# Assessing the Implementation of Sustainable Tourism Standards for Destinations:

Opportunities and Challenges Facing Regional Administrations and DMOs in Japan

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## Contents

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Findings
- Discussion and Implications
- Two Key Takeaways
- References



#### INTRODUCTION

# GSTC-Recognized Standards for Destinations (15)

- Some are owned by the national authorities (e.g. Thailand, Indonesia, Norway, Japan, South Korea)
- The public authority is considered the proper decision-maker for how certification operates in their country

# National tourism policies and governance modes

- affect how the standards are operationalized
  - → certification program and scheme
  - → award system
  - → assessment guideline



# Case of Japan promoting sustainable tourism as a national initiative

- The Japan Sustainable Tourism Standard (JSTS-D), GSTC-recognized, released in 2020



# Implementation of GSTC-Recognized Standard (JSTS-D)

The Establishment of
Sustainable Tourism
Promotion Headquarters
In The Japan Tourism Agency
(JTA)

Launch of Model

Projects for Promoting

Sustainable Tourism

based on JSTS-D

(2021--2025)

Launch of the 4<sup>th</sup>
Tourism Nation
Promotion Basic
Plan (2023~2025)

Launch of the 5<sup>th</sup>
Tourism Nation
Promotion Basic Plan
(planning in progress)

June, 2020

April, 2021

March, 2024

June, 2018

April, 2021

April, 2023

April, 2026

JTA in collaboration with UNWTO, JNTO, JICA, local governments

JSTS-D acquired the status of GSTC recognized standard

Videos for
JSTS-D-based
Training

#### Literature Review:

#### Implementing Global Sustainability Standards through National Tourism Policy and Strategic Framework

#### **Key Concepts and Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

#### **Sustainable Tourism Policy**

- •The study of sustainable tourism policy has garnered increasing attention from scholars, and the number of studies has been steadily rising (Guo et al, 2019;
- The implementation of sustainable tourism policies requires successful execution, monitoring, and evaluation, which in turn leads to effective governance and transparency (Fabricius, 2021).

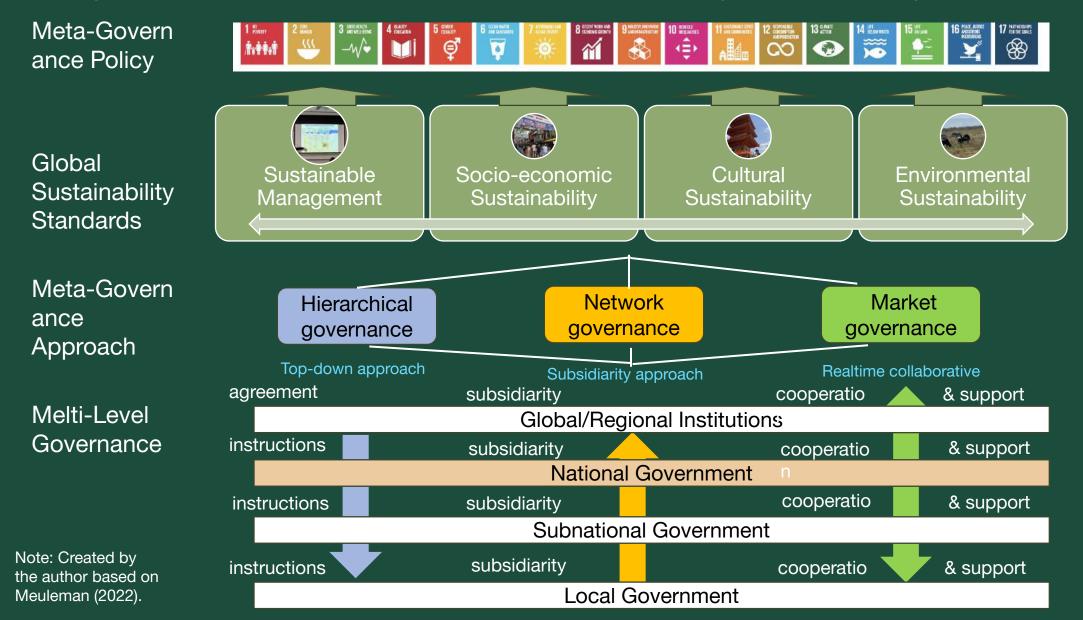
#### **Sustainable Tourism Governance**

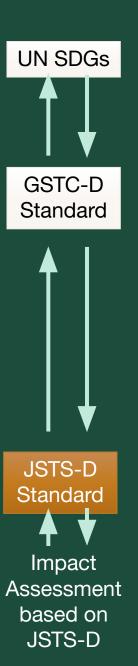
•Governance is considered to be one of the most significant factors in promoting sustainable tourism within a multi-layered political framework (Amore & Hall, 2016; Farsari, 2023).

