

## **Towards Sustainable Tourism Development: A Comprehensive Analysis of Strategies and Perspectives in the Kanto Region, Japan**

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### **Abstract**

This article investigates visions and perspectives for sustainable tourism development in Japan's Kanto region. It examines national-level guidelines encompassing four critical sustainable destination management measures, analyses pre- and post-pandemic prefectural tourism development plans, and integrates insights from surveys with key governing actors, including government officials, destination management organizations, and private sector tourism associations in the Kanto region. The findings emphasize the Kanto region's shift towards holistic and sustainable tourism development, prioritizing community engagement, economic growth, environmental stewardship, and overall sustainability. This research contributes insights for sustainable tourism planning and policymaking, facilitating a harmonious balance between tourism expansion, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation to benefit both visitors and local communities.

**Keywords:** Tourism governance, Sustainable tourism development, Stakeholders collaboration, Tourism-driven area development, Sustainability

### **1. Introduction**

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2023) describes sustainable tourism (ST) as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UNWTO 2023: 1). This research explores an approach to sustainable tourism development (ST Development) and utilizes Japan's Kanto region as a case study area. The Japan Tourism Agency (JTA), the main organization responsible for tourism policy development on a national scale, in the policy guideline entitled “Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations,

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JSTS-D (*Nipponban jizoku kanoona kankoo gaidorain*)” uses the definition of ST propped by the UNWTO adding domestic context to it:

In Japan, the rapid increase in foreign tourists visiting the country has raised concerns, particularly in some regions. These concerns are related to issues such as overcrowding and misconduct, and there has been frequent media coverage of so-called “overtourism.” Furthermore, the recent outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has severely impacted tourism-related industries in various regions. [...] Creating a truly “sustainable” tourist destination that can endure crises becomes crucial (JTA/UNWTO Japan Office 2020: 5).

Recognizing the imperative for ST practices, the JTA established the Sustainable Tourism Promotion Headquarters and issued a policy document outlining measures to address overtourism and advance sustainability within the industry. This article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of perspectives towards ST Development in the Kanto region of Japan. By examining national-level guidelines, pre-pandemic and post-pandemic prefectural tourism development plans (TDPs), and gathering insights from tourism governing actors during the COVID-19 crisis, this study offers insights into the transition towards ST in the region. This article contrasts the differing policy interpretations and practices between the public and private sectors, illuminating the nuances in their approaches to ST.

This article’s first section analyses national-level ST guidelines. It explores the “Toward a Sustainable Tourism Developed Country” framework with four key measures: collaborative destination management, a holistic “sustainable tourism index,” effective local communication, and visitor guidelines. The second section examines pre- and post-pandemic prefectural TDPs in the Kanto region. The third section explores the perspectives of governing actors involved in tourism development in the area. A structured survey targeting governing actors responsible for tourism planning and management captures views from governmental sectors, domestic management organisations (DMOs), and private-sector tourism associations. The conclusion highlights that the Kanto region is moving toward a holistic and sustainable approach to tourism development by acknowledging the significance of community engagement, economic benefits for residents, environmental responsibility, and overall sustainability. By synthesizing the findings and discussions from these sections, this article contributes to the growing body of knowledge on ST Development.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Investigating perspectives on ST Development in the Kanto region of Japan, this study employs a comparative analysis of tourism policy guidelines. It examines national-level guidelines, pre- and post-COVID-19-pandemic TDPs, and supplements it by tourism governing actors' insights obtained during the pandemic. Comparing pre- and post-pandemic TDPs allows for the investigation of the evolving landscape of tourism planning and policy implementation and determination of how the crisis prompted a re-evaluation of priorities.

The selection of the Kanto region as a case study enhances the study's depth and breadth. Encompassing Tokyo and adjacent prefectures, it offers diverse tourism destinations, allowing a comprehensive exploration of various development scenarios and strategies. This deliberate choice aims for a thorough and nuanced examination of ST Development in Japan, going beyond Kyoto's widely recognized overtourism issues to ensure a holistic understanding.

This study contributes to the ongoing discussion on tourism sustainability. It employs a blended research approach, involving an original survey targeting governing actors responsible for tourism planning and management. Additionally, qualitative thematic analysis was conducted on policy documents at national and prefectural levels, identifying recurring themes and patterns within textual data. This dual-method approach offers a comprehensive exploration of ST Development, combining governing actors responsible for tourism planning and management perspectives with policy document insights.

Original surveys involved multilevel governing actors from public and private sectors, utilizing an online survey form. The sampling strategy, aligned with established frameworks in tourism governance literature (Goeldner & Ritchie 2012; Morrison 2013; Lustický & Musil 2016), categorized tourism governing actors into three distinct groups: national and prefectural government entities engaged in tourism policy, DMOs within the Kanto region, and private sector tourism associations in the Kanto region. The survey targeted 6 national-level government entities, including the JTA in the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism (MLIT), resulting in 1 response, and 13 prefectural-level government entities, including the Metropolitan Government, Prefectural administrations, and Prefectural administrative center administrations, with 5 responses. Additionally, 20 Kanto regional and local DMOs were targeted, yielding 4 responses, and 17 responses were collected from private-sector tourism business associations from the intended 169 (Appendix 1). Survey responses have been anonymized. The assigned code indicates the institution and the response date.

Appendix 2 outlines survey items related to ST Development. Data collection spanned August to October 2021.

