially pertinent in areas experiencing structural economic limitations, where tourism offers alternative revenue sources and bolsters community resilience (Ramaano, 2023). These results underscore the significance of entrepreneurial prospects in tourism as a strategy focused on development rather than merely a market-driven endeavour.

A recent body of work examines the role of tourism entrepreneurship in enhancing women's economic engagement and social inclusion. Research indicates that tourism provides accessible entrepreneurial opportunities for women owing to less capital demands and adaptable business

frameworks (Koliouska *et al.*, 2023). The involvement of women in tourist entrepreneurship correlates with increased household income stability and elevated social standing, hence strengthening the social impact aspect of entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism (Vujko *et al.*, 2024). Opportunities for entrepreneurship in tourism are intricately associated with the cultivation of entrepreneurial orientation among local stakeholders. Entrepreneurial orientation, characterised by innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking, empowers tourism entrepreneurs to identify market opportunities and adjust to changing tourist demand (Batista *et al.*, 2022). Empirical evidence demonstrates that locations with vibrant tourism entrepreneurship show elevated innovation and competitiveness, as entrepreneurs consistently enhance products and services to distinguish their offerings (Burton *et al.*, 2025). The innovation and entrepreneurial environment prove crucial for enhancing entrepreneurial orientation in tourism destinations. Recent research highlights the significance of institutional support, legislative frameworks, and collaborative networks in promoting entrepreneurial activity (Batista *et al.*, 2022). Access to training, financial resources, and knowledge-sharing platforms augments entrepreneurs' ability to innovate and adopt sustainable business methods, hence strengthening the correlation between entrepreneurial orientation and long-term destination performance (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2024). The economic and social effects of tourism entrepreneurship further strengthen entrepreneurial attitude. Favourable economic results, including elevated income and job generation, bolster community support for tourist development and encourage ongoing entrepreneurial participation (Alvarez-Sousa, 2018). Recent literature increasingly associates entrepreneurial orientation with sustainable tourism development.

The above studies offer robust evidence for a structured relationship wherein entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism promote entrepreneurial orientation resulting in sustainable tourism development. This cohesive viewpoint strongly corresponds with current tourism research that highlights sustainability driven by entrepreneurship in rural and community-oriented locations. Despite the growing recent evidence linking entrepreneurial opportunities, entrepreneurial orientation, and sustainable tourism development, the literature remains limited in empirically examining their integrated relationships within a single framework that would simultaneously capture innovation ecosystems and socio-economic impacts in rural tourism contexts – a gap that the present study directly addresses.

DISCUSSION

Thematic Findings

As shown in Figure 3, we manually analysed the evaluated literature to generate a strategic/thematic map of the field. We divided the map into four sections, labelled 'motor,' 'fundamental/basic,' 'niche,' and 'emerging/declining.' Centrality represents how well one topic relates to other themes, while density illustrates how many connections exist between individual themes (Aparicio *et al.*, 2019; Murgado-Armenteros *et al.*, 2015). Six main concepts stood out, we chose them chosen for their significance and growth rate.

The key themes that refer to bandwagon elements vital to the field remain insufficiently explored. The underlying ideas may have been explored extensively in the past, or they may have great promise as future driving ideas. Fundamental concepts better characterise the heart of the study field: the 'sustainability perspective' and the 'economic and social impact' are the two major topics of our strategic diagram. One of the most significant themes to emerge from the literature was the 'sustainability perspective,' which includes terms like 'nature tourism,' 'lifestyle entrepreneurs,' 'resources,' 'risk management,' and 'eco-tourism.' These themes are important because, until now, authors have highlighted both the positive and negative effects that tourism may have on sustainability. Overcrowding, disruption of local economies, and harm to the natural environment are just a few examples of how tourism may negatively affect a location (Maldonado-Erazo *et al.*, 2022). The many positive effects on a destination include new jobs development, protection of historic buildings and sites, cultural artifacts interpretation, and restoration of natural habitats for native species (Terkenli & Georgoula, 2022). According to García-Gallo *et al.*'s research (2021) on intangible assets along with economic and financial differences between tourism startups by region and by sector of activity

