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Traditional Village Development Strategies for Sustainable Tourism (Case Study of Leshan Fishing Village, China)

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ABSTRACT: Traditional villages in China are rich in cultural heritage and tourism resources, with significant economic and social potential. However, urbanization challenges their sustainable development. This study explores sustainable tourism strategies for Leshan Fishing Village in Guangxi, using the Delphi method with eight experts and the Analytic Hierarchy Process. Analysis of 100 survey responses reveals the village's moderate tourism development, with scores for social (57.74), economic (57.85), ecological (75.15), cultural (80.47), and landscape (88.12) dimensions. To improve sustainability, recommendations include enhancing tourism facilities, government support, and transportation, diversifying the economy, boosting investment, and marketing. The study also emphasizes managing ecological risks, innovating cultural experiences, protecting heritage, and promoting community involvement.

KEYWORDS: sustainable tourism, analytic hierarchy process, traditional villages, sustainable development evaluation system, leshan fishing village

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a global framework for achieving peace and prosperity for people and the planet, aiming at socially and environmentally sustainable economic growth (UNSDG, 2022). This goal is crucial for the tourism industry, as many countries rely heavily on tourism for jobs and revenue (UN, 2023). However, the sector's environmental impact cannot be ignored in pursuit of economic gains. Rapid urbanization has led to issues like constructive destruction, ecological degradation, and land resource waste in traditional villages, posing significant challenges to their protection and sustainable development (Chen, Xie & Li, 2020; Xu et al., 2021; Su et al., 2022).

The concept of sustainable development has become a central principle in tourism development, leading to the preservation and use of traditional village cultural heritage through sustainable tourism policies (Zhuang, Yao & Li, 2019). This idea has also been supported in other research, emphasizing its role in safeguarding cultural heritage in traditional villages through sustainable tourism initiatives (Budeanu et al., 2016; Goulding et al., 2014). For example, in Kutoharjo Village, Central Java, tourism has been used to boost economic activity, improving living conditions (Sesotyaningtyas & Manaf, 2015). Similarly, in Ponggok Village, Indonesia, enhancing community welfare has been key to becoming a self-sufficient village. Sun (2020) notes that rural revitalization strategies have revitalized traditional villages, making it essential to reassess their development and innovate new sustainable models.

Despite the village's 300-year history and reliance on unique resources like "ancient village, ancient trees, and ancient fishing and hunting" (Xie, 2016), few scholars have examined its tourism development. Chen (2014) focused on sustainable development from an environmental landscape planning perspective, while Wei (2011) stressed the importance of a people-centered approach and harmonious coexistence between humans and nature to preserve the village's historical and cultural heritage. This paper seeks to fill the research gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of traditional village tourism development, with a specific focus on Leshan Fishing Village, and proposes strategies to address the challenges identified.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional Village

Traditional villages, which blend natural and human resources, are becoming increasingly significant. Research has highlighted the global value of preserving these villages, especially since the 19th century, focusing on their architectural styles, landscape features, and types (Yan, 2022). Traditional villages embody both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, holding irreplaceable historical, cultural, and architectural value (Guo & Sun, 2016). The study of traditional villages emphasizes the need for balanced development and conservation. Sustainable tourism in traditional villages relies on maintaining the integrity and uniqueness of these areas while promoting their tourism potential (Yu, Ji & Li, 2021). Tourism can aid in reducing poverty, enhancing social equity, and fulfilling cultural needs, aligning with broader goals of rural prosperity and high-quality transformation in China's tourism sector (Sun, Zhang, & Luo, 2023).

In summary, the growing focus on developing and conserving traditional villages suggests that tourism can play a key role in their sustainable development. The General Office of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China has issued guidelines for sustainable tourism in traditional villages, such as Leshan Fishing Village in Guangxi, which has been in development for 14 years, demonstrating the potential for successful tourism if managed well. Traditional villages, which blend natural and human resources, are becoming increasingly significant. Research has highlighted the global value of preserving these villages, especially since the 19th century, focusing on their architectural styles, landscape features, and types (Yan, 2022). Traditional villages embody both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, holding irreplaceable historical, cultural, and architectural value (Guo & Sun, 2016).

