

LOCAL LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN TIMOR-LESTE

Manuel Vong
João Albino Silva
Patrícia Pinto

ABSTRACT

Timor-Leste is a small island that emerged as Asia's newest nation in 2002, and it is largely unknown as a tourism destination in the world, with geographic, natural, and socio cultural weaknesses and vulnerability. In this country, tourism is considered as one of the priorities for the national economic development, in addition to agriculture, and petroleum. However, in a new destination, which is also in the first stage of tourism development, the involvement of stakeholders is very limited both on the supply and the demand sides. This situation presents a major challenge to the achievement of a sustainable tourism development. Moreover, the study of tourism in this country is a very recent phenomenon. In this context, the objective of this study is twofold. Firstly, it intends to examine the perceptions of the local leaders (from the public sector, the private sectors and from non-governmental organizations) regarding the sustainable tourism development concept; and secondly, to understand to what extent these leaders take initiatives in voluntary actions towards sustainable tourism development at the local level, as well as their motivations and difficulties in this process.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism Development, Leaders' Perceptions, Timor Leste

JEL Classification: L83

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of "sustainable tourism development" became globally known after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) that was held in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992. The UNCED adopted an agenda for environment and development in the Agenda 21 as a programme and action plan for achieving the sustainable development principles, such as: social equity, economic prosperity, and environmental responsibility (Moisey and McCool, 2008; Moniz, 2006; UNCED, 1992; UNCSD, 2007).

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the World Tourism Organization (WTO), and the Earth Council (EC), in 1995, had recognized the importance of sustainability in tourism and formulated the Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry. More recently, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), an international association of local government organizations that have made a commitment to sustainable development, is concerned about the implementation of Agenda 21 at local levels including in the tourism sector (Vourc'h and Denman, 2003). In this implementation process, local leaders in public sectors (local government and planners), in private sectors' (tourism operators), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (including civil society,

religious institutions, church, and academics) have key roles and responsibilities at local, regional, and even national levels (Lacy, Battig, Moore and Noakes, 2002; Moniz, 2006; WTO, 2004). Many studies found that local leaders can individually take initiative and voluntary actions for launching a local Agenda 21 to enhance the sustainability of tourism in terms of economical, socio-cultural, environmental dimensions by planning, organizing and coordinating the participation of others stakeholders to implement the voluntary actions plan for which they are responsible (Mckercher, 2003; Vourc'h and Denman, 2003).

This study addresses the special case of sustainable tourism development in Timor-Leste and it has two purposes: firstly, to examine the local leaders' perceptions about the sustainable tourism development concept in this country; and secondly, to understand to what extent leaders have taken voluntary initiatives to operationalize and implement the sustainable tourism development concept, according to Local Agenda 21, including their motivations and difficulties in this process. In this sense, the present study contributes academically to sustainable tourism development studies for emerging destinations, focusing on the particular case of Timor-Leste, a quite unstudied country in what regards tourism development.

2. RESEARCH SETTING

Timor-Leste has a set of typical characteristics of the island nations in general, with vast resources but geographical difficulties that restrict the development of its own industries, such as mining, agriculture, and manufacture (WTO, 2002a). Currently, oil and gas are important industries and sources of economic wealth in Timor-Leste (RDTL-MF, 2013a,b). However, as WTO (2007) noted, although these sectors comprise the main financial resources for the national budget in this country, they will not generate employment and livelihood opportunities for rural communities, which have a very low productivity and experience food shortages, due the climate adversities (UNWTO, GoTL & UNDP, 2007). Therefore, there is a strong need to diversity investments into development sectors. Tourism is viewed as one of these sectors with potential to bring socio-economic development to the country, providing employment, and income to rural communities, and able to make the local economies more sustainable (Cabasset-Semedo, 2009; Carter, Prideaux, Ximenes and Chatenay, 2001; Tolkach, 2013; UNWTO *et al.*, 2007).