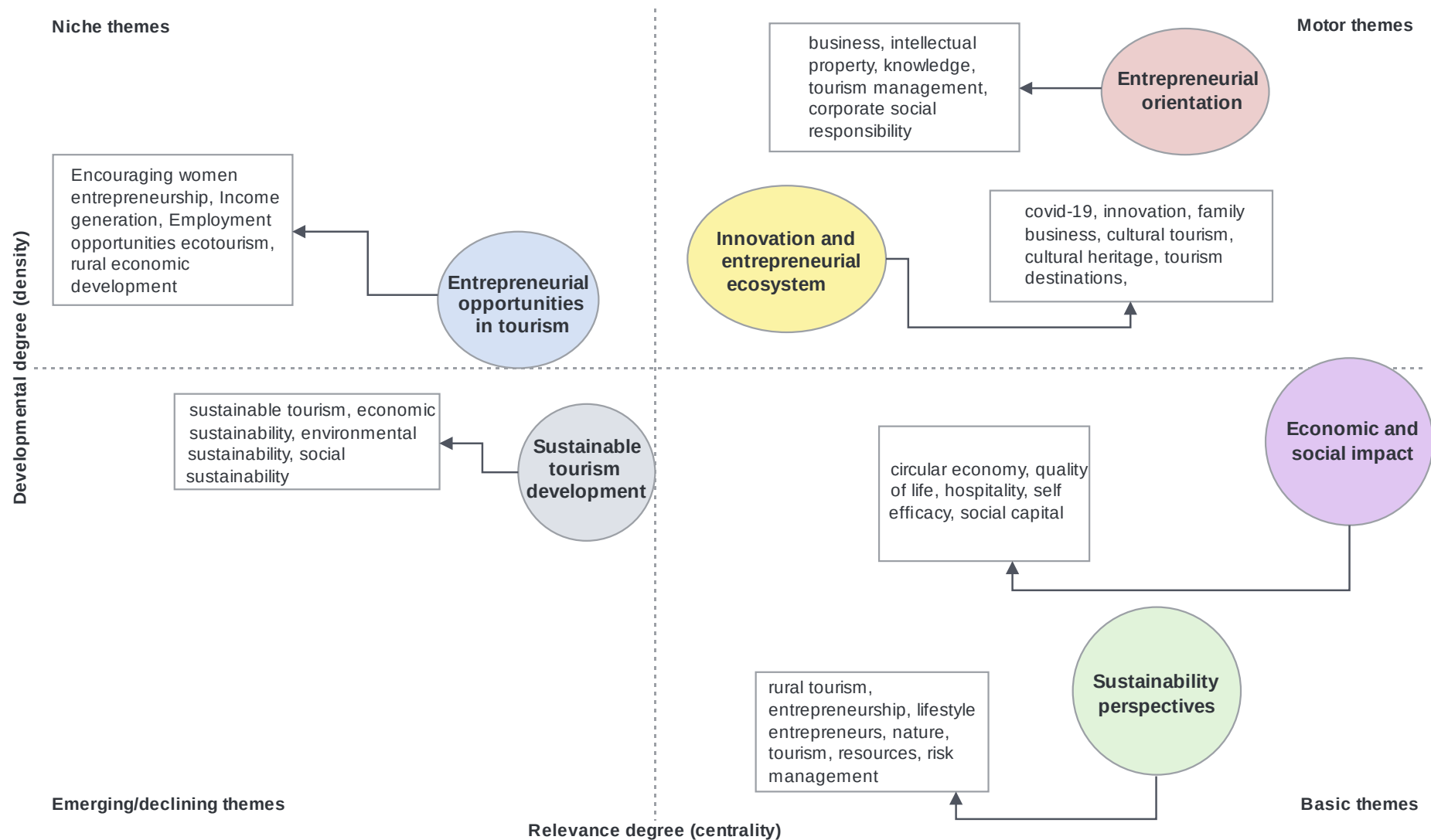


Figure 3. Thematic map

Source: own elaboration.

to determine their sustainability both in a situation of economic crisis and growth, investment in intangibles along with economic and financial sustainability constitute key variables in any of the crises situations such as the COVID pandemic. Contrarily, Pérez-Calderón *et al.* (2020) examined users' perspectives on the long-term viability of places like national parks in their immediate vicinity, finding verified strong correlations between users' perceptions of economic development and quality of life but not social development. Scholars also observed that in contrast to large conglomerates, small businesses are actively engaged in accepting responsibility for being sustainable (Font *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, recent articles highlight the role of adaptive management and stakeholder coordination in balancing conservation and commercialisation (Alegre & Berbegal-Mirabent, 2016; Glowka & Zehrer, 2019; Ryan, 2002), particularly in fragile destinations. Sustainability is no longer treated as an external constraint but as a strategic resource, enabling differentiation, legitimacy, and long-term competitiveness for tourism entrepreneurs. The growing intersection of sustainability with innovation suggests a shift towards proactive sustainability strategies rather than compliance-driven approaches.

