

## PERCEPTION OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES: THE CASE OF VILLA DE LEYVA, COLOMBIA

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**Abstract:** Sustainable tourism promotes initiatives that enhance natural and cultural assets while addressing social, environmental, and economic impacts. This study aims to assess the perceptions of residents, public officials, and tourism managers in Villa de Leyva regarding sustainable tourism and their contributions to its development. The town is a recognized colonial heritage site and a certified sustainable tourism destination. However, it faces challenges in balancing tourism growth with sustainable development. The methodology employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a case study design. Hence, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve participants representing four stakeholder groups: farmers, hotel managers, tourism entity leaders, and public sector officials. The results reveal that although Villa de Leyva is certified as a Sustainable Tourism Destination, it lacks an adequate legal framework, which led to the creation of a Public Tourism Policy in the municipality. The study revealed positive aspects include job creation, opportunities for the community, and training tourism programs for businesses and residents. On the other hand, negative aspects include poor waste management, depletion of natural resources, increased insecurity, rising costs, and the displacement of residents. The study emphasizes the importance of inclusive governance models that promote collaboration between the public and private sectors, as well as community participation in planning and implementation processes. Despite Villa de Leyva's certification there is a significant gap that persists between policy formulation and practical application. This research provides valuable insights into how stakeholder perceptions influence sustainable development at the local level. It contributes to the refinement of public policies and informs future studies in heritage tourism and stakeholder engagement.

**Keywords:** tourism, sustainability, community perceptions, tourism impacts, stakeholders' engagement, community- based tourism, rural tourism, tourism governance.

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism has recently experienced exponential growth, with repercussions at cultural, economic, social, political, and environmental levels (Lőrincz et al., 2020; Olszewski-Strzyżowski, 2022). Tourism activities contribute 10.3% annually to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Jóźwiak & Sieg, 2021). In this context, Mori et al. (2022) suggest that it contributes to local economic development through job creation and other benefits for residents. Furthermore, progress has been observed in urban and rural areas through improvements in relationships among stakeholders and the implementation of innovative and environmentally responsible practices (Stoiljković et al., 2025). Based on the paragraph above, tourism is defined as the activity through which individuals seek leisure outside of their work environment, causing them to enjoy locations different from their usual place of residence. This can lead to a convergence of cultures, showcasing diverse forms of consumption in the visited area (Więckowski, 2021).

The tourist chooses their destination based on the imaginary they construct, shaped by their preferences and personal characteristics, such as age, gender, and social class. According to Gazzola et al. (2018), contemporary tourists tend to seek less crowded destinations to establish a direct connection with the local population, valuing both tangible and intangible goods while pursuing relaxing experiences that include sustainable practices. Their intention lies in understanding the perspective of those who inhabit the space daily and can share their knowledge (Ortega et al., 2021).

As a result, the tourism industry has experienced progress and economic growth (Sudarmanto et al., 2025). For this reason, it is crucial to innovate to meet visitors' desires, offering more authentic and natural experiences while connecting with local people, such as farmers, artisans, and others. This trend has given rise to an alternative form of tourism, mainly focused on experiences that enable closer interaction with social and cultural realities (Stoiljković et al., 2025).

### Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism emerged as a response to the historical negative impacts of mass tourism, to protect territories and resources for present and future generations. This approach addresses the needs of both tourists and local communities, integrating supply, demand, the natural environment, and sustainability (Buonincontri et al., 2021; Jóźwiak & Sieg, 2021; Olszewski-Strzyżowski, 2022; Trigo & Silva, 2022). These considerations encompass three key dimensions:

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social, economic, and environmental (Mendoza et al., 2023; Fonseca et al., 2024). Due to the negative environmental impacts of tourism activities, it is essential to mitigate consequences such as pollution, habitat destruction, deforestation, wildfires, climate change, and resource exploitation (Więckowski, 2021). This is achieved through conscious tourism, which promotes the participation and recognition of the local population (Soares et al., 2021).