Sustainable Tourism

The World Tourism Organization (1998) defines sustainable tourism (SST) as an approach that ensures opportunities for current and future generations. Guo, Jiang, and Li (2019) describe SST as a model that integrates tourism with resource and human environments, aiming for a balance between socio-economic, resource, and environmental factors. SST seeks to maximize community benefits and minimize costs while preserving natural and cultural heritage, thus ensuring economic sustainability (Ilić & Kostić, 2021). The topic is heavily debated. Peng & Gui (2020) examined sustainable tourism in Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, exploring practical strategies for national parks. Kişi (2019) proposed a tourism sustainability strategy for Ukraine's Carpathian region to improve local living standards. The UNWTO's guidebook, Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations (2004), provides a framework for aligning indicators with policy objectives. Scholars like Streimikiene et al. (2021) and Lansing & Vrie (2007) emphasize the need to balance economic, environmental, social, and ecological impacts. Zou et al. (2020) and Song, Zhu, and Fong (2021) stress that for traditional villages, sustainable tourism depends on balancing heritage preservation with tourism development.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants / Subject / Population and Sample

The research employed the Analytic Hierarchy Process , which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, case study of traditional village development of Leshan for sustainable tourism in Guangxi China .The survey subjects of this study are tourists, scenic area staff, and scenic merchants in Leshan Fishing Village. The survey subjects of this study are tourists, scenic area staff, and scenic merchants in Leshan Fishing Village. With the tool of AHP, expert scoring is involved, necessitating a clear definition of the expert sample size. For this study, we have selected 10 experts to provide their assessments.In addition, there are 87 households with 328 villagers in Leshan Fishing Village, and the sample size of the questionnaire data is 150,000 tourists received annually, which was determined based on Slovin's formula:

$$\mathbf{n} = \frac{\mathbf{N}}{\mathbf{1+Ne^2}}$$

n**:** Number of samples .

N: Total sample size .

e: fault tolerance , which usually used is 5% ~ 10% , according to the N size, the research choose 10% to calculate. So the research use the number of questionnaire interviews with a sample size of 100, which include 5 scenic area staff, 15 self-employed businessmen, 80 tourists.

Instruments

Establishment of evaluation indicator system

After reviewing literature such as Yan (2022), we have developed a robust evaluation system for sustainable development in traditional village tourism. We adhered to established principles for selecting indicators and assessed the practicality of collecting the necessary data.

Target Layer	Criteria Layer	Indicator Level
Evaluation System of Indicators for Sustainable Development of Traditional Village Tourism	Economic dimension	GDP
		Annual tourism capital investment
		Annual number of tourists received
		Annual tourism revenue
		Income of villagers
	Social Dimension	Traffic convenience
		Community in the location is of tourists
		Tourism facilities
		Tourist satisfaction
		Level of government support
	Ecological Dimension	Site is utilizing its resources
		Level of environmental pollution
		Scale of the natural landscape
		Degree of protection of natural resources
		Coastal wind resistance
	Traditional Cultural Dimension	Village cultural characteristics
		Number of intangible cultural heritage
		Village cultural heritage
		Village culture innovation
		Cultural Experience Activities
	Settlement Landscape Dimension	Unique village site selection
		Integrity of Village Conservation
		Footprint of traditional buildings
		Integrity of the architectural landscape
		The buildings' age

Figure 1. Evaluation System of Indicators for Sustainable Development of Traditional Village Tourism

Source: Modified based on Yan and made by author (2023)

Establishment of evaluation model

Assessing the sustainable development of tourism in traditional villages necessitates a thorough and systematic analysis of relevant indicators. This paper develops an evaluation model for such tourism using a multi-objective linear weighting function, ensuring a comprehensive approach to scoring and analysis. The functional expression of the model is:

$$Z = \sum_{j=1}^{m} (\sum_{i=1}^{n} A_i B_i) D_J$$

In this study, the evaluation of sustainable development of traditional village tourism is divided into five stages with reference to the existing research results.