'Economic and social impacts' are another overarching theme; related terms include 'circular economy,' 'quality of life,' 'hospitality,' 'self-efficacy,' and 'social capital.' The integration of circular economy principles introduces new measurement dimensions, linking waste reduction, resource efficiency, and social well-being. Thus, this theme bridges entrepreneurship research with development studies by highlighting how tourism ventures shape not only growth but also social cohesion and institutional trust (Guerra & Gonçalves, 2024; Saura *et al.*, 2024b). Furthermore, the estimation of how a community could alter in response to an uptick or dip in tourism activity makes this subject even more vital. Depending on how it is organised and promoted, tourism can significantly contribute to a region's social, cultural, and economic well-being. The economic health of an area or even a country is directly impacted by tourism (Ferreira *et al.*, 2021). Cohen (1984) argues that tourism has generally acknowledged favourable impact on foreign exchange, income, employment, distribution of benefits, pricing, ownership and control, regional development, and government revenues (Isik *et al.*, 2018; Piuchan *et al.*, 2018). Foreign direct investment, enhanced infrastructure, and economies of scale all contribute to lower manufacturing costs as a result of tourism (Arain *et al.*, 2020). Long after researchers began scrutinising economic effects of tourism, they analysed the broader social and cultural ripples that make the byproduct of locals' direct and indirect interactions with visitors. According to studies, the behaviours, customs, social lives, beliefs, and values of non-nationals in a particular community impact the connection between locals and visitors (Almeida García *et al.*, 2015).

Motor Themes

The themes in the motor quadrant are the most fundamental to the organisation of the knowledge base, and their development has progressed further than any other. Two main themes, 'entrepreneurial orientation' and 'innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem,' drive this research base's strategic map. The number of studies on a topic is reflected by the size of the sphere used to depict it. The most developed topic is 'entrepreneurial orientation,' which includes the phrases business, intellectual property, knowledge, tourist management, corporate social responsibility, and so forth. Many business possibilities arise as a result of the wide range of services, facilities, and attractions that form the tourism industry. The tourism sector is widely recognised as a major economic driver and employer in a wide range of global locations. Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and its characteristics have been studied in the context of the travel sector. Fadda (2018) conducted a test to determine if EO dimensions are significant determinants of firm performance and which EO dimension exerts the strongest effect, and found that innovativeness, proactiveness, and autonomy were significantly associated with tourism firm performance, while risk-taking and competitiveness were not. Employee autonomy is the most essential feature to explain the performance of tourist enterprises, followed by inventiveness and proactivity. This theme represents the strategic posture and behaviour of tourism entrepreneurs. It includes risk-taking, innovation, and proactiveness traits often associated with successful entrepreneurial ventures. It is central because it underpins many tourism strategies, especially in dynamic and competitive destinations. The inclusion of intellectual property and corporate responsibility shows that

today, entrepreneurship in tourism requires ethical, responsible, and knowledge-based decision-making (García-Gallo *et al.*, 2020; Sarabia-Molina *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, EO interacts with contextual factors such as destination maturity and regulatory frameworks, challenging the assumption of universally positive effects. Furthermore, the incorporation of ethical orientation and responsible leadership signals an evolution of EO theory towards more socially embedded forms of entrepreneurship, particularly relevant in tourism contexts where social legitimacy is critical (Ruiz-Ortega *et al.*, 2021).

There are several terms associated with the second motor theme, 'innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem,' including such sub-themes as 'COVID-19,' 'innovation,' 'family business,' 'tourist destinations,' 'green innovation,' and 'eco-innovation.' Previous studies examined how far the tourist industry has come in terms of sustainability and new ideas. Like many others, the tourist business saw the effects of the current pandemic outbreak, which has slowed the progress towards more environmentally friendly innovations. According to Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró (2021), tourism is one of the activities most desperately in need of innovation to keep its growth. It is also important to learn how established tourist spots and their management discover novel approaches to everyday problems to sustain the industry's upward trajectory. Recent inventions, such as green and eco-innovations, have been shown to directly contribute to lowering the travel industry's carbon emissions. While green innovation has a beneficial effect on the hotel industry's sustainability performance through antecedents such as environmental legislation, green innovation strategy, and green organisational culture (Asadi *et al.*, 2020), business model innovation (BMI) directly contributes to sustainability in the tourism and hospitality sphere, as visitors seek tourism activities with creative and sustainable themes (Presenza *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, BMI reflects the systemic support structure that enables tourism innovation, including family-run enterprises and cultural tourism, which are important components of tourism resilience, especially during disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Niche Theme