The author conducted qualitative thematic content analysis on 45 national-level and prefectural-level tourism development policy documents. The aim was to explore the approach to sustainable tourism within these policies, which included the White Paper on Tourism, the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan, and prefectural TDPs (Appendices 3 and 4). Citations are included to illustrate the analysis. Japanese citations were translated into English by the author for research purposes, ensuring an accurate representation of the original content.

### **3. Towards Sustainable Tourism Development**

Before the global COVID-19 pandemic, Japan actively promoted itself in the international travel market, attracting a significant influx of foreign tourists. However, this economic boon came with adverse consequences, particularly overtourism in popular hubs like Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto (Abe 2019). Dissatisfaction among residents gave rise to the term “tourism pollution (Bertorelli 2019).” The JTA primarily focused on addressing overtourism, notably in Kyoto, as advocated in “Toward a Sustainable Tourism Developed Country”:

In the Sustainable Tourism Promotion Headquarters, to achieve sustainable tourism, we first focus on the issue of overtourism, which has garnered increasing attention in recent years, within the broader concept of “sustainable tourism” (MLIT 2019: 11).

Recognizing the adverse impacts of increasing number of foreign tourists on the living environment of residents and domestic tourist destinations, the JTA released “Toward a Sustainable Tourism Developed Country,” aiming to make tourism in Japan sustainable (MLIT 2019). These national-level guidelines provide directions for governments of various levels in ST Development (Table 1). Published on June 10, 2019, they represent the official vision before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Measure	Japanese title	Main point
The Necessity of Tourism Destination Management and Its Stakeholders	観光地マネジメントの必要性とその主体	The rising number of tourists in popular destinations is a persistent issue that necessitates a long-term approach. Local governments and DMOs should assume responsibility for effective tourism destination management.
Tourism Destination Management Based on Accurate and Comprehensive Understanding of the Situation	正確かつ多面的な実態把握に基づく観光地マネジメント	It is essential to go beyond the “destination indicators” such as the number of day-trip visitors, overnight guests, and in-area consumption. It is also crucial to measure data, including “residence indicators” like resident satisfaction and environmental impact.
Promoting Communication with Local Residents	地域住民とのコミュニケーションの促進	It is crucial to engage in ongoing communication with the local community, promote understanding of tourism, and actively seek their cooperation.
Effective Information Provision to Visiting Travelers	訪問する旅行者への効果的な情報提供	In addressing issues related to the increase in visitors, such as etiquette violations and overcrowding, efficiently and effectively conveying necessary information to individual travelers is a crucial means.

Table 1: Four key measures of  
 “Toward a sustainable tourism development country”  
 (Compiled by the author based on MLIT 2019)

The first measure focuses on destination management, emphasizing collaboration among tourism stakeholders to maximize local economic benefits, minimize negative impacts, and ensure gains for the community, travelers, culture, and the environment. To address overtourism, guidelines suggest adopting global best practices to balance economic benefits with local community well-being and protect cultural and natural

resources unique to each region. Local governments and DMOs are recommended for overseeing destination management due to their understanding of the local context (MLIT 2019: 32):

Considering that the environment in each region is different and it is necessary to make fine adjustments to the tourists and residents in the region, local governments and DMOs are the first candidates for tourist destination management because they understand the actual situation of the region the best (MLIT 2019: 32).

The second measure in the guidelines proposes developing a “sustainable tourism index” to monitor tourism’s impact. Beyond conventional indicators, it advocates “good-to-live” metrics, prioritizing local well-being, including resident satisfaction and environmental effects. The third measure focuses on communicating with residents to gain their support. The guidelines recommend diverse channels like media and community meetings to provide information (MLIT 2019: 39). The fourth guideline aims at educating visitors about proper behavior to avoid etiquette violations and congestion. It suggests indicating prohibited items or actions while offering cultural and historical context.

These four measures present a comprehensive framework for ST Development, emphasizing collaboration among stakeholders, the adoption of “good-to-live” metrics, communication with residents, and educating visitors. They serve as a foundation for understanding how the Kanto region’s prefectural governments translate these principles into actions. The next section explores their implementation through a thematic content analysis of prefectural TDPs.

#### **4. Thematic Content Analysis of Prefectural Tourism Development Plans: Pre-Pandemic Perspectives**

The analysis of the Kanto region’s prefectural TDPs adopted before the COVID-19 pandemic provides insights into the key themes related to ST Development. This section explores the identified themes and their significance in the context of the plans. The analysis reveals a strong focus on economic revitalization, safety and disaster resilience, cultural preservation and heritage, and environmental conservation as priority areas for ST Development.

##### **Economic Revitalization and Job Creation**

This theme underscores plans focusing on local economic growth and employment opportunities through ST. Prefectural plans acknowledge tourism as a key driver of the

regional economy and aim to boost their appeal as travel destinations. Strategies include developing distinctive tourism assets that capitalize on the region's natural environment and local sectors, like agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. For instance, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is exploring innovative approaches to utilize its abundant natural and agricultural resources, especially in the Tama and island regions, with an emphasis on broadening the tourist base:

To boost Tokyo's appeal as a travel destination, we'll innovate by developing distinctive local tourism assets. We aim to introduce fresh perspectives previously unexplored, capitalizing on the region's abundant natural resources and signature industries like agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, with a particular focus on the Tama and island regions (Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs, Tokyo Metropolitan Government 2018: 44).