Table 1. Scale of scores for the comprehensive score

Scale of scores for the comprehensive score of sustainable development of traditional village tourism					
Overall Rating	＜40	40-65	65-80	80-95	＞95
Marking Scheme	Underde-veloped	Poorly Developed	Moderately Developed	Well-Developed	Developed

Source: made by Yan (2022) and modified by author (2024)

Criteria for assigning scores to evaluation indicators, according to the actual situation of the relevant indicators, the 25 indicators are quantified into five grades as the details can be found in the appendix. Survey of the weights**,** once the system was established, a "Traditional Village Tourism Sustainable Development Evaluation Index System Survey Questionnaire" was created and distributed to 10 tourism experts (see attachment). The questionnaire used a 1-9 scale to assess the importance of various indicators. Out of the 10 questionnaires sent out, 8 valid responses were collected. Scoring**,** this paper builds on an established evaluation index system for the sustainable development of traditional village tourism. It conducts an assessment of the tourism sustainability level in Fishing Village, based on real-world investigation and aligned with the index evaluation standards.

Data Analysis

Constructing a Judgment Matrix

The 1-9 scale method is employed to individually compare the importance of assessment factors provided by experts. This process involves creating a judgment matrix, analyzing and calculating the average values of indicators at each level, and deriving the weights for the five levels to construct the final judgment matrix. Assume that the judgment matrix A=(aij)nxn, and this judgment matrix should be satisfied:

Scale	Meaning
1	Both elements are equally important
3	Compared with the two elements, i is slightly more important than j
5	Compared with the two elements, i is obviously more important than j
7	Compared with the two elements, i is strongly more important than j
9	Compared with the two elements, i is extremely more important than j
2468	The middle value of the adjacent judgments of the above elements
Reciprocal	Compared with the two elements, the degree to which element i is less important than element j

Figure 2. 1-9 Scale Methor

Source: Steps of AHP Method

This matrix needs to satisfy ： aij>0; (2) aij=1/aji; (3) aii=1, ajj=1. In the formula, ai is the average score of indicator i, and aj is the average score of indicator j. The comparison result is transformed into pairwise comparison judgment matrix A.

$$A=\begin{bmatrix} 1 & a_{12} & \cdots & a_{1n} \\ a_{21} & 1 & \cdots & a_{2n} \\ \vdots & & \ddots & \vdots \\ a_{n1} & a_{n2} & \cdots & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

Calculate judgment matrix, the sum-product method is used to calculate the eigenvectors of the judgment matrix and normalize them to determine the weight value of each level of indicators. Calculate the maximum characteristic root max of the judgment matrix and its corresponding characteristic vector W. Then calculate the weight value of each index element after normalization of W. Consistency test, the calculated weight values are operated to test whether they pass consistency. When the judgment matrix consistency CR ≤ 0.1, then it can be said that the matrix has consistency. The consistency index used in the hierarchical analysis method is expressed by the formula:

$$CI = \lambda - n/n-1, \quad CR=CI/RI$$

Determining the weight, according to the judgment matrix that passes the consistency test, the importance of the indicators of each layer relative to the indicators of the previous layer is obtained, and then the weights of each criterion layer are combined with the weights of the indicators within that criterion layer to obtain the priority scores of each indicator and the overall ranking of the hierarchical consistency test. Average evaluation, based on 100 field survey questionnaires collected in Lashan Fishing Village, we averaged all the results to obtain the most concentrated willingness data of the 100 respondents.