One major theme emerged in the upper left quadrant, sometimes known as the niche themes, namely 'entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism.' This theme included the phrases encouraging women entrepreneurs, income generation, employment opportunities, and rural economic development. The themes in this area are considered to be on the periphery or in a specific niche since they have strong internal ties but few external ones. As one of the world's fastest-growing industries, tourism is propelled not just by people's basic necessities and their insatiable wanderlust but also by the commercial opportunities that arise from satisfying people's ever-evolving desires and curiosity (Nikraftar & Hosseini, 2016). Opportunity creation in tourism is increasingly linked to social innovation, particularly in peripheral and rural regions where tourism serves as a development catalyst. However, the weak integration of this theme with ecosystem and innovation research suggests a missed opportunity to theorise how inclusive entrepreneurship can be structurally supported (Dote-Pardo *et al.*, 2025). Researchers are coming to the conclusion that opportunity identification is the defining characteristic and foundational feature of entrepreneurs as they dig more into the field of empirical entrepreneurship studies (Bichler *et al.*, 2020; Çiçek *et al.*, 2019). Employment possibilities for both rural and urban residents, as well as new sources of revenue, are generated as a consequence of the growth of tourism-related enterprises, which in turn contributes to economic expansion.

Emerging/declining Theme

This research premise yields just one issue, which is 'sustainable tourism development.' The themes in this area are either just starting to emerge or decline, due to weak internal relationships and few exterior connections. Based on our research, we expect this theme to evolve into either a basic or motor theme. Because of its rising economic, social, and cultural significance at both the national and international levels, the tourism industry presents promising opportunities for long-term, equitable progress (León-Gómez *et al.*, 2021). There is a substantial body of research that illustrates the many impacts of tourism (Farzanegan *et al.*, 2021; Niñerola *et al.*, 2019; Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2020), since the economic relevance and expansion of the tourist industry is a topic of great worth today. Similarly, sustainability is important

in the tourist industry because it is viewed as a means to meet the demands of all parties involved, regardless of industry (Liu *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the tourist industry is always worried about its future and its potential to expand (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019; Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016; Manzoor *et al.*, 2019).

Strategic Insights for Tourism Entrepreneurship

We examined each publication separately to identify keywords or first-order concepts employed in that research as shown in Figure 4. Next, we combined these keywords to form six distinct themes (second-order themes): 'entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism,' 'innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem,' 'sustainable tourism development,' 'sustainability perspective,' 'entrepreneurial orientation,' and 'economic and social impact.' Furthermore, combining these themes yielded the following aggregate dimensions: tourism entrepreneurship, sustainable value creation, and inclusive development. Aggregate dimensions reflect a synthesis of the study's topics and concepts (Thomas & Tee, 2022).

Tourism Entrepreneurship

Tourism entrepreneurship refers to the process by which individuals or groups recognise, exploit, and innovate around opportunities within the tourism sector to create value (Zeng *et al.*, 2024). This dimension encompasses both the identification of unmet needs in tourism and the creation of products, services, or systems that respond to evolving demands of tourists and host communities alike. Tourism entrepreneurship includes themes entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism and innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem, covering the creation of new business models such as rural homestays, women-led ecotourism ventures, and community-based tourism. Tourism entrepreneurship emphasises opportunity recognition, resource mobilisation, and market development in underutilised regions (Dias *et al.*, 2025). Furthermore, in innovation, tourism entrepreneurship involves the role of digital tools, cultural heritage valorisation, and post-pandemic resilience strategies in nurturing an ecosystem that supports entrepreneurial ventures (Mahato *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, tourism entrepreneurship emphasises how creativity, institutional support, and networks contribute to a thriving tourism-based entrepreneurial culture (Mzembe *et al.*, 2019). Thus, tourism entrepreneurship constitutes a powerful mechanism to diversify local economies, reduce dependence on traditional sectors, and stimulate creative industries (Moyle *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, it encompasses strategic thinking, adaptability, and the ability to respond to market trends or external disruptions such as global pandemics or climate change.