In order to assist the development of tourism, the government implemented new public policies on land, environment or biodiversity protection, tertiary education grants, and tax incentives to community-based tourism projects (Quintas, 2011; Tolkach, 2013). The National Biodiversity Working Group Timor-Leste (NBWG-TL, 2011) on the National Biodiversity Strategic and Action Plan (NBSAP) (2011 – 2020) stressed that the tourism industry should be involved from the beginning in biodiversity conservation and sustainable management processes, including planning, implementation and monitoring of development.

In recent public and private sector initiatives to ensure sustainable tourism in Timor-Leste, degree courses began to be offered at the Trade and Tourism Department at Economics Faculty of the National University of Timor Lorosae (UNTL), the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Dili Institute of Technology (DIT), and the professional tourism training centres, such as East Timor Development Agencies (ETDA), and others. Additionally, the Government of Timor-Leste proposed the development of a new polytechnic institution of tourism in Lospalos, in the east of the country (Tolkach, 2013).

The tourism industry depends on the general availability of a set of infrastructures. With this regard, the government investments in 2013 were concentrated on basic infrastructures, including 866 km of national roads, rehabilitation of 1270 km of rural and districts roads in

13 Districts, high power electricity lines, water supply and sanitation, a new multipurpose port in Tibar Dili, a new terminal, control tower and the airport runway extension at the International Airport Presidente Nicolau Lobato, Dili (RDTL-MF, 2013). There are some eco-friendly tourism facilities, guest houses, and community-based tourism initiatives in some districts of Timor-Leste (RDTL-MF, 2013; Tolkach, 2013; Vong *et al.*, 2014). Also to note that the Ministry of Tourism has supported community based initiatives, through capacity building programs, education and training, financial assistance in several districts of the country (Quintas, 2011; RDTL-MF, 2013; Tolkach, 2013). These tourism initiatives aim to reduce poverty, by creating job opportunity, increasing incomes, improving the quality of people's lives, and, in this sense, fostering sustainable development.

3.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Sustainable development in tourism

The concept of “sustainable development” became a global theme after the United Nations Conference on Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972, and the presentation of the report from the Brundland Commission in 1982 called “Our Common Future”. The main objective of this report was to advance the understanding of global interdependence, and the relationship between economic, social, cultural and environmental issues, and to propose global solutions (Brundtland, 1987; UNCSD, 2014). Moreover, United Nations members reflected on the perceived problems of mankind at that time and raised their concerns about over exploitation of natural resources and economic development at the expense of environmental quality (Keiner, 2008). In fact, the recognition of humanity's connection with nature requires thinking globally and acting locally. Strategic initiatives have led to the creation of institutions for sustainable development, at international, regional, national, and local levels (top down and bottom up), with objectives to assist in policy making, planning, management processes, at all levels. These initiatives have highlighted the need of converting the concept of sustainable development within politicians, technocrats, private sectors, NGOs, and civil society' attitudes, based on ethical and social responsibility principles, namely to deliver economic growth but without comprising social, cultural, environmental, and political aspects (Anuar, Ahmad, Jusoh and Hussain, 2013; Brohman, 1996; Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Communités and Social Identities Research Group (CSIRG), 2012; United Nations (UN), 1972).

In 1992, the United Nations on Environment and Development (UNCED) conference in Rio de Janeiro adopted an agenda for environment and development in the 21st Century (popularly known as Agenda 21). The Agenda 21, as an action plan for sustainable development, and contains the Rio Declaration on environment and development, which recognized each nation's right to pursue economic and social progress and assigned to nation states responsibilities to adopt: (1) a model of sustainable development; (2) the statement of forest principles; (3) the convention on biological diversity; and (4) the framework convention on climate change.

The tourism sector cannot be an exception to this framework (Silva and Perna, 2005). Tourism is a multitude of activities based on the use and enjoyment, often intensive, of a wide variety of environmental and natural resources, like heritage resources, historical, cultural, and ethnological, among others (Silva & Flores, 2008). In other words, tourism is a transfer of economic, social, cultural and financial capital that generates the purchasing power as a consequence of the displacement of people. Therefore, sustainable tourism development is a process of meeting the needs of tourists and destinations regions in the present, allowing the protection of resources and enhancement of opportunities for the future (Baggio, Scott,

& Cooper, 2010; Moniz, 2006)”mendeley” : { “previouslyFormattedCitation” : “(Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010; Moniz, 2006).