#### **Metagovernance** - in Global Sustainability Standards Research

- •Dealing with meta-policy issues, such as sustainability, requires new institutional arrangements and policy settings at global, national, regional, and local scales (Meulman, 2019, 2022).
- •The concept of metagovernance is introduced as a critical lens through which tourism governance can be

## Metagovernance model and practices of voluntary sustainability standards





## Research Gap

- Although research on metagovernance in sustainable tourism is expanding, it remains a relatively underexplored area, especially in terms of its practical applications.
- There is a need to explore how metagovernance principles are implemented in real-world sustainable tourism initiatives, including the application of voluntary sustainability standards.
- A significant gap is converting metagovernance theory into practical tools and frameworks that tourism practitioners can apply.

#### Research Questions

- 1. How has the sustainable tourism policy been operationalized using the sustainable tourism standard system?
- 2. How have national policy and the introduced scheme affected the development of tourism policy and planning strategies at the destination level?
- 3. What are the opportunities and challenges facing public administration and destination management organizations in adopting the national scheme?

## Methodology

#### 1. Content analysis

• 74 tourism policy and planning documents of regional destinations and DMOs authorized to use the JSTS-D logo for their sustainability initiatives

#### Three-step analysis:

- 1) categorizing the documents using pre-coded numbers
- 2) examining key performance indicators
- 3) evaluating the extent to which the framework of sustainable tourism standards is applied

#### 2. Semi-structured interviews with government officials

Date: 10:30~12:00 May 28, 2025

Interviewees: Three national officials of the Japan Tourism Agency

(JTA)

#### **Procedure:**

First, questions asked regarding 1) the processes involved in implementing the national scheme, 2) the way of verifying applicants' qualifications, 3) the way of assessing destination management, and 4) the way of providing technical support.

Second, open-ended questions asked about 5) the challenges of applying the national scheme, and 6) the projected scenario of sustainable tourism policy







# Findings

## 1. National Tourism Plan and Strategies

The 4th Tourism Nation Promotion

Basic Plan (FY2023 - FY2025)

Key Objectives are:

- 1. Promote sustainable tourism
- 2. Increase tourism consumption
- 3. Promote regional attraction

Three Strategies to work on are:

- Create Sustainable Tourism Destinations
- 2. Recover Inbound Tourism
- 3. Expand Domestic Exchanges.

Sustainable Tourism Targets by FY2025

Establishment of a community development system

 Number of regions engaged in creating sustainable tourism

**100 regions** (12 regions as of 2022)



Basic logo

Of which, international certifications and commendation regions:

mmendation regions:
50 regions



International logo

Qualifications of destinations receiving the JSTS-D basic logo

- 1. The tourism plan clearly states its alignment with JSTS-D
- 2. The current staff member has completed and passed either the GSTC STC or the JATA Video training courses

Qualifications of destinations receiving JSTS-D international logo

- 1 & 2 Same as the above
- 3. Evidence of International certifications and awards: Green Destinations - Top 100, Awards/Certification UN Tourism - Best Tourism Village (BTV)

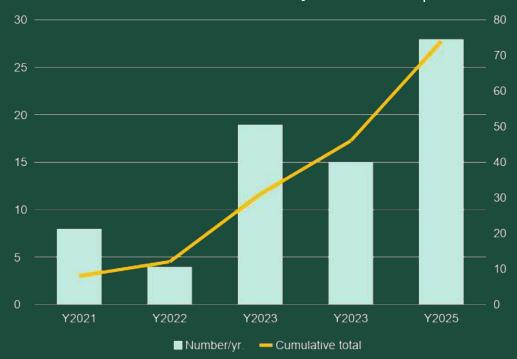
Source: The Japan Tourism Agency (JTA)