Sustainable Value Creation

Sustainable value creation encapsulates the imperative for tourism to go beyond short-term profits and instead contribute to the long-term well-being of environmental, economic, and socio-cultural systems. This dimension reflects the integration of sustainable development principles into tourism strategies and operations. It encapsulates how tourism can drive economic growth while preserving ecological and cultural integrity (Henche *et al.*, 2020). Sustainable value creation integrates sustainable tourism development and a sustainable perspective. It focuses on economic, environmental, and social sustainability that emphasises practices like eco-certification, conservation tourism, green infrastructure, and responsible resource use. Moreover, sustainable value creation broadens the lens by including risk management, rural resource allocation, and holistic approaches to the long-term viability of tourism destinations. This dimension promotes the idea that tourism should not deplete the very resources it depends on (Escoto *et al.*, 2019). Instead, sustainable value creation should regenerate ecosystems, empower communities, and create enduring value for both tourists and host populations (Sarabia-Molina *et al.*, 2022). It encourages tourism stakeholders – entrepreneurs, governments, NGOs, and tourists – to adopt sustainable practices that ensure the tourism system remains resilient, regenerative, and inclusive (Salem *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, sustainable value creation transforms tourism from a consumptive industry to a constructive force for sustainable development. Hence, together, these themes contribute to regenerative tourism, which not only minimises harm but actively works to revive ecosystems, enhance cultural heritage, and build resilient local economies.

Inclusive Development

Inclusive development captures the social equity and participatory aspects of entrepreneurship within the tourism sector. It reflects how tourism-led entrepreneurship can lead to broad-based economic growth while addressing social disparities and promoting human well-being (Escoto *et al.*, 2019). This dimension brings together the entrepreneurial orientation, such as knowledge development, innovation capacity, and responsible risk-taking and the economic and social impacts that improve life quality, foster community development, and promote justice. Furthermore, inclusive development acknowledges that tourism should not benefit only a few but must create opportunities for underrepresented and marginalised groups, including women, indigenous communities, rural residents, and informal workers (Dragin *et al.*, 2024). It ties economic growth to social outcomes, ensuring tourism is a tool to improve life quality, foster community development, and promote justice (Maziliauske, 2024). By integrating these two themes, inclusive development as a dimension addresses the disparities in opportunity, income, and access in the tourism economy. It envisions tourism not just as a business sector but as a catalyst for human development, fostering equity, dignity, and agency among all stakeholders.