The principles of sustainable tourism development are appropriate to all types of tourism in all destinations (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000). Sustainable principles refer to the environmental, economic, socio-cultural and political aspects of tourism development. Therefore, a suitable balance must be established between these four dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability, including: (1) ecological sustainability (respect for the ecological processes, resources and biological diversity); (2) economical sustainability (to ensure the economic viability of the products, quality of life and well-being of locals in these communities); (3) socio-cultural sustainability (respect for the identity, culture and values of the communities where tourism products are inserted); and (4) political and governance sustainability (achievement of a broad consensus among various stakeholders by the systems of governance in regard to the exercise of decision making and implementation of the other three aspects of sustainability) (Bramwell & Lane, 2010; Moniz, 2006; Silva & Flores, 2008; WTO, 2004).

3.2. The roles of local leaders in sustainable tourism development

One of the fundamental requirements of the Local Agenda 21 is the use of a bottom-up approach, with local leaders closely involved in achieving a sustainable tourism future (Selin, 1999). However, this process needs direction and leadership. In specific, sustainable tourism development at a local level requires a participatory approach from the public, the private sectors, and NGOs as a partnership, all being involved in the decision-making processes for planning and management of the destination (Aref, Redzuan and Emby, 2009; Aref and Redzuan, 2010; Twining-Ward and Butler, 2002).

The term “public sector or government” covers a range of public organizations, from national government ministries and departments, government business enterprises, to local government departments (Lacy *et al.*, 2002; Ruhanen, 2013; Timothy, 1998). In order to achieve a sustainable development and optimal tourism industry functions, leaders in the public sector have responsibilities not only in legal but also in regulatory matters (Lacy *et al.*, 2002). Consequently, the public sector role is essentially of regulating and managing a triangular relationship between host areas and their habitats and residents, tourists, and the tourism industry (Lane, 2005). The public sector has to reconcile the tensions between the three partners in the triangle, keeping the long term equilibrium, minimizing environmental and cultural damage, optimizing visitor satisfaction, and maximizing the long-term economic growth of the destination (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005, 2006; Lane, 2005). Besides, the public sector has basic responsibilities including: - establishing legality and regulation; - policy and institutional frame working in which the tourism industry functions and sustainable development can achieved; - building infrastructures and facilities – roads, airports, ports, electricity and waste management, marketing and promotion, education and training (Lacy *et al.*, 2002; Scott *et al.*, 2011).

According to the Agenda 21 for the travel and tourism industry, it is extremely important that the public sector fulfils its responsibilities if sustainable tourism development at local and national levels is to be achieved (WTO, 2002b).

Private sector travel and tourism organizations, such as tour operators, hotel and restaurant owners, play a crucial role in sustainable tourism development. These organizations have responsibilities to ensure that decisions about investment, employment, operations and other product development, marketing and investment in operations take full account of the Agenda 21, while continuing to develop voluntary programs (self-regulation) to improve the environmental management and enhance positive social impacts (Lacy *et al.*, 2002; Tinsley and Lynch, 2001; UNCED, 1992; WTO, 2004). Examples of these responsibilities include

increasing the efficiency of their resource utilization, by the reuse and recycle of residues, and the reducing the quantity of waste discharge per unit of economic output (UNCED, 1992). Organizations need to make a strong commitment to education and environmental training of staff, minimizing negative environmental and cultural impacts and creating incentive schemes to promote sustainable social and economic development of a country (Lacy *et al.*, 2002; UNCED, 1992; WTO, 2004). The private sector needs a stable policy regime that enables and encourages the tourism industry to operate responsibly and efficiently. Such a regime is essential in implementing long-term policies and increasing prosperity of local communities, through trading, employment and livelihood opportunities, especially for women, contributing towards their professional development, strengthening their economic role and transforming the social system (UNCED, 1992; WTO, 2004).