$$\mathbf{Average} = \frac{X_1+X_2+\cdots X_{100}}{100}$$

RESULT

Expert Opinion Weight Calculation

Following specific research procedures, an analytic hierarchy process (AHP) model was constructed using SPASSAU software. Based on this model, a judgment matrix was established, inputting questionnaire data into it. By employing the eigenvalue method, expert weights were calculated using weighted geometric mean :

$$(X_1 \times X_2 \times X_3 \cdots X_n)^{\frac{1}{n}}$$

Table 2: Ranking of expert scoring results

Dimension	Weight (heavy→light)
Social	0.2641
Economic	0.2452
Traditional Cultural	0.1752
Settlement Landscape	0.1616
Ecological	0.1539

Source: made by researcher (2024)

Social management indicators are essential for the sustainable development of traditional village tourism, serving as the foundation for its success. Governments play a critical role in fostering a supportive socio-economic environment, enhancing tourism infrastructure, managing the tourism sector, and promoting the area. Effective government planning is crucial for preserving and managing traditional villages. Improvements in infrastructure and transportation significantly impact tourists' experiences and are key to attracting visitors. According to (Wu & Guo, 2022), convenient transportation and upgraded infrastructure make traditional villages more appealing, while Nurfadlilah (2023) underscores the importance of village governments in advancing village and tourism development. Economic factors are fundamental to the sustainability of traditional village tourism. Chen and Deng (2022) observe that travel tours are fueling rapid growth in rural areas, transforming them into large-scale industries with unique characteristics. Tourism development can boost local incomes, increase infrastructure funding, and enhance the preservation and appeal of cultural heritage, thus improving competitiveness. Furthermore, tourism drives economic and industrial progress, elevating the economic status and attractiveness of villages. The influx of tourism capital and revenue is crucial for economic growth and development.

At the traditional cultural level, the cultural heritage of traditional villages is an invaluable spiritual asset and a key driver of tourism growth (Zandieh & Seifpour, 2020). These cultural elements, rich in historical significance and continuously developed through practice, are essential for village development. Protecting, preserving, and revitalizing this heritage is crucial for ongoing cultural growth. At the settlement level, historically significant buildings and unique layouts contribute to the village's cultural identity and ambiance (Chen & Wang, 2024). These structures, valued for their scientific and artistic aesthetics, symbolize the village's cultural heritage. The distinctive features shaped by local terrain and culture enhance the village's tourism appeal and reflect its lifestyle and heritage. The ecological environment is crucial for the sustainable development of traditional villages, underpinning residents' lives and civilization. Deng (2023) emphasizes that a harmonious relationship with nature is vital for the protection and growth of these villages. A healthy environment, with clean air and water, supports well-being and livelihoods, while neglecting ecological concerns can negatively impact health and quality of life.

Calculation Results

The average score for each indicator is multiplied by its appropriate weight once the evaluation scores for sustainable tourist development in Leshan Fishing Village have been determined. The overall scores for each indicator layer of Leshan Fishing Village's sustainable tourist development are produced by this procedure. Ultimately, the summation of all indicator values yields the overall score for the criteria layer.

Table 3. Evaluation score sheet for sustainable tourism development

Criteria Layer	Guideline Level	Combined Weights	Score	Overall Rating
Economic Dimension （57.85）	GDP	0.1972	47	9.27
	Annual tourism capital investment	0.2622	41	10.75
	Annual number of tourists received	0.2025	77	15.59
	Annual tourism revenue	0.229	59	13.51
	Income of villagers	0.1091	80	8.73
Social Dimension （57.74）	Traffic convenience	0.1647	69	11.36
	Community in the location is of tourists	0.1765	70	12.36