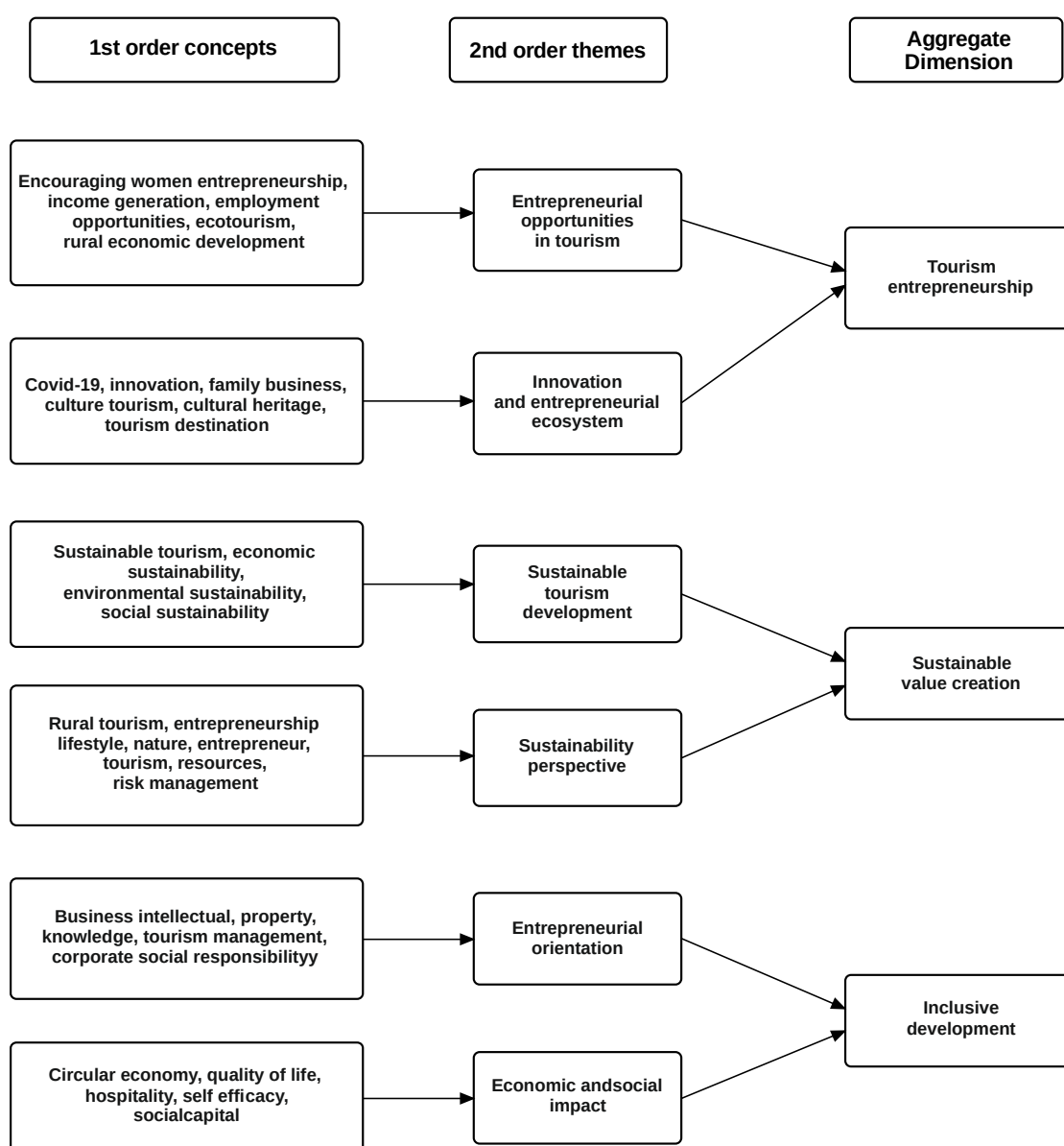


Figure 4. Strategic insights for tourism entrepreneurship

Source: own elaboration.

Conceptual Framework

In Figure 5, the conceptual framework synthesises the study findings and demonstrates how we addressed the research questions by illustrating the interrelationships among entrepreneurial opportunities, entrepreneurial orientation, innovation, socio-economic engagement, and sustainable tourism development. The people who start businesses are the ones that fuel the entrepreneurial spirit in any country, which is why entrepreneurship is often considered a national asset. Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process that may develop wealth and also produce value for people's benefit. On the other hand, tourism is vital to the country's progress since it affects not only the economy but also the social and moral values of the population. Businesses centred on providing memorable experiences for tourists are flourishing as a result of a recent emphasis on encouraging entrepreneurship. Furthermore, expansion of tourism businesses can bring economic benefits to any country. Revenue is generated through tourist taxation, foreign exchange is generated, the balance of payment concerns are eased, the economy is diversified, and new jobs are created, especially in rural and distant regions. The conceptual framework is theoretically grounded in institutional and ecosystem perspectives, which argue that entrepreneurial outcomes in tourism are shaped by the interaction between market opportunities, institutional support, and contextual constraints (Bradley *et al.*, 2021). By explicitly linking entrepreneurial orientation with disruptive innovation and socio-economic embeddedness, the study moves beyond linear entrepreneurship-growth models and offers a multi-level extension that explains how tourism entrepreneurship can generate sustainability-oriented outcomes at both firm and destination levels. This perspective complements and advances prior tourism entrepreneurship research by incorporating sustainability as an emergent property of entrepreneurial ecosystems rather than as a predetermined policy goal.

Consistent with the existing literature, we argue that the presence of entrepreneurial opportunities in the tourist industry fosters an entrepreneurial orientation which – when combined with disruptive innovation and socio-economic activities – may pave the way for sustainable tourism development. Numerous studies, such as those by Dominiak and Wantoch-Rekowski (2009), Thapa Karki and Xheneti (2018), and Szirmai *et al.* (2011) demonstrated the correlation between entrepreneurship and economic growth. More than ever before, the innovativeness, risk-taking, proactivity, aggressiveness, and employee autonomy that make up an entrepreneurial orientation prove key to a successful tourist business and a window into the industry's future. Regarding rural development, it is important to have an entrepreneurial approach that prioritises supporting local entrepreneurs so that people may keep their hard-earned money in their own neighbourhoods. Today, what's needed is a setting that promotes the growth of responsible entrepreneurship, with the needs of sustainable development as a starting point. Moreover, while earlier articles such as Wang *et al.* (2022) emphasise the economic benefits of tourism expansion through foreign exchange earnings, tax revenues, and employment generation, the current article advances this perspective by highlighting local value retention and community-based entrepreneurial activity as critical pathways to sustainability. This finding aligns with rural entrepreneurship and community development literature but diverges from growth-centric tourism models by explicitly linking entrepreneurship with social inclusion and environmental responsibility.