Moreover, the plans highlight the importance of developing tourist areas that capitalize on various local resources, including historical, cultural, and natural assets. This multifaceted approach seeks to extend visitor stays and promote deeper engagement with the destination. The focus is not solely on attracting tourists but on creating meaningful experiences that foster longer-term economic sustainability:

It is necessary to create a tourist area that utilizes various local resources such as history and culture, including the prefecture's rich natural environment and the history and culture that has been handed down since ancient times (Tourism Planning Division, Department of Commerce, Industry and Labor, Chiba Prefectural Government 2019: 27).

Another facet of this theme is its response to demographic challenges, particularly the expected population decline. Prefectures like Kanagawa acknowledge the necessity of rejuvenating their local economies and creating employment prospects through ST. This acknowledgment is especially relevant within the context of Japan's aging population and decreasing birth rate. The plans strive to ensure the perpetuated economic growth from ST, extending beyond the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games:

In this prefecture as well, the population is expected to decline in the future due to the rapid decline in the birthrate and aging population. By revitalizing the local economy and creating jobs, it is necessary to spread sustainable tourism even after the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games (International Culture

and Tourism Bureau Tourism Division, Kanagawa Prefectural Government 2019: 4).

This theme underscores the plans' commitment to using ST for regional economic growth, job creation, and long-term stability. Prioritizing the socio-economic aspect highlights its central role in shaping tourism strategies, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of ST, where economic benefits are closely linked to community well-being and regional development.

### **Safety and Disaster Resilience**

Ensuring the safety and security of tourists, especially in the event of a disaster, is a significant theme in TDPs. Disaster-resistant infrastructure and measures are considered crucial for ST Development. The plans acknowledge the importance of disaster resilience in protecting tourists and maintaining the integrity of the tourism sector:

To realize sustainable tourism, it is important to ensure the safety and security of tourists in the event of a disaster (International Culture and Tourism Bureau Tourism Division, Kanagawa Prefectural Government 2019: 4).

The focus on safety and disaster resilience in tourism plans highlights their vital role in achieving ST in the Kanto region. These plans prioritize tourist safety, particularly in potential disaster scenarios, acknowledging it as a paramount concern. This approach minimizes risks, ensuring visitor satisfaction and the tourism sector's overall integrity and longevity. By emphasizing disaster resilience, the plans establish a strong foundation for coping with unforeseen challenges, ultimately promoting the sustainability of the tourism industry.

### **Cultural Preservation and Heritage**

Preserving and promoting the region's cultural heritage is a key theme in the TDPs. Understanding the local area's traditional culture and history is deemed essential for creating a tourist destination. The plans stress the importance of conserving designated cultural properties, facilitating their suitable use, and preserving them for future generations. They also highlight efforts to protect and showcase the historical cultural heritage, like Kamakura, with an active pursuit of its registration as a World Heritage Site:

We will support owners, etc. to plan the appropriate preservation and utilization of national and prefectural designated cultural properties. We will promote



efforts to protect the historical cultural heritage of Kanagawa, the “Old Capital of the Samurai, Kamakura,” and pass it on to future generations, while actively promoting its appeal (International Culture and Tourism Bureau Tourism Division, Kanagawa Prefectural Government 2019: 11).

This theme highlights the TDP’s commitment to creating authentic tourism experiences deeply rooted in local cultural heritage. It represents a deliberate move beyond surface-level attractions to explore the region’s historical and traditional essence. By emphasizing the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, the plans seek to establish deep connections between tourists and the destinations they explore. This approach underscores the importance of cultural preservation and meaningful visitor engagement as essential elements of tourism development strategies in the Kanto region.

### **Environmental Conservation**

Environmental conservation is a central and recurring theme in the TDPs, showcasing a deep commitment to sustainable resource management and the preservation of the natural environment. The plans prioritize responsible use of finite resources while actively safeguarding the region’s intrinsic beauty.

One notable aspect of this theme is the focus on the sustainable use of hot spring resources. The plans demonstrate a dedication to preserving and wisely utilizing these natural assets, ensuring their long-term sustainability for future generations to enjoy. For instance, Kanagawa prefecture’s tourism development plan states:

To ensure the sustainable use of limited hot spring resources, we are committed to their protection and responsible utilization. We also aim to preserve the natural environment that enhances the region’s appeal, including coastal areas along Sagami Bay prone to erosion, Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, Tanzawa-Oyama Quasi-National Park, and prefectural natural parks. Additionally, we will maintain and manage urban parks, providing spaces for connecting with nature (International Culture and Tourism Bureau Tourism Division, Kanagawa Prefectural Government 2019: 11).

The plans emphasize natural environment preservation, vital for enhancing the region’s attractiveness. Initiatives like safeguarding vulnerable coastal areas like Sagami Bay’s sandy beaches show a proactive stance on preserving nature. The inclusion of national parks like Fuji-Hakone-Izu, Tanzawa-Oyama, and prefectural

parks in conservation highlights a comprehensive commitment to safeguarding diverse ecosystems.

The environmental conservation theme showcases dedication to sustainable, responsible tourism development. It aligns tourism's economic benefits with environmental stewardship, acknowledging nature's role in the region's appeal. Through these conservation efforts, Kanto's tourism plans aim to balance economic growth and environmental preservation, promoting ST Development.

Analyzing pre-pandemic Kanto tourism plans reveals a multifaceted approach to ST. Themes include Economic Revitalization, Safety and Disaster Resilience, Cultural Preservation, and Environmental Conservation, aligned with overarching objectives. This highlights ST as a strategic driver for regional economic growth.

It is noteworthy that only four out of the seven analysed prefectural TDPs feature sustainability-related initiatives, with most of these initiatives being incorporated shortly before 2019. While this might suggest that ST had not been a dominant agenda in the region before the pandemic, these developments align with the broader national-level trajectory towards sustainability and the integration of ST into the regional agenda.