Criteria Layer	Guideline Level	Combined Weights	Score	Overall Rating
	Tourism facilities	0.1529	67	10.24
	Tourist satisfaction	0.2336	54	12.61
	Level of government support	0.2723	43	11.16
	Site is utilizing its resources	0.2524	53	13.38
Ecological Dimension （75.15）	Level of environmental pollution	0.2812	85	23.90
	Scale of the natural landscape	0.1548	73	11.30
	Degree of protection of natural resources	0.1974	86	16.98
	Coastal wind resistance	0.1142	84	9.59
	Cultural characteristics	0.2266	88	19.94
Traditional Cultural Dimension （80.47）	Amount of intangible culture	0.2869	92	26.39
	Scale of natural landscape	0.1698	76	12.90
	Degree of protection of natural resources	0.1545	66	10.20
	Coastal wind resistance	0.1623	68	11.04
	Unique village site selection	0.2379	96	22.84
Settlement Landscape Dimension （88.12）	Integrity of village conservation	0.2569	89	22.86
	Footprint of traditional buildings	0.1901	79	15.02
	Integrity of the architectural landscape	0.1621	84	13.62
	The buildings' age	0.1531	90	13.78

Lashan Fishing Village (Overall rating= combined Weights* Score)

Source: made by researcher (2024)

The calculated indicator scores for Economic, Social, Ecological Environment, Traditional Culture, and Settlement Landscape are 57.85, 57.74, 75.15, 80.47, and 88.12, respectively. To evaluate Leshan Fishing Village's sustainable tourism development capability, these scores are weighted according to their respective dimensions. The total score is computed as follows: 57.85 × 0.2452 + 57.74 × 0.2641 + 75.15 × 0.1539 + 80.47 × 0.1752 + 88.12 × 0.1616 = 69.34. This result signifies that the sustainable development of Leshan Fishing Village is at a moderate level.

Comprehensive Evaluation and Analysis

Table 4. Current Tourism Development in Leshan Fishing Village

Target layer (A)	Criteria Layer(B)	Indicator Level (C)		Overall Rating
Rating Of The Current Status Of Sustainable Development Of Tourism In the Lashan Fishining Village	B1: Settlement Landscape Dimension （88.12）	C1	Integrity of the architectural landscape	13.62
		C2	The buildings' age	13.78
		C3	Footprint of traditional buildings	15.02
		C4	Unique village site selection	22.84
		C5	Integrity of Village Conservation	22.86
	B2: Traditional Cultural Dimension	C6	Village culture innovation	10.2
		C7	Cultural Experience Activities	11.04
		C8	Village cultural heritage	12.9
		C9	Village cultural characteristics	19.94

Target layer (A)	Criteria Layer(B)		Indicator Level (C)	Overall Rating
	（80.47）	C10	Number of intangible cultural heritage	26.39
		C11	Coastal wind resistance	9.59
	B3: Ecological Dimension （75.15）	C12	Scale of the natural landscape	11.3
		C13	Site is utilizing its resources	13.38
		C14	Degree of protection of natural resources	16.98
		C15	Level of environmental pollution	23.90
	B4: Economic dimension （57.85）	C16	Income of villagers	8.73
		C17	GDP	9.27
		C18	Annual tourism capital investment	10.75
		C19	Annual tourism revenue	13.51
		C20	Annual number of tourists received	15.59
		C21	Tourism facilities	10.24
	B5: Social Dimension （57.74）	C22	Level of government support	11.16
		C23	Traffic convenience	11.36
		C24	Community in the location is of tourists	12.36
		C25	Tourist satisfaction	12.61

Source: made by researcher (2024)

Combining the traditional village tourism sustainable development evaluation system and the field survey score of Leshan ancient fishing village, after calculation and sorting, the comprehensive score values of 25 indicators of Lashan ancient fishing village are shown in the figure.