At last, leaders in NGOs play a vital decision making roles in the implementation of the Agenda 21. NGOs create capacity building programs at local levels, involving local authorities, local businessmen and local communities, allowing them to participate, in an informed manner, in the planning, decision making, implementation, supervisory and monitoring process of the Local Agenda 21 guidelines for sustainable tourism development process (Bramwell, 2011; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; WTO, 2002b). Furthermore, NGOs play a key role in representing and standing up for the best interests of local communities, and they can act as a dialog catalyst for small local institutions on issues such as environment, culture and gender (UNCSD, 1999; WTO, 2004). They can also increase awareness to tourism issues and provide feedback to public and private organizations.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Target population

The target population for this study were local leaders living in three districts in Timor-Leste, Baucau, Dili and Maliana. These districts were selected because of their geographical location, comprising the three main cities located in the East, Central and West of the territory. Those have the potential and characteristics suited to the tourism industry in Timor-Leste. The Public Sector, Private Sectors, and NGOs in this research comprise leaders of organizations such as government, travel agencies, hotels, restaurants, and NGO's who play important roles and have responsibilities to contribute directly or indirectly to a sustainable tourism development at local, regional or national levels.

The target population residing in the three districts was 156 persons (leaders), with the following breakdown between districts: Baucau (18), Dili (126), and Maliana (12). The sample size was calculated as 125 persons and respondents were distributed throughout the three districts: Baucau, 17 respondents, Dili, 96 respondents, and 12 respondents in Maliana.

4.2. Questionnaire and data collection

A questionnaire was developed as a means for collecting data through a five-step process. At first, the questionnaire was developed based on a literature review related to sustainability concepts, its principles, and the operationalization of tourism development in a destination. On the second step, the questionnaire was developed in Portuguese and it was translated into Tetum (the national language) by the Dili Institute of Technology Language Centre (DIT-LC) to ensure the consistency and correctness of the content. A Tetum and Portuguese expert in DIT-LC reviewed the content of both copies to ensure consistency and correctness of translation. Third, five senior students of the tourism department at DIT attended a data collection training between the 12th and 14th of January 2012. In the fourth step, the

questionnaire was pre-tested in 5 tourist organizations and 5 non-tourist organizations in Dili. Lastly, the content of the questionnaire was revised and adjusted based on the results of the pre-test. The Data collection took place over two months between the 1st of June and the 30th of July 2012.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Socio-demographic characteristics

The main socio-demographic characteristics of the local leaders surveyed can be seen in Table 1. Most of them were male, but this varied within sectors (92.9% in the public sector; 62.3% in the private sector and 57.1% in NGOs). Evaluating all the local leaders as a whole, we observed a total of 68.0% male respondents (n = 85). Regarding age, 49.3% of private sector and 46.4% in NGOs leaders were aged between 30 and 39 years. In the public sector, 42.9% leaders aged between 40 and 49 years. Overall, most local leaders had a bachelor degree level (75.0%). Looking at incomes, 86% in public sector had a monthly salary below 599 USD. In comparison, all of the leaders in NGOs and in the private sector had salary higher than this value. The highest salaries were earned by leaders in the public sector.

Table 1: Sample profile of the surveyed local leaders

Variables	Leaders in Public Sec.		Leaders in Private Sec.		Leaders in NGOs	
	n	%	N	%	n	%
Gender	28	100	69	100	28	100
Male	26	92.9	43	62.3	16	57.1
Female	2	7.1	26	37.7	12	42.9
Age	28	100	69	100	28	100
20-29	2	7.1	14	20.3	3	10.72
30-39	6	21.4	34	49.3	11	39.28
40-49	12	42.9	20	29.0	13	46.4
50-59	7	25.0	1	1.4	1	3.6
> 60	1	3.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
Education	28	100	69	100	28	100
Basic school	1	3.6	3	4.3	0	0.0
High school	3	10.7	6	8.7	3	10.7
Bachelor degree	21	75	55	79.7	18	64.3
Master and Phd degree	3	10.7	5	7.3	7	25.0
Job Occupation	28	99.9	69	100	28	100
Administrators and Head of Villages	9	32.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Directors and Presidents	16	57.1	10	14.5	12	42.9
Managers	2	7.1	54	78.3	4	14.2
Other	1	3.6	5	7.2	12	42.9
Salary	28	100	69	100	28	100
200 - 399 USD	3	11.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