In this context, the United Nations established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. According to Moreira et al. (2022), efforts are currently being made to adopt new tourism practices by integrating entrepreneurs and local communities to promote traditional and natural attractions, in order to achieve a balance. Additionally, there is a focus on involving visitors in ways that align their interests with learning about, respecting, and preserving destinations. One option is eco-hotels, designed to provide environmentally protective experiences (Stoiljković et al., 2025).

In this regard, activities focused on the care of natural territories and communities are proposed (Więckowski, 2021; Mori et al., 2022). Besides that, the aim is to foster human interaction with the environment while safeguarding natural, traditional, and intangible heritage from an ethical perspective that benefits the host community (Buonincontri et al., 2021). In this way, sustainable tourism addresses the challenge of developing environmental, social, and economic strategies to minimize negative impacts (Olszewski-Strzyżowski, 2022).

### **Community-based tourism**

Community-based tourism arises from the need to preserve culture, the environment, and values, aiming to provide visitors with a closer connection to communities and active participation in their activities (Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2018). In this regard, the proactive involvement of the local population becomes crucial, because this causes people to value and appreciate the local traditional knowledge, and to position nature as the main socioeconomic attraction (Moreira et al., 2022; Mandić et al., 2025). It is essential to implement training processes focused on tourism projects that demonstrate their economic, social, and environmental viability to encourage support from local and national governments (Tolkach & King, 2015; Zeng et al., 2024). According to Harb et al. (2025), promoting autonomous community management could generate economic benefits while enhancing competitiveness within the community.

In relation to the topic of this article, notable examples include Malaysia, where rural tourism has been promoted through the commercialization of local products, thereby strengthening the economy (Goh, 2021). Meanwhile, Mendoza et al. (2023) observe that while rural tourism generates economic benefits in Ecuador, it does not significantly contribute to the development of local communities. In contrast, Soares et al. (2021) report that in Compostela, Spain, the concentration of tourists in cultural heritage areas overwhelms the ecosystem and adversely affects residents.

Lőrincz et al. (2020) propose global strategies to promote sustainable tourism, including business approaches to optimize access to tourist sites in Hungary. In Portugal, tourism drives the economy and creates jobs, recording a 25% increase in recent years and becoming one of the most visited destinations in Europe (Trigo & Silva, 2022). Tourism growth, however, has faced challenges since the 1960s and 1970s, emphasizing the need for stronger management to mitigate its negative impacts (Więckowski, 2021). Mandić et al. (2025) conducted a study in the Metropolitan Area of Split, with the participation of four stakeholders: politicians, public sector entities, cultural and community institutions, and tourism companies. Seidualin et al. (2025) analyzed the role of stakeholders including banks, investment funds, farmers, the local community, and tour operators in contributing to sustainable development in the Ulytau State National Natural Park in central Kazakhstan. They believe that the local community can provide services and traditional cuisine to tourists, while tour operators can organize excursions that immerse visitors in the region's cultural and natural heritage. Harb et al. (2025) examined the effectiveness of sustainable tourism policies in Jordan, a country that holds a significant position in global tourism. In their study, they considered the same stakeholders as in the present study.

The authors highlight one key challenge: Jordan's rapid growth as a tourism center has created environmental, economic, and socio-cultural problems. As future lines of research, they suggest using technology to improve tourism management and implementing policies to achieve a sustainable balance. Stoiljković et al. (2025) analyzed the efficiency of tourism in Europe from a sustainability perspective, focusing on social and economic impacts. They argue that sustainable management can mitigate negative impacts such as overcrowding, waste management problems, and environmental pollution. Pérez (2024) conducted a study in Cuba, a country highly dependent on tourism. The author emphasizes that the formulation of policies to safeguard tourist destinations is a globally relevant issue due to its impact on local communities, the economy, infrastructure, and the environment.