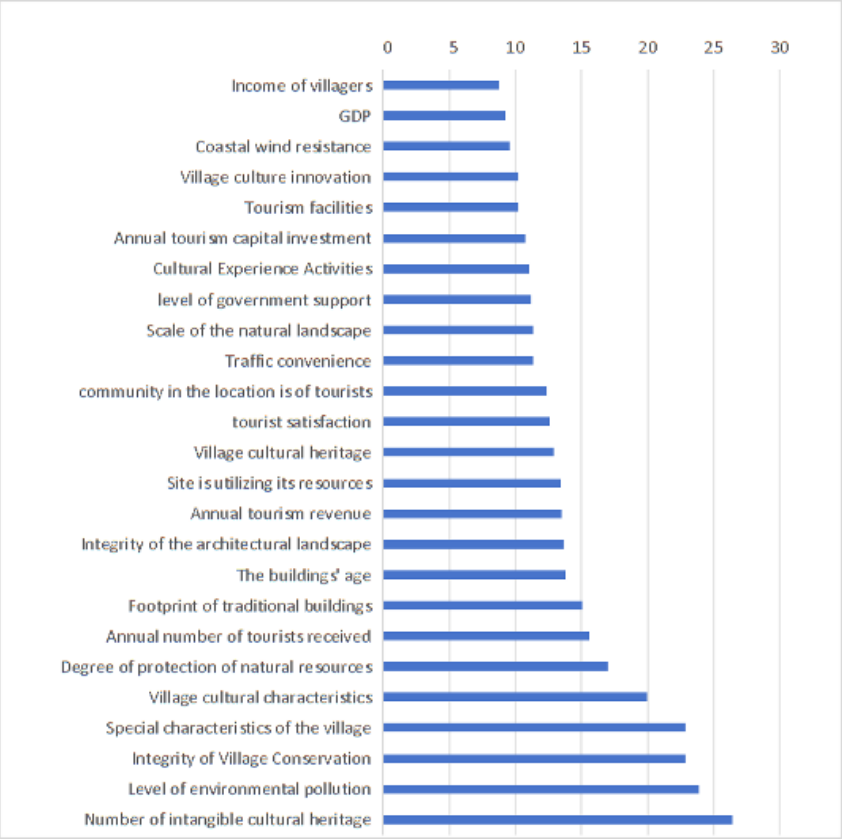

Figure 3: Ownership Layout

(**Source by:** Author Production, 2024)

DISCUSSION

Statistical Dimensions

Settlement Landscape Dimension (B1), scoring 88.12, this dimension highlights significant strengths, but reveals weaknesses in (C1) Integrity of the architectural landscape, (C2) Age of buildings, and (C3) Footprint of traditional buildings. These aspects suggest that the traditional architectural integrity is compromised by modern constructions, affecting the overall architectural cohesion. According to Duan et al. (2021), the absence of fully preserved traditional buildings can lead to a loss of local customs, which undermines the village's sustainable development. Traditional Cultural Dimension (B2), with a score of 80.47, this dimension indicates strong cultural value but reveals weaknesses in (C6) Village culture innovation, (C7) Cultural experience activities, and (C8) Cultural heritage. These areas show insufficient depth in cultural activities and a lack of innovation. Cai (2023) emphasizes that rural tourism plays a vital role in preserving and promoting local culture, offering a platform for villagers to showcase their heritage, which supports the vibrant development of rural cultural assets.

Ecological Dimension (B3), scoring 75.15, this dimension shows potential for improvement despite a relatively good score. Low scores in (C11) Coastal wind resistance and (C12) Scale of natural landscape suggest concerns about the village's resilience to coastal weather and a need to enhance natural attractions, such as ancient banyan trees. Wu & Guo (2020) note that natural resources are crucial for attracting tourism and providing enriching experiences. Upgrading the ecological environment is essential to bolster overall sustainable development. High scores in (C13) Environmental tourism degree reflect a good level of environmental awareness, but sustained improvements in management are needed for true ecological sustainability. Economic Dimension (B4), with a score of 57.85, this dimension reveals relatively low socio-economic development. Weaknesses include (C16) Average income of villagers, (C17) Low GDP, and (C19) Insufficient tourism revenue. The reliance on traditional labor and limited investment in tourism infrastructure contribute to these issues. Despite a decent number of tourists, low-quality visitor spending and inadequate capital investment hinder economic growth. Li and Hu (2019) assert that traditional village tourism can drive significant economic advancement in ethnic regions, underscoring the need for increased investment to enhance economic outcomes and attract more tourists.