Entrepreneurship's potential for good effects on a region's economy, society, and environment provides one rationale for the connection between the tourist industry and sustainable development. Sustainable growth may be achieved through developing tourist entrepreneurship, bolstering culture and identity, diversifying tourism activities (including rural tourism activities), retaining rural residents, and reducing the negative environmental consequences of the tourism industry. Moreover, the EU enterprise policy strategy asserts that businesses, in particular, can aid in sustainable development by adopting corporate social responsibility (CSR), a concept wherein businesses voluntarily incorporate social and environmental concerns into their business operations and their interactions with their stakeholders. Public authorities play a crucial role in encouraging the tourist industry to embrace CSR, especially in terms of encouraging the industry to promote socially and environmentally responsible activities. Entrepreneurship has become a boon to the tourist sector to

protect the environment, benefit local economies, and foster long-term growth in these areas, all of which are essential to the nation's overall success.

While the proposed framework emphasises opportunity-driven tourism entrepreneurship as a pathway to sustainability, it also acknowledges alternative perspectives that question growth-led tourism models. Insights from tourism degrowth and sustainability paradox literature suggest that entrepreneurial expansion may generate trade-offs between economic benefits and environmental or social limits, particularly in fragile destinations. Similarly, community-based entrepreneurship – although often promoted as inclusive – may face constraints related to power asymmetries, capacity gaps, and uneven benefit distribution, which are incorporated as boundary conditions within the framework.

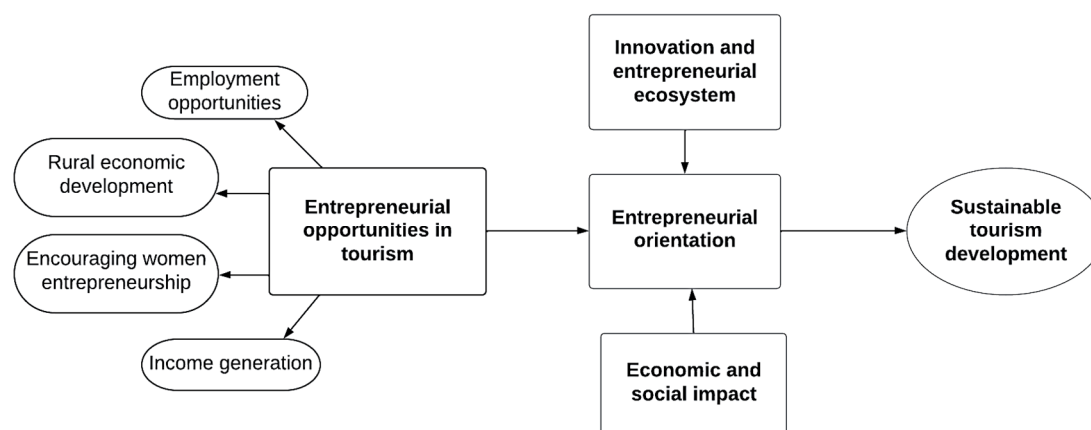


Figure 5. Conceptual framework

Source: own elaboration.

Future Research Directions

Table 1 details the topics that emerged from the analysis and will inform our future research. Given the rising emphasis on sustainability in the tourist sector, future researchers should investigate the relationships between tourism entrepreneurship and local economic growth, as well as examine entrepreneurship as a tool for sustainable development in tourism destinations, analysing the potential of entrepreneurship to establish more sustainable tourism businesses. There is also a need for investigating how to reduce tourism's social and environmental consequences, as well as the role that entrepreneurship and sustainability in the sector play in this process. Further possible areas of study include how technology may help tourist entrepreneurs build more sustainable firms, what it takes to launch a successful sustainable tourism venture, and how much of an impact tourism entrepreneurs can have on local economies. Moreover, researchers should study if and how technological developments affect the initiative and creativity of tourist business owners. Not to mention that the use of AI and data analytics to develop novel tourist enterprises is another area that might benefit from the field of study.