## **5. Shifting Priorities: Post-Pandemic Perspectives on Sustainable Tourism**

This section examines shifts in tourism development policies regarding ST in Kanto during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysis of post-pandemic plans uncovers new themes: resident engagement, economic benefits for residents, environmental consciousness, and sustainability. These evolving perspectives redefine ST priorities.

### **Resident Involvement and Satisfaction**

The theme of Resident Involvement and Satisfaction highlights the importance of engaging residents in tourism and enhancing their satisfaction. Plans emphasize strategies to increase resident participation in the sector, aiming to improve the experience for tourists and residents. For example, leveraging Tokyo's arts, culture, and traditional performing arts to facilitate such interactions:

[...] Enhancing residents' involvement in tourism, fostering a more welcoming atmosphere for visitors, and elevating the satisfaction of both travelers and locals. This includes boosting economic gains for residents by targeting extended stays, repeat visitors, and expanding MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism. (Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs, Tokyo Metropolitan Government 2022: 14).

The plans prioritize resident involvement and satisfaction to create a positive and mutually beneficial tourism experience. This expanded perspective goes beyond economic aspects to encompass the well-being of local residents. Local involvement is also viewed as an opportunity to raise ecological, cultural, and tourism awareness among the local population. It fosters appreciation and connection with the region's unique attributes, promoting sustainable acceptance and understanding among different communities:

High tourist numbers offer not just benefits to tourists but also to locals, helping them appreciate the region's appeal and fostering stronger attachment. This mutual understanding enhances tourism's perception in the region and promotes mutual respect, empathy, and understanding between areas, ultimately leading to a sustainable acceptance system (International Culture and Tourism Bureau Tourism Division, Kanagawa Prefectural Government 2023: 54).

The inclusion of Resident Involvement and Satisfaction themes in TDPs highlights an evolving view of ST in the Kanto region. It recognizes that sustainability extends beyond economics to engage local communities and promote positive interactions between residents and visitors. Prioritizing the well-being of both groups, the plans aim for a harmonious and sustainable tourism environment that encourages mutual respect, cultural exchange, and shared responsibility among stakeholders.

### **Economic Benefits for Residents**

The "Economic Benefits for Residents" theme in the TDPs emphasizes ST's role in enhancing local communities' economic well-being. They take a nuanced approach, focusing on longer-stay and repeat visitors to maximize residents' economic gains. Additionally, the plans aim to expand MICE tourism to attract high-value travelers who can significantly contribute to the local economy:

Increasing the economic benefits of tourism for residents by focusing on longer-stay visitors, repeat visitors, and the expansion of MICE tourism. [...] To encourage greater spending by each individual visitor through a shift toward "quality over quantity" in tourism while pursuing sustainable growth for the tourism industry by strengthening the businesses and organizations that drive it. Foster civic pride by advancing sustainable tourism that reflects the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while supporting the local economy, culture, environment, etc (Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs, Tokyo Metropolitan Government 2022: 41).

The shift to prioritize “quality over quantity” in tourism aims to create valuable, memorable experiences for tourists and enhance the visitor experience and individual spending while benefiting local communities. Additionally, the focus on strengthening the tourism sector recognizes the need for a robust, well-supported industry. The plans aim to promote civic pride through ST aligned with the United Nations’ SDGs, integrating economic, cultural, and environmental aspects into tourism development to align with global sustainability objectives.

### **Environmental Consciousness**

The “Environmental Consciousness” theme in post-pandemic TDPs signals a notable shift in the industry’s sustainability approach. The plans recognize tourism’s contribution to climate change and emphasize reducing greenhouse gas emissions. They promote the use of CO<sub>2</sub>-saving equipment by small and medium-sized enterprises to reduce the industry’s carbon footprint. For instance, the citation from Tochigi prefecture tourism development plan demonstrates this commitment:

[...] Promoting the renewal of CO<sub>2</sub>-saving equipment by small and medium-sized enterprises, etc., and the creation of new businesses for climate change countermeasures. [...] Promote eco-friendly school excursions that reduce the use of single-use plastics and food loss (Tourism Exchange Division, Tochigi Prefecture government 2021: 28).

This shift aligns with global climate change mitigation efforts, reflecting a proactive stance in environmental sustainability. Additionally, sustainable waste management, reduction of single-use plastics, and minimizing food waste emphasize the commitment to lower environmental impact. These initiatives mirror a broader shift toward eco-friendly tourism practices considering the full lifecycle of products and services.

The emphasis on environmental sustainability in the TDPs signifies an evolving awareness of its vital role in the industry. This shift indicates a broader commitment to a comprehensive and ecological approach to tourism development, departing from the previous emphasis on social and economic aspects of sustainability.

### **Sustainability Aspects**

The theme of sustainability underscores the multi-dimensional approach to achieving ST Development. The plans recognize that sustainability encompasses various aspects that are essential for the long-term well-being of the tourism industry and local

communities. It addresses three key perspectives for fostering a positive relationship between tourism and host communities.

Firstly, the plans prioritize regional economic sustainability, recognizing tourism's contribution to local growth. They focus on generating income for local businesses and residents by attracting longer-stay and repeat visitors, and expanding MICE tourism. Secondly, sustainability encompasses environmental concerns, emphasizing efforts to decarbonize tourism, align with SDGs, and reduce the environmental footprint. Initiatives include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity protection, and sustainable waste management. Integration of sustainability criteria into tourism certifications and the use of renewable energy in tourism facilities demonstrates a comprehensive environmental approach:

The perspective of sustainable tourism, such as local environmental conservation and the protection and inheritance of traditional culture, has become the standard for tourists around the world to choose tourist destinations (International Culture and Tourism Bureau Tourism Division, Kanagawa Prefectural Government 2023: 54).