Social Dimension (B5), scoring 57.74, this dimension exhibits considerable shortcomings, notably in (C1) Tourism facility equipment, (C2) Government support, and (C3) Traffic convenience. Observations from field visits confirm these deficiencies, such as inadequate public amenities and limited transportation options, which affect the visitor experience. Wang (2019) identifies poor public transportation and limited facilities as barriers to tourism development. Enhanced government planning and support are essential to improve infrastructure and market promotion. Survey responses highlight the reliance on self-driving and the need for better public transport, with limited traffic convenience noted via platforms like Xiaohongshu. Sun (2020) suggests that sustainable development requires re-evaluating and improving infrastructure and development strategies.

Discussion In All

Sustainability remains a critical concern, especially regarding the development and preservation of traditional villages. A pressing question is how to preserve and pass on the spiritual and material heritage—such as architectural and settlement culture—that has been handed down through generations. Coastal tourism, one of the largest and fastest-growing tourism sectors (Leposa, 2020), aligns with the broader goal of promoting high-quality rural tourism in China, as noted by Sun, Zhang, and Luo (2023). However, Curčić (2021) emphasizes that sustainable rural development cannot occur without the protection and conservation of resources.

Leshan Fishing Village, with its unique geographical location and rich tourism resources, serves as a prime example. Scholars have extensively studied its sustainable development, with Chen(2014) focusing on environmental landscape planning as a key to sustainable growth. The challenge of balancing development and protection to ensure sustainable progress is an ongoing topic. This study employs expert consultations and surveys, along with a cultural review related to the village's honors, to analyze the current issues Leshan Fishing Village faces in achieving sustainable tourism. By applying the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), the study prioritizes these issues and proposes suitable development strategies.

Importantly, the study underscores the crucial role of government support in the village's sustainable development, echoing Yan's (2022) findings. Government involvement is essential not only for improving infrastructure and protecting cultural heritage but also for raising environmental awareness and guiding planning efforts. In conclusion, this analysis highlights that Social and Economic Dimensions are pivotal in developing traditional villages, aligning with Wu and Guo's view that government and social capital support are key to success. Therefore, increased government attention and investment are imperative to achieve sustainable tourism development in Leshan Fishing Village.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable development has been a critical focus, and for Leshan Fishing Village, achieving sustainable tourism requires strategic efforts across various dimensions. Socially, enhancing tourism facilities, securing government support, and improving transportation are essential. Economically, it's crucial to diversify the economy, enhance tourism products, and boost investment. Ecologically, prioritizing coastal risk assessment and environmental preservation is key. Culturally, innovative cultural experiences must be developed to engage visitors. For the Settlement Landscape, a comprehensive heritage conservation strategy is vital to preserving the village's unique architectural character.

This study utilizes the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to identify the most effective sustainable tourism strategies for Leshan Fishing Village. The research significantly contributes to the theoretical understanding of sustainable tourism and offers practical insights for the village's development. The evaluation highlights areas needing improvement, enabling managers to build on strengths, address weaknesses, and foster sustainable social and economic progress aligned with sustainable tourism principles. This approach promotes collaboration, enhances business partnerships, and supports continuous tourism development through a robust evaluation framework.

However, the study acknowledges several limitations. The subjective nature of the AHP method, while useful, has inherent drawbacks, suggesting the need for alternative methods to further sustainable tourism in traditional villages. Additionally, local surveys and data acquisition were constrained by government policies, economic conditions, technological capabilities, and data availability. While the study focuses on Leshan Fishing Village, future research should expand to other village types to develop a more universally applicable evaluation framework.

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