The New Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan

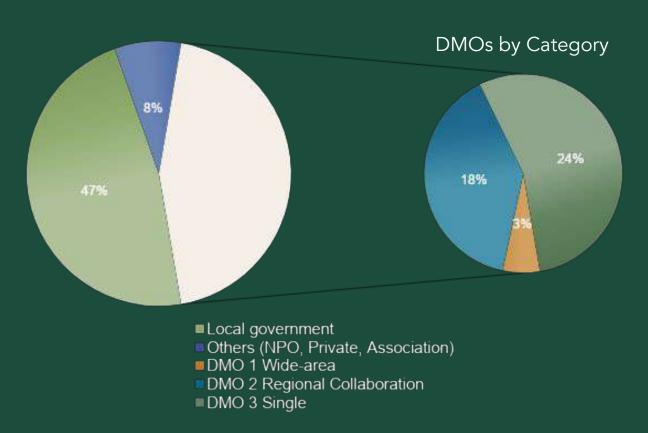
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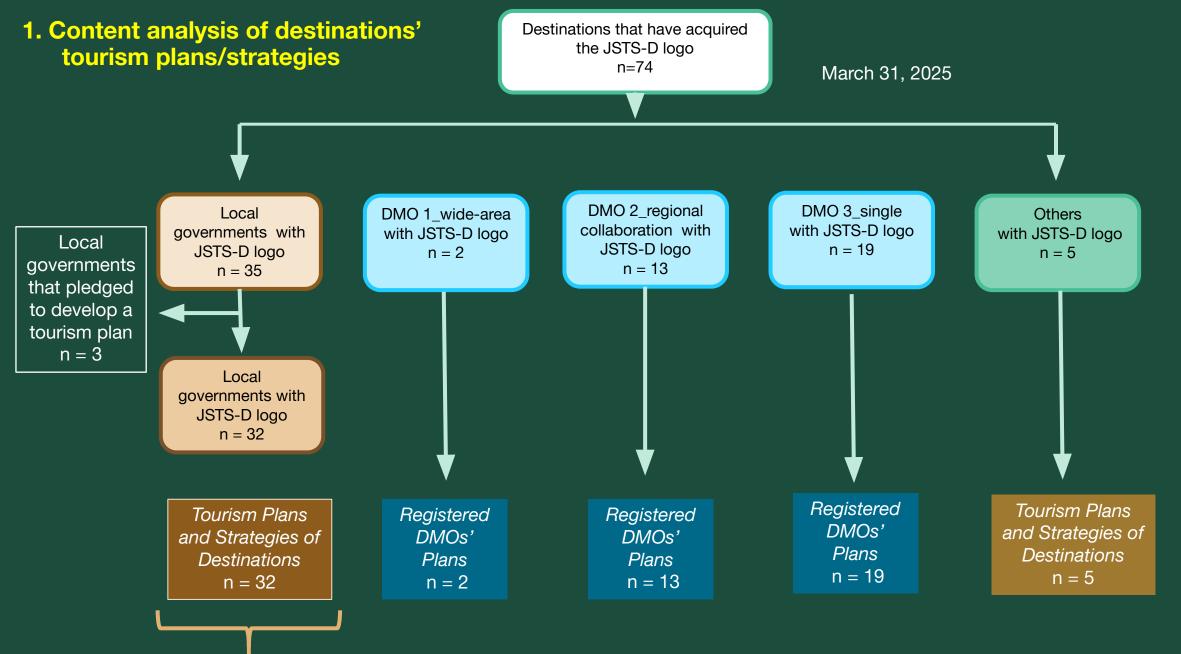
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#### Proportion of Destinations by Organization Types





This presentation focuses on the analysis of local governments' plans.

# Data Analysis - KPIs

Economic indicators

Social indicators

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Data Analysis – Tourism Plans, Visions, Strategies	