Finally, the plans emphasize the sustainability of the local acceptance system, focusing on mutual respect, understanding, and attachment between tourists and local residents. This perspective acknowledges that positive interactions and cultural exchange between residents and tourists are crucial for a harmonious and welcoming tourism environment. By involving local residents in tourism and encouraging cultural exchange, the plans aim to enhance the overall tourism experience and strengthen the sense of community.

In conclusion, the sustainability theme in the TDPs adopts a holistic approach to achieve ST. It acknowledges the interplay of economic, environmental, and socio-cultural factors, emphasizing the need to integrate sustainability practices across all tourism sectors. This comprehensive approach reflects a commitment not only to economic prosperity but also to environmental responsibility and community well-being, establishing sustainability as a central pillar of tourism development in the Kanto region.

The analysis of post-pandemic TDPs in the Kanto region reveals evolving priorities and perspectives on ST. New themes like resident involvement, economic benefits for locals, environmental consciousness, and sustainability indicate a changing understanding of ST's role. The plans commit to a sustainable, resilient tourism

industry that benefits residents and visitors while reducing environmental impact. These changes underscore the rising recognition of community engagement, local economic benefits, and environmental conservation in post-pandemic tourism strategies.

## **6. Transition towards a Comprehensive and Sustainable Approach**

The findings suggest a shift from a narrow economy-focused approach to a holistic perspective, emphasizing resident satisfaction and environmental well-being. This reflects a growing awareness of community engagement, economic growth, environmental responsibility, and long-term sustainability in Kanto's tourism development.

In conclusion, the analysis of Kanto's TDPs reveals a shift towards a comprehensive and sustainable approach, highlighting the importance of community engagement, economic benefits, environmental responsibility, and overall sustainability. The next section presents results from an original survey conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering insights into the perspectives of tourism development governing actors.

## **7. Perspectives of Governing Actors on Sustainable Tourism Development in the Kanto Region**

This section unveils the results of the structured survey conducted amid the COVID-19 pandemic. These surveys sought to capture the viewpoints of governing actors engaged in tourism planning and management in the Kanto region. Through this analysis, the study seeks to shed light on the transformations in tourism development policies and approaches related to ST in the region.

### **Cooperation Among Stakeholders: Acknowledging Importance, Mixed Implementation**

The “cooperation among stakeholders” code highlights the respondents' recognition of the need for collaboration among various parties involved in ST Development within their regions. While cooperation among stakeholders was frequently mentioned, only 50.0% of respondents actively engaged in such collaboration. Approximately 38.5% expressed uncertainty about their level of cooperation, and 11.5% reported no engagement in cooperative efforts. Notably, respondents from private-sector tourism associations were among those who didn't cooperate, while most governmental sector and DMO respondents affirmed their active cooperation with other stakeholders. One government sector respondent stressed the importance

of collaboration involving the community, related organizations, and government to establish sustainable tourism destinations:

The community, related organizations, government, etc., should work together with a shared vision of “creating a sustainable tourist destination” (Pref 5, 25.10.2021).

Similarly, another government sector respondent emphasized the need for tourism industry-related stakeholders to work together, leveraging resources and inviting tourists and future residents to develop tourism sustainably with considerations for the economy, society, and the environment:

Tourism industry-related stakeholders should work together to revitalize the region and create tourism by making the best use of resources and inviting tourists and future residents to develop tourism sustainably, considering the economy, society, and the environment (Pref 2, 29.09.2021).

The responses indicate that the governmental sector and DMOs demonstrate a greater inclination towards cooperating with other stakeholders in the tourism development process, reflecting a more sustainable approach. In contrast, the private sector appears less involved and, at times, lacks awareness of the necessity of coordination or cooperation with other governing actors.

The private sector tourism associations primarily consist of local tourism businesses operated by community members. Their limited involvement in cooperation and coordination for tourism development suggests a challenge within the region. Despite the recurring mention of cooperation between stakeholders in the TDPs adopted before the pandemic, the results reveal a somewhat contradictory nature of governing actors' involvement in tourism planning and development.

In summary, the analysis indicates that, while the governmental sector and DMOs prioritize cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders, the private sector appears less engaged and may lack awareness of the importance of collaboration in tourism planning and development. The limited involvement of private tourism sector associations and the relatively low representation of DMOs as governing actors underscore the existing challenges in this area within Japan.

### **Tourism-Based Area Development and Infrastructure Revitalization**

The codes “tourism-based area development” and “area revitalization and infrastructure development” emerged as key themes in the survey responses. Respondents expressed their views on developing their areas through tourism and revitalizing infrastructure, aligning with the national and prefectural levels’ approach to ST. Developing tourism infrastructure and creating experience-based tourism opportunities were seen as effective strategies for revitalization. Meyer and Meyer (2015) suggest that tourism is recognized as a crucial catalyst for generating new economic activities in rural and remote regions, offering an alternative to industrialization and traditional industries. This highlights the transformative potential of tourism in stimulating economic growth and job creation in regions historically faced with population decline and economic stagnation. The expansion of tourism in these areas can enhance residents’ overall quality of life, providing opportunities for cultural preservation, and community engagement.