Scholars may also investigate sharing economy prospects and threats, tourist entrepreneurs' access to untapped markets, and innovative approaches to gaining a competitive edge. Future research should determine the extent to which cultural influences affect tourist entrepreneurship, as well as how cultural values and traditions affect the entrepreneurial process and the success of the tourism industry as a whole. This may entail investigating the impact of local communities on tourist entrepreneurship or looking at the ways in which local cultures and traditions affect the growth of tourism businesses. Furthermore, researchers should investigate the resilience and creativity of the tourist industry in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. To effectively establish policies and strategies to assist tourism entrepreneurship, we need to understand the dynamics of the global tourism sector, visitor motives and values, and the role of governments in regulating and promoting tourism.

Table 1. Future research directions

Research themes	Future research questions
Sustainability perspective	– What new business models may be developed to encourage sustainability and tourist entrepreneurship? – What role do community members play in creating and sustaining tourist projects that prioritise sustainability? – To what extent do entrepreneurs in the tourist industry play a part in advancing environmentally friendly policies and bringing about constructive change?
Economic and social impact	– Does tourism entrepreneurship help boost the local economy? – What effects does tourist entrepreneurship have on society, economy, and culture? – What is the impact of tourism entrepreneurship on local communities, companies, and the environment? – What is the potential for tourist entrepreneurs to create jobs and support economic development?
Entrepreneurial orientation	– What are the difficulties and opportunities for tourist entrepreneurs and the best strategies for conquering them? – What entrepreneurial tactics do entrepreneurs in the tourist industry employ, and what are their success and failure rates? – What is the role of education and training in supporting and growing tourist businesses?
Innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem	– What effect do technologies like AI and data analytics have on startup businesses in the tourist industry? – What is the significance of technology in the tourist business and its influence on entrepreneurial activities? – How have digital technologies and new media changed the dynamics of business in the tourist industry?
Entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism	– Do government policies, laws, and incentives play a part in encouraging tourism-related business startups?
Sustainable tourism development	– How digital tools may be used to help promote eco-friendly tourism and business ventures? – How may entrepreneurs design and execute ecologically and financially solvent practices for the tourism industry? – How can more inclusive, fair, and sustainable tourism practices be developed, particularly for minority and underprivileged communities?

Source: own study.

CONCLUSIONS

As globalisation proceeds, the significance of tourism to national economies and local communities is grows. This study carries important implications for policymaking and assisting business owners in making ethical and sustainable choices.

The research substantially contributes to existing management theories, synthesising key findings by presenting theoretical and contextual contributions that complement the existing theories. The study integrated entrepreneurial opportunities in tourism with socio-economic factors, including employment generation, rural economic development, women's entrepreneurship, and income generation, thereby expanding existing sustainable tourism theories to encompass inclusive economic development beyond environmental aspects. The inclusion of innovation and the entrepreneurial ecosystem as precursors to entrepreneurial orientation enhances the theoretical comprehension of how systemic and contextual elements influence sustainability-driven entrepreneurial behaviour. By incorporating thoughts on innovation ecosystems and entrepreneurship into sustainability frameworks, this study enhances the philosophy of sustainable tourism. Moreover, the study connected entrepreneurial activities to more general sustainability objectives, particularly in rural and inclusive tourist environments.

Our study details the obstacles that may stand in the way of sustainable development and how they might be overcome. Moreover, the study results present policy implications for managers, policymakers, and academicians in the field of sustainable tourism entrepreneurship. Policymakers should assist the sectors of hospitality and innovation in order for them to develop in the appropriate manner. Our study will help managers face the dynamic challenges that prevail in the sustainable tourism industry. The framework provides essential insights for policymakers, tourism planners, and practitioners by emphasising entrepreneurship as a strategic instrument for attaining sustainable tourist development. The framework posits that cultivating innovation ecosystems, endorsing an entrepreneurial attitude, and facilitating inclusive entrepreneurial possibilities can create employment, improve rural livelihoods, and advance women's involvement in tourism-related enterprises. The findings underscore the necessity for governments to implement focused strategies that enhance entrepreneurial ecosystems and offer institutional support for tourism entrepreneurs.

Possible future outcomes would include the effects of tourism entrepreneurship on sustainable tourism development, tourism trends, economy and society, entrepreneurial orientation, post-pandemic tourism and sustainability perspectives.

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. We relied solely on the Web of Science database, which may exclude relevant studies indexed in other databases. Moreover, we based the study on secondary and conceptual analysis. Thus, future studies could adopt an empirical approach and focus on specific geographical contexts to enhance the robustness and contextual relevance of the findings.

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