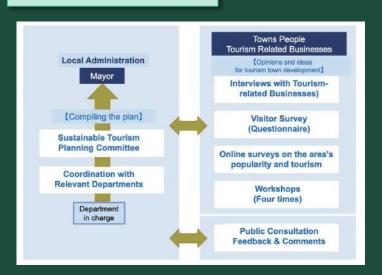
## Analysis of Meta-governance

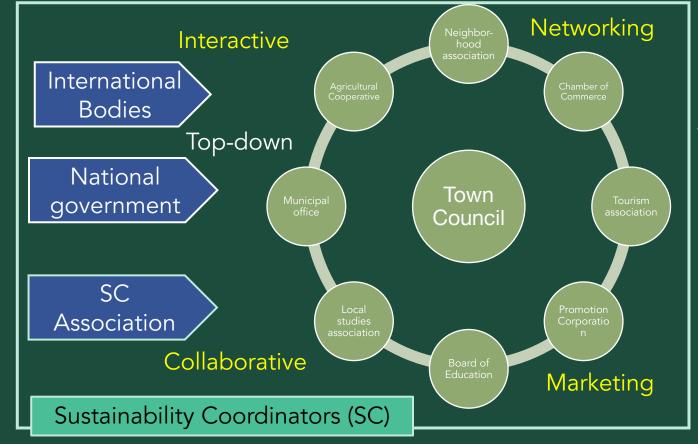
#### **Destination 5**



https://www.town.teshikaga.hokkaido.jp/material/files/group/9/teshikagakankoshinkokeikaku.pdf

#### **Destination 10**

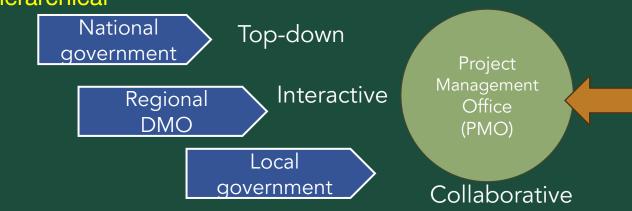




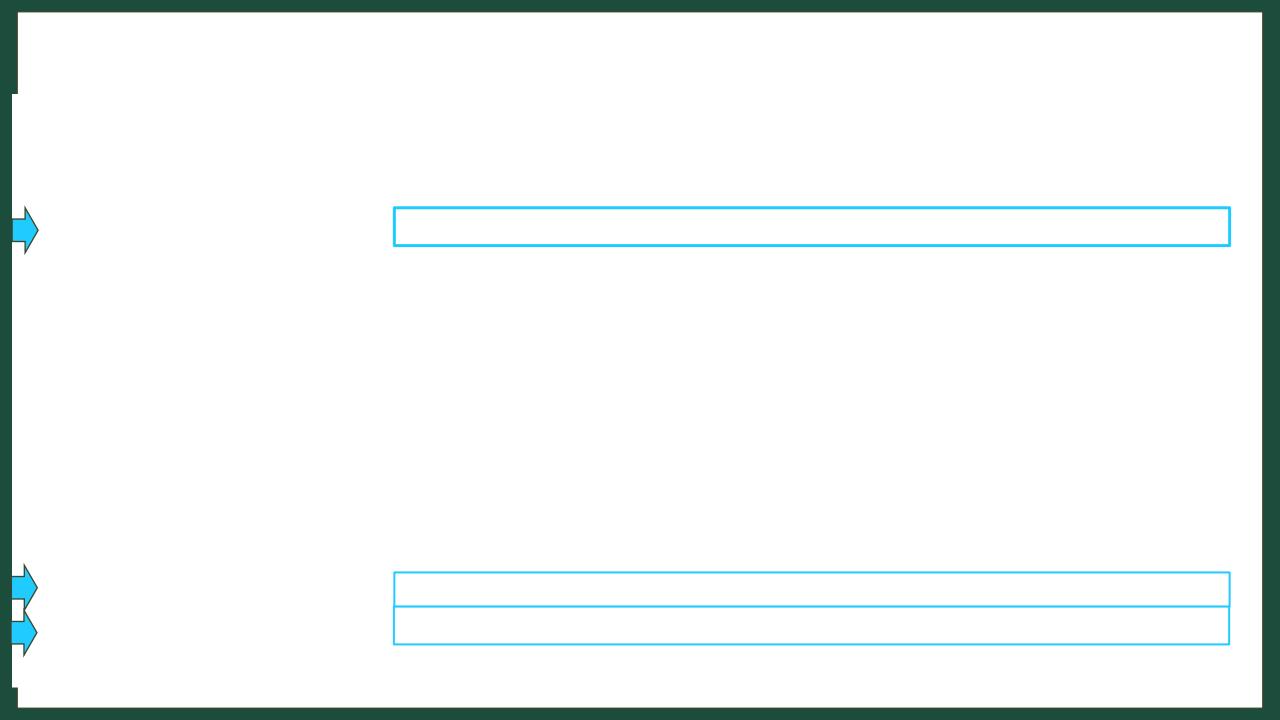
Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO)