The term “*kankoo machizukuri*” (tourism-based area development) is most frequently employed by private business tourism association representatives. These individuals, representing local businesses and communities, show a strong interest in their area’s development. The responses highlight the consideration of experience-based tourism as a strategy for revitalization. As one respondent emphasized, enhancing tourist destination infrastructure can ensure a consistent flow of visitors, reducing dependence on special events in normal times:

By improving the infrastructure of a tourist destination, it is possible to expect a certain amount of visitors even in normal times without relying on special events (BAM 8, 27.09.2021).

Undoubtedly, tourism infrastructure development, including new roads and facilities, contributes to regional development and increases visitor numbers. As another respondent pointed out, tourism development and area revitalization can lead to “towns where people want to live” (BAM 9, 27.09.2021). This is especially crucial in addressing the outmigration of young, non-disabled individuals from rural and remote regions, as they often seek urban areas with superior infrastructure and job prospects.

Tourism development in remote and rural areas significantly impacts economic growth and social development, stimulating the creation of new employment opportunities and enhancing the overall quality of life, thereby attracting potential new residents, and revitalizing the area (Yang, Yang, Chen, Su, Zhi & Xi 2021). These revitalization strategies are frequently mentioned by representatives of local



businesses and communities. These codes collectively emphasize the recognition of potential benefits associated with developing tourism and improving infrastructure in respective areas.

### **Meeting the Needs of Local Residents and Tourists: A Focus on Sustainable Development**

The “meeting local residents’ and tourists’ needs” code underlines the challenge of developing tourism that aligns with the interests of both tourists and local communities. Historical research underscores that tourism development practices have traditionally centered on tourists’ interests. Thetsane (2019) argues that large multinational tourism companies and hotel developers have historically taken the lead in developing tourism projects in destinations, often overlooking local socio-economic conditions and the interests of local communities. Decisions regarding tourism development have often been made without sufficient consideration of the local communities’ interests (Sharpley & Telfer 2015).

Notably, while the governmental sector and DMOs recognized and prioritized this aspect, private-sector tourism associations did not explicitly mention it. Respondents from the governmental sector stressed the long-term benefits of ST for the local society and economy, extending beyond fulfilling tourists’ immediate needs. For example, one respondent stressed that ST transcends the temporary needs and desires of tourists and embraces a broader vision that prioritizes the enduring well-being of the local society and economy:

Sustainable tourism meets the needs of not only tourists but also local residents and the society of the destination. It contributes not only to the temporary effects of tourists’ visits but also to the economy and society of the region (Pref 1, 24.09.2021).

Another respondent from the governmental sector presented a definition of ST, emphasizing its role in meeting the diverse needs of visitors, the tourism industry, the environment, and host communities. This perspective suggests the commitment to safeguarding the region’s economic vitality, cultural heritage, and natural environment for current and future generations:

Tourism that meets the needs of visitors, industry, environment, and host areas, while giving due consideration to current and future environmental, socio-cultural, and economic impacts (Pref 4, 12.10.2021).

The theme of “meeting the needs of local residents and tourists” highlights the critical importance of considering the interests of both host communities and visitors in ST Development. While the governmental sector and DMOs explicitly acknowledge and prioritize this principle, its absence among private-sector tourism associations’ answers suggests a potential gap in their perspective. The viewpoints shared by respondents from the governmental sector reflect the overarching objective of ST, which aims to contribute to the enduring prosperity of the region’s economy, society, and environment, surpassing the immediate satisfaction of tourists’ desires.

## **7. Conclusions and Discussion**

This study provides a multi-tiered approach to achieving ST Development in Japan, particularly in the Kanto region, involving national, prefectural, and local governance levels. The national-level analysis explores tourism development guidelines and policy documents, revealing the main strategies and objectives set by the national government. At the prefectural level, examination of TDPs reveals region-specific goals and priorities within Kanto. Qualitative surveys at the local level involve local tourism business associations, DMOs, and prefectural governments, capturing the perspectives of those engaged in local tourism development. Synthesizing these analyses offers insights into the Kanto region’s shift toward a more comprehensive and sustainable tourism approach.

“Toward a Sustainable Tourism Developed Country” outlines national-level guidelines for ST Development, offering measures for both national and local governments. The first measure emphasizes destination management through collaboration among stakeholders, addressing economic benefits while tackling overtourism. Local governments and DMOs play a crucial role due to their deep local knowledge. The second measure proposes a “sustainable tourism index” incorporating “good-to-live” indicators, assessing resident satisfaction and environmental impact for holistic destination management. The third measure underscores effective communication with residents via various channels, fostering their understanding and engagement. The fourth measure promotes providing visitors with information about responsible behavior, reducing etiquette violations and congestion through clear guidelines and cultural context.

The analysis of pre-pandemic TDPs in the Kanto region reveals a multifaceted approach to ST, including themes like Economic Revitalization, Safety and Disaster Resilience, Cultural Preservation, and Environmental Conservation. It underscores the role of ST in supporting regional economic revitalization, job creation, and long-term stability. Analyzing post-pandemic plans reveals shifting priorities. New themes like

Resident Involvement, Economic Benefits for Residents, Environmental Consciousness, and Sustainability emerge, reflecting an evolving understanding of ST's role. These plans commit to a resilient, sustainable industry that benefits residents and visitors while minimizing environmental impact. This signifies a shift from solely focusing on tourism business vitality to a holistic approach considering resident satisfaction, environmental well-being, and long-term sustainability.