400 - 599 USD	21	75.0	1	1.0	0	0.0
600 - 799 USD	4	14.0	20	30.0	23	82.0
800 - 999 USD	0	0	27	39.0	3	11.0
> 1000 USD	0	0	21	30.0	2	7.0

5.2. Perceptions about the concept of sustainable tourism development

Perceptions of the local leaders towards sustainable tourism development concept are presented in Table 2. This table shows the percentages of affirmative responses to 4 questions related to this concept. The level of knowledge of the different sectors is presented as well as the *p-value* from the Pearson Chi-Square tests for independence between knowledge (yes or no) and the leaders' typology. The results show that, overall, local leaders demonstrate a very low level of knowledge and familiarity with the Agenda 21 document regarding the travel and tourism industry. Overall, the proportion of those with higher level of knowledge is higher within NGOs leaders and lower within public sector leaders. In some situations, the relationship between leaders' typology and knowledge level is significant (*p-value* < 0.05).

Table 2. Perceptions about the concept of sustainable tourism development
(% of those who responded "Yes")

	Public Sector Leaders	Private Sector Leaders	NGOs Leaders	Pearson Chi-Square (<i>p-value</i>)
Have you heard of Agenda 21 for the Sector of Travel and Tourism?	17.9%	31.9%	42.9%	0.128
Do you have access to the Agenda 21 document (in electronic or paper)?	14.3%	39.1%	46.4%	0.025
Have you read the definitions of sustainable development and sustainable tourism therein?	17.9%	40.6%	42.9%	0.074
Have you read the objectives and priority areas of action for companies in the tourism sector?	14.3%	42.0%	42.9%	0.025

5.3. Adoption of the individual sustainable development practices

The levels of individual adoption of sustainable practices within the surveyed leaders are presented in Table 3. As can be observed, the local leaders show very low levels of support to sustainable development in practice. In most cases, the relationship between leaders' typology and agreement level is significant (*p-value* < 0.05). In fact, most of the local leaders in public sector report a lower level of adoption of sustainable development practices than leaders in private and NGOs. Within the three groups of leaders, the high levels of adoption were found with regard to the following questions: "your company buys local products whenever they are available?" and "your company uses hand-labor and local materials in redevelopment or expansion of equipment?"

Table 3. Adoption of the sustainable development practices
(% of those who responded “Yes”)

	Public Sector Leaders	Private Sector Leaders	NGOs Leaders	Pearson Chi-Square (<i>p-value</i>)
Have you done an assessment of the impact of their activities on environment and development?	10.7%	37.7%	32.1%	0.032
Do you have an organizational environmental policy including environmental practice and sustainability objectives?	32.1%	40.6%	39.3%	0.737
Do you separate waste for recycling?	21.4%	34.8%	50.0%	0.081
Do you reuse products and packaging whenever possible?	32.1%	46.4%	50.0%	0.339
Implement measures to reduce energy consumption?	42.9%	50.7%	60.7%	0.406
Employs energy saving technologies?	10.7%	50.7%	21.4%	0.000
Use alternative energy / renewable (solar, photovoltaic, or other)	60.7%	43.5%	53.6%	0.273
Regulators use to reduce consumption of water (the taps in the toilets)?	39.3%	44.9%	57.1%	0.381
Use non-potable water - for example, in irrigation, laundry, etc. - To save drinking water?	42.9%	50.7%	75.0%	0.036
Ensures the final destination of appropriate wastewater (public sanitation, septic tank)?	28.6%	52.2%	39.3%	0.089
Acquires biodegradable detergents, fertilizers and biological products “ozone-friendly”?	10.7%	46.4%	17.9%	0.001
Buys recycled products that are compatible with standards of operation of the unit?	10.7%	43.5%	7.1%	0.000
Minimizes the use of hazardous substances or replaces them with less dangerous?	17.9%	56.5%	14.3%	0.000
Controls the noise to the outside?	14.3%	46.4%	14.3%	0.001
Control emissions to the atmosphere (CO ₂ , aerosols, odors, heat, etc.)?	14.3%	43.5%	14.3%	0.002
Buys local products whenever they are available?	57.1%	76.8%	60.7%	0.096
Trains and motivates employees to implement these practices?	42.9%	75.4%	57.1%	0.007
Uses hand-labor and local materials in redevelopment or expansion of equipment?	64.3%	71.0%	67.9%	0.805
Zones and offers non-smoking rooms?	50.0%	58.0%	53.6%	0.759
Sensitizes customers to save water and energy (through leaflets, etc.)?	50.0%	59.4%	50.0%	0.574
Provides information to assist customers who are using public transport?	21.4%	72.5%	39.3%	0.000
Provides information to customers on tourist attractions and local services?	21.4%	81.2%	25.0%	0.000
Already implemented a quality management system in your organization?	35.7%	79.7%	32.1%	0.000