Community
Development
Council



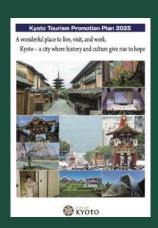
## Significant Factors in Operationalizing the Governance of Sustainable Tourism

based on JSTS-D (113)

#### Data-driven measures

#### Destination 20

Urban Tourism





#### 83 Indicators

- Balancing community life and tourism
- Transforming to High Value-added tourism
- Revitalizing tourism businesses
- Risk Management, MICE

#### Intermediary support

Destination 30

Disaster Prevention Tourism

#### Destination Assessment 74.1% 74.2% Environmenta Socio-economic 65.5% 85.3% Cultural

#### Making Disaster Prevention Handbook





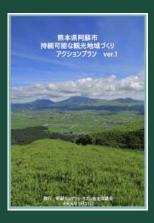
#### Role of District Transport Bureau

- Technical support
- Financial support

#### Stakeholders Engagement

#### **Destination 31**

Nature-based Ecotourism



Action Plan for Developing a Sustainable Tourism Region

#### Making Guidelines (20 items):

- What to do at the accommodation (12)
- What to do in the area surrounding the accommodation and in the hot spring town (5)
- What to do across the entire region (3)

#### Tourism Businesses Engagement

- Certification for Accommodation
- Sustainability Training Course

#### 2. Interview with the Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) officials

#### Q1. How the qualification of the applicant (destination) is validated:

"There are some things that we cannot understand from the required documents, including the tourism plan alone, so we look at many resources, such as information posted on the Internet, and see what kind of initiatives are being taken. We are also conducting work to verify whether the initiatives are truly based on the JSTS-D."

#### Q2. What improvements could be made to the current scheme?

"Over the years, we have seen some accumulation of data, so I think the most important thing is to be able to compare and analyze that data. I think that's probably one of the significances of JSTS-D."

#### Q3. What challenges do local governments and regional officials face when it comes to obtaining JSTS-D and the logo mark?

"The biggest challenge was not having enough people or money, which was often mentioned, followed by how to communicate the benefits to others."

#### Q4. What are the biggest advantages of this system? What are the key points for further development?

With more and more regions in Japan getting involved, I think it's becoming easier to work on sustainable tourism."

"I think it is important for the country to set goals such as showing the direction of sustainable tourism, and setting targets for the

#### Opportunities and Challenges Facing Regional Administrators and DMOs

Date: May 28, 2025

Duration: 1 hour

Number of interviewees: 3

Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT)

Japan Tourism Agency (JTA)

2 Checking the qualification

5 Checking the assessment

Application

Renewa

6

logo



Applying to Use the logo

3 Granting permission

to use the logo.



ting the



Granting Submit permission to continue

to use the assess ment sheet

Regional Administrators and DMOs

## Discussion and Implications

- The number of destinations and DMOs that have adopted the national sustainability scheme based on the JSTS-D has grown over the past five years, showing a positive trend in sustainable tourism efforts.
- The results of this study indicate that implementing the sustainable tourism policy based on a globally recognized standard has encouraged regional administrations and DMOs to include sustainable tourism in their planning processes.
- The extent to which sustainable tourism standards are used in shaping regional tourism strategies varies among destinations and DMOs. Typically, KPIs are selected to evaluate the economic aspect of sustainability in most destinations and DMOs.
- The destinations that have most successfully integrated the JSTS-D standard into their sustainability management systems coordinate and align different governance models (e.g., hierarchical, network, market) to address challenges and achieve optimal outcomes, that is, the mode of meta-governance.
- The retention rate within the national scheme depends on the opportunities and challenges faced by regional destinations and DMOs concerning the market forces of inbound tourism and the national policy with sustainability targets.

# Two key takeaways for tourism practitioners and businesses

- The national scheme of sustainable tourism, utilizing a GSTC-recognized standard, has effectively engaged an increasing number of destinations and DMOs in the national sustainability scheme. This has contributed to the expansion of the Japanese market for sustainable tourism.
- Challenges must be addressed before fully integrating sustainability policies and practices
  into the destination. The government's role in collaborating with local stakeholders is
  essential for implementing the standards-based scheme within the meta-governance
  framework.

contact info

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