The analysis of governing actors' perspectives on ST Development highlights key themes. Firstly, cooperation among stakeholders is emphasized, with the governmental sector and tourism-related businesses recognized as primary stakeholders. However, a gap between awareness and action is evident, with only half of the respondents actively cooperating. Private-sector tourism associations exhibit a potential disconnect in collaboration. The next theme underscores the importance of tourism-based area development in addressing societal challenges like aging populations and decline. Lastly, meeting the needs of tourists and residents is paramount in ST Development. While the governmental sector and DMOs recognize this, private-sector tourism associations don't explicitly mention it.

In conclusion, the analysis suggests a notable shift towards a comprehensive and sustainable approach to tourism development. This transition reflects the recognition of the significance of community engagement, economic benefits for residents, environmental consciousness, and overall sustainability. The findings highlight the progress made in ST Development, particularly by the governmental sector and DMOs, while also indicating areas that require further attention. Encouraging collaboration among stakeholders, prioritizing tourism-based area development, improving infrastructure, and considering the needs of both tourists and local residents are crucial for achieving sustainable tourism outcomes that benefit all stakeholders and contribute to the overall well-being of communities.

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**Appendix**

Governing actors type	Sampling strategy				Period
	Informant	Data collection method	Target sample size	Responses	
Government organization	National level: Japan Tourism Agency in the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism	Questionnaire	6	1	07.2021– 09.2021
	Prefectural level: Metropolitan Government; Prefectural administration; Pref. administrative centre administration	Questionnaire	13	5	09.2021– 10.2021
DMO	Kanto regional and local DMOs	Questionnaire	20	4	09.2021– 10.2021
Private-sector tourism business associations	Kanto tourism sector private business associations	Questionnaire	169	17	09.2021– 10.2021

Table 2: Survey respondents sample

(Compiled by the author)

Question number	Question	Response options
Q1.	To what organization from the tourism sphere do you belong?	<input type="checkbox"/> Governmental sector <input type="checkbox"/> Private sector tourist association <input type="checkbox"/> Destination management organization (DMO) <input type="checkbox"/> Non-profit tourist sector organisations
Q2.	What role does your organization play in the tourism sphere?	Open-ended question
Q6.	What is sustainable tourism in your opinion?	Open-ended question
Q7.	From your point of view, do external factors influence the tourism industry?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (go to Q9) <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know (go to Q9)
Q8.	If you answered yes to Q7, then what external factors influence the tourism industry in your opinion?	Open-ended question
Q9.	In your opinion, do public health-related crises (epidemics and pandemics) affect the tourism industry?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know
Q10.	Do you think the current tourism industry in Japan is resilient to external crises?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know (go to Q12)
Q11.	If you answered yes or no to Q10, please share your opinion as to why.	Open-ended question
Q14.	Do you think that the tourism industry faces any challenges because of the current global pandemic?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (go to Q17) <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know (go to Q17)
Q15.	If you answered yes to Q14, then what are the challenges the tourism industry faces because of the current global pandemic?	Open-ended question
Q16.	How do you think those challenges might be addressed in the future?	Open-ended question
Q17.	Do you have any essential observations for the tourism industry from the current pandemic?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (go to Q20) <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know (go to Q20)

Q18.	If you answered yes to Q17, could you tell me please about your essential observations for the tourism industry from the current pandemic?	Open-ended question
Q19.	How might those observations be incorporated into future tourism policy to prevent the risk of damage from similar potential public health-related crises?	Open-ended question
Q20.	Do you have any suggestions on what should be done to make the tourism industry more sustainable and resilient in the future?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (go to Q22) <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know (go to Q22)
Q21.	If you answered yes to Q20, then what are your suggestions on what should be done to make the tourism industry more sustainable and resilient in the future?	Open-ended question
Q22.	In your opinion, should tourism policy change to adapt to what we have learned from the current COVID-19 pandemic or any previous public health-related crises?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (go to Q24) <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know (go to Q24)
Q23.	If you answered yes to Q22, then how should tourism policy change to adapt to what we have learned from the current COVID-19 pandemic or any previous public health-related crises?	Open-ended question
Q24.	How do you think the sustainable tourism concept and its operationalization should be changed given the current pandemic experience?	Open-ended question

Table 3: Survey items

(Compiled by the author)



Document Type	Document Title
National law	Tourism Promotion Basic Law (Kankō rikkoku suishin kihonhō)
Promotion plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan (2008-2011).</li> <li>• Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan (2012-2016).</li> <li>• Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan (2017-2020) (Kankoo rikkoku suishin kihon keekaku Heisei 29-nen 3 tsuki 28-nichi kakugi kettei).</li> </ul>
White paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2002 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 14-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2003 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 15-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2004 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 16-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2005 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 17-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2006 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 18-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2007 White Paper on Tourism (Annual Report on Tourism Situation) (Heisei 19-nenban kankō hakusho (kankoo no jookyoo ni kansuru nenji hōkoku)).</li> <li>• 2008 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 20-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2009 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 21-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2010 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 22-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2011 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 23-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2012 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 24-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2013 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 25-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2014 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 26-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2015 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 27-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2016 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 28-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2017 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 29-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2018 White Paper on Tourism (Heisei 30-nenban kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2018 Tourism Situation 2019 Tourism Policy (Heisei 30-nendo kankoo no jookyoo-Reiwa moto nendo kankoo shisaku).</li> <li>• 2019 Tourism Situation. 2020 Tourism Policy (Reiwa moto nendo kankoo no jookyoo. Reiwa 2-nendo kankoo shisaku).</li> <li>• 2020 White paper on Tourism (Reiwa 2-nendo kankoo kankoo hakusho).</li> <li>• 2021 White paper on Tourism (Reiwa 3-nendo kankoo kankoo hakusho).</li> </ul>
Project document	Toward a Sustainable Tourism Developed Country (Jizoku kanoona kanko senshinkoku ni mukete)
	Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard for Destinations, JSTS - D (Nipponban jizoku kanoona kankoo gaidorain)