5.4. Initiatives for sustainable development at the organizational level

At the organizational level, the local leaders report some participation in voluntary initiatives towards implementing sustainable development in Timor-Leste (Table 4). Overall, the results show that most of the local leaders in NGOs participated in these initiatives, in a stronger effort than leaders in the public or private sectors. In some items, the relationship between leaders' typology and agreement level is significant (*p-value* < 0.05).

Table 4. Initiatives for sustainable tourism
(% of those who responded "Yes")

	Public Sector Leaders	Private Sector Leaders	NGOs Leaders	Pearson Chi-Square (<i>p-value</i>)
Codes of conduct (for all units)?	50.0%	46.4%	75.0%	0.034
Best practice guides (for all units)?	39.3%	50.7%	71.4%	0.048
Eco-labels, seals or awards for environmental quality?	42.9%	49.3%	71.4%	0.069
Environmental management system	35.7%	56.5%	53.6%	0.171

Table 5 shows the same items presented in table 4 but now the level of importance ascribed to each item is assessed. Now it is clear that the three groups show a strong level of understanding of the importance of implementing voluntary sustainable development initiatives. There is limited variability in the responses between the three groups of local leaders and, overall, the relationship between leaders' typology and agreement level is not significant (*p-value* > 0.05).

Table 5. Importance of initiatives for sustainable development
(% of those who responded "Yes")

	Public Sector Leaders	Private Sector Leaders	NGOs Leaders	Pearson Chi-Square (<i>p-value</i>)
Codes of conduct (for all units)?	89.3%	85.3%	92.9%	0.568
Best practice guides (for all units)?	92.9%	85.5%	92.9%	0.432
Eco-labels, seals or awards for environmental quality?	92.9%	85.5%	92.9%	0.432
Environmental management system	92.9%	88.4%	92.9%	0.703

5.5. Motivations and barriers to adopt sustainable development practices

Table 6 shows that all groups of local leaders understand and are motivated for adopting sustainable development practices. In most cases, the relationship between opinions of different groups of leaders and agreement is not significant (*p-value* > 0.05). Note, however, that, in the most motivational questions, leaders in the NGOs express higher levels of agreement than public and private leaders.

Table 6. Motivations to adopt sustainable development practices
(% of those who responded "Yes")

	Public Sector Leaders	Private Sector Leaders	NGOs Leaders	Pearson Chi-Square (<i>p-value</i>)
To increase business profitability by reducing costs	100%	97.1%	100%	0.438
To increase customer satisfaction and attract "green tourists"	96.4%	97.1%	100%	0.629
To increase employee satisfaction (pride in the company, commitment to quality, reduce health risks and safety)	96.4%	94.2%	96.4%	0.846
To benefit the local community and ultimately, the tourist destination	96.4%	95.7%	100%	0.540
To improve the company's public relations (credibility, image, reputation)	100%	95.7%	100%	0.287
To achieving a marketing advantage over the competition	96.4%	97.1%	100%	0.629

Table 7 shows a strong agreement to all of possible obstacles to the adoption of sustainable development practices, especially in the case of “high associated investment costs”. In two cases, “the lack of information and disinterest on the part of business sectors “ and the “the lack of technical assistance”, differences among the three types of leaders and non-leaders are statistically significant, with the leaders from the private sector expressing lower agreement levels ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$).