Table 4: List of the analysed national-level tourism development policy documents

(Compiled by the author)

The area	Tourism development plan (Japanese title with Romaji reading)	Tourism development plan (English translation)
Tokyo metropolitan area 東京都	PRIME 観光都市・東京～東京都観光産業振興実行プラン2017～ (Puraimu kankoo toshi Tokyo～Tookyooto kankoo sangyoo shinkoo jikkoo puran 2017～)	PRIME Sightseeing City, Tokyo～Tokyo Tourism Industry Promotion Execution Plan 2017～
	PRIME 観光都市・東京～東京都観光産業振興実行プラン2018～ (Puraimu kankoo toshi Tokyo～Tookyooto kankoo sangyoo shinkoo jikkoo puran 2018～)	PRIME Sightseeing City, Tokyo～Tokyo Tourism Industry Promotion Execution Plan 2018～
	PRIME 観光都市・東京 東京観光産業振興実行プラン～東京2020大会に向けた重点的な取組～ (Puraimu kankoo toshi Tokyo Tokyo kankoo sangyoo shinkoo jikkoo puran～Tokyo 2020 taikai ni muketa jütentekina torikumi～)	PRIME Tourist City, Tokyo Tokyo Tourism Industry Promotion Action Plan～Priority Initiatives for the Tokyo 2020 Games～
	PRIME 観光都市・東京 東京都観光産業振興実行プラン～観光産業の復活と持続的な成長に向けて～ (Puraimu kankoo toshi Tokyo Tookyooto kankoo sangyoo shinkoo jikkoo puran～kankoo sangyoo no fukkatsu to jizokutekina seichoo ni mukete～)	PRIME Tourism City, Tokyo Tokyo Tourism Industry Promotion Action Plan～Towards Revival and Sustainable Growth of the Tourism Industry～
Kanagawa prefecture 神奈川県	神奈川県観光振興計画(平成25年) (Kanagawa ken kankoo shinkoo keekaku (Heisei 25 nen))	Kanagawa Tourism Promotion Plan (2013)

	神奈川県観光振興計画 (平成29年 見直し) (Kanagawa ken kankoo shinkoo keekaku (Heisei 29 nen minaoshi))	Kanagawa Tourism Promotion Plan (revised in 2017)
	神奈川県観光振興計画 (2019年 ※ 計画期間の延長 2022年) (Kanagawa ken kankō shinkō keekaku (2019-nen ※ keekaku kikan no enchoo 2022-nen))	Kanagawa Tourism Promotion Plan (2019* Extension of plan period to 2022)
	第5期 神奈川県観光振興計画 (Dai 5-ki Kanagawa ken kankoo shinkoo keekaku)	5th Kanagawa Prefecture Tourism Promotion Plan
Saitama prefecture 埼玉県	おもてなし日本一の埼玉県観光づ くり基本計画 (平成24-28年度) (Omotenashi nihonichi no Saitama ken kankoo zukuri kihon keekaku (Heisei 24-28 nendo))	Saitama Prefecture's Tourism Development Basic Plan (FY2012-2016)
	第2期埼玉県観光づくり基本計画 (Dai 2-ki Saitama ken kankoo zukuri kihon keekaku)	2nd Saitama Prefecture Tourism Development Basic Plan
	第3期 埼玉県観光づくり基本計 画 (Dai 3-ki Saitama ken kankoo zukuri kihon keekaku)	3rd Saitama Prefecture Tourism Development Basic Plan
Chiba prefecture 千葉県	第2次観光立県ちば推進基本計画 (Dai 2-ji kankoo rikken Chiba suishin kihon keekaku)	The 2nd Tourism Prefecture Chiba Promotion Basic Plan
	第3次観光立県ちば推進基本計画 (Dai 3-ji kankoo rikken Chiba suishin kihon keekaku)	The 3rd Tourism Prefecture Chiba Promotion Basic Plan

Ibaraki prefecture 茨城県	茨城県観光振興基本計画（令和4（2022）～令和7（2025）年度）  (Ibaraki ken kankoo shinkoo kihon keekaku (Reiwa 4 (2022)~ Reiwa 7 (2025) nendo))	Ibaraki Prefecture Tourism Promotion Basic Plan (2022-2025)
	茨城県観光振興基本計画（平成28年度～平成32年度）  (Ibaraki ken kankoo shinkoo kihon keekaku (Heisei 28-nendo ~ Heisei 32-nendo))	Ibaraki Prefecture Tourism Promotion Basic Plan (2016-2020)
Gunma prefecture 群馬県	群馬県観光振興計画  (Gunma ken kankoo shinkoo keekaku)	Gunma Prefecture Tourism Promotion Plan
Tochigi prefecture 栃木県	とちぎ産業成長戦略  (Tochigi sangyoo seechoo senryaku)	Tochigi Industry Growth Strategy
	新とちぎ観光立県戦略  (Shin Tochigi kankoo rikken senryaku)	

Table 5: List of the analysed Kanto region prefectural-level tourism development policy documents

(Compiled by the author)