Table 7. Barriers to adopt sustainable development practices
(% of those who responded “Yes”)

	Public Sector Leaders	Private Sector Leaders	NGOs Leaders	Pearson Chi-Square ($p\text{-value}$)
High associated investment costs	92.9%	82.6%	96.4%	0.110
The low importance attached by customers or tourists	82.1%	71.0%	92.9%	0.052
The difficulties of practical implementation (tasks such as the need to increase training to employees and management tasks)	89.3%	78.3%	96.4%	0.059
The lack of information and disinterest on the part of business sectors	96.4%	81.2%	96.4%	0.033
The lack of technical assistance	96.4%	78.3%	100%	0.004
The lack of government incentives and / or tax benefits	96.4%	87.0%	96.4%	0.178

5.6. Entities that can contribute to sustainable development

Table 8 shows that, overall, local leaders agree that the set of suggested entities can have an important role in sustainable tourism development (agreement levels in all groups higher than 88%). Regarding all entities, the relationship between leaders’ typology and agreement level is not significant ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$).

Table 8. The action for sustainable development
(% of those who responded “Yes”)

	Public Sector Leaders	Private Sector Leaders	NGOs Leaders	Pearson Chi-Square ($p\text{-value}$)
National government	100%	94.2%	100%	0.187
Local government	100%	88.4%	100%	0.051
Association of Entrepreneurs	92.9%	88.4%	100%	0.159
Companies	89.3%	89.9%	100%	0.207
Scientists	92.9%	87.0%	100%	0.114
The Environmental Organization and Citizens groups	100%	91.3%	100%	0.077
The Citizens	100%	95.7%	100%	0.287
The Social Communication	100%	97.1%	100%	0.438
The Schools	100%	97.1%	100%	0.438

6. CONCLUSION

The local leaders in public, private sectors, and NGOs have key roles in achieving sustainable tourism development at local, regional, and national levels. The study found that leaders in Timor-Leste have a very low understanding of the concept of sustainable tourism development. Most of them had not heard about the Agenda 21 for the Sector of Travel and Tourism, nor had accessed to Agenda 21 documents. This means a significant lack of knowledge about the definitions of sustainable development and sustainable tourism or even about the objectives and priority areas of action for companies in the tourism sector. When asked about the individual adoption of sustainable development in practice, there are also low levels of average adoption, even though the results improve when the question is posed at the organizational level. An additional encouraging result is that leaders classify these initiatives as very important. They also agree that there are substantial motives to foster these practice but several barriers to its implementation. All entities, from the national government to the citizens are recognized as having a potential role in this process.

Some policy recommendations can result from this study. Firstly, it would be important if the policy makers of Timor-Leste ratify, adopt, and adapt the Agenda 21 as a national policy guidance for sustainable development for all government bodies, private sectors, civil societies, and communities. In this sense, programs for capacity building, through education and training at local levels for the local leaders, and local communities about roles and responsibilities for implementation of the Agenda 21 sustainable development guidelines, are needed. Secondly, since the tourism uses abundant public resources, it would be important for the public sector to assume a more active role with local governments in promoting sustainable development, including tourism development, and allowing the private sector, and NGOs to participate in the planning, decision making, implementation, supervising, and monitoring process for sustainable tourism development in all the territory of Timor-Leste..

There is a lack of literature addressing sustainable tourism development in developing countries on the first stages of tourism development, particularly the case of Timor-Leste, including knowledge about the local leaders' perceptions of this concept in this territory. This is a first study on this issue. So, further research should be conducted in order to consolidate this analysis not only in the specific case of Timor-Leste but also in the general case of developing countries.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is financed by National Funds provided by FCT- Foundation for Science and Technology through project UID/SOC/04020/2013.

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