Finally, Sudarmanto et al. (2025) examined tourism development in Kemuning Village, Indonesia, highlighting the importance of incorporating sports activities as a strategy for local growth. Their findings suggest that such initiatives generate social, cultural, and economic benefits and contribute to the responsible management of tourism. In this context, this research holds particular significance, as it was conducted in Villa de Leyva, a municipality recognized as a National Monument of Colombia for over 70 years. Renowned for its historical and colonial heritage, Villa de Leyva highlights the critical need to preserve its customs and values. The aim of the research is to assess how Villa de Leyva residents, public officials and tourism managers perceive sustainable tourism and how they contribute to its development.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research adopted a qualitative approach through the case study method with a descriptive scope. Widely used in social science research, this method helps to explore dynamics within real-world contexts. Thus, this research aimed to study situations and understand their development in Villa de Leyva. The case study approach facilitates observing human behavior and collecting data through interviews, offering detailed insights into the surrounding environment. As Carazo

(2006) explains, this method can focus on analyzing individuals or groups within specific locations, such as villages, cities, or countries. Given that tourism is inherently a social phenomenon, using a case study approach is both appropriate and relevant. Initially, the problem was defined, followed by the formulation of a strategy to implement the case study, and finally, the data collection technique was selected. The sample in this study consisted of twelve individuals divided into four stakeholder groups. The methodological process included the following stages: literature review, case selection through purposive sampling, data collection and systematization of the case study (Figure 1).

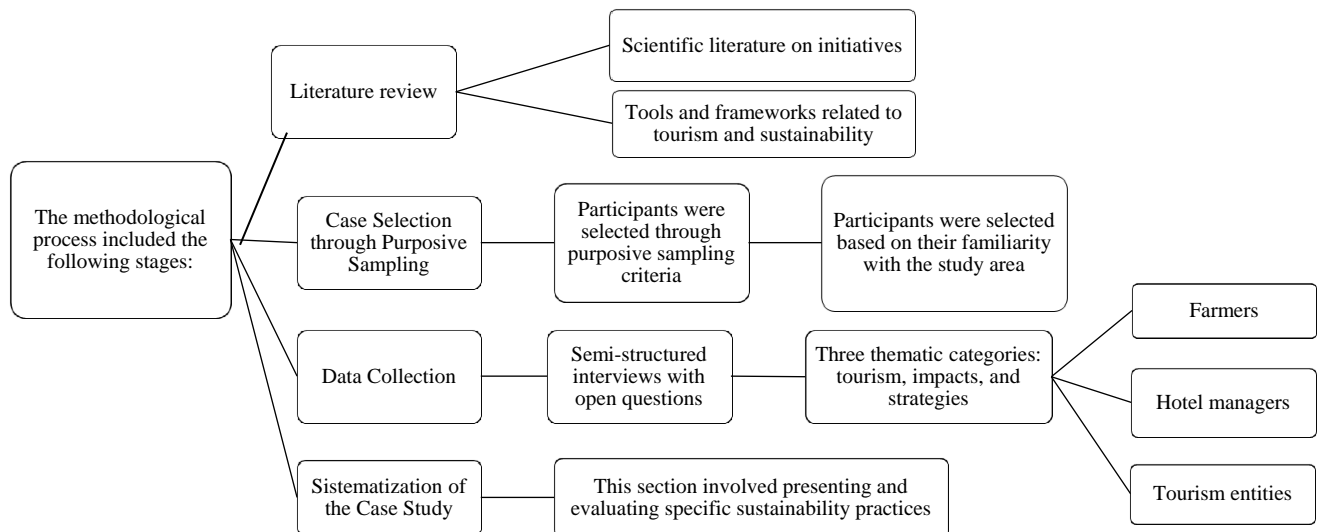


Figure 1. Methodological process

1) Literature review: A comprehensive review of scientific literature on initiatives and tools related to tourism and sustainability.

2) Case selection through purposive sampling: Participants were chosen through purposive sampling based on their familiarity with the area of interest and their expertise derived from life experience, professional trajectory, and prior studies (Cohen et al., 2011). Each participant was thoroughly briefed on the research objectives, participated voluntarily, and provided informed consent. The participants were divided into four stakeholder groups (Figure 2). The first group consisted of three farmers with an average age of 58 years, all either born in Villa de Leyva or residing there for over 20 years, actively engaged in tourism-related activities. The second group included three hotel managers, each with more than 20 years of experience in the tourism sector, operating in the central area or near the Plaza Mayor. The third group comprised three directors of tourism entities, representing both urban and rural businesses such as restaurants and tourism agencies. Lastly, the fourth group included three public sector managers involved in overseeing tourism-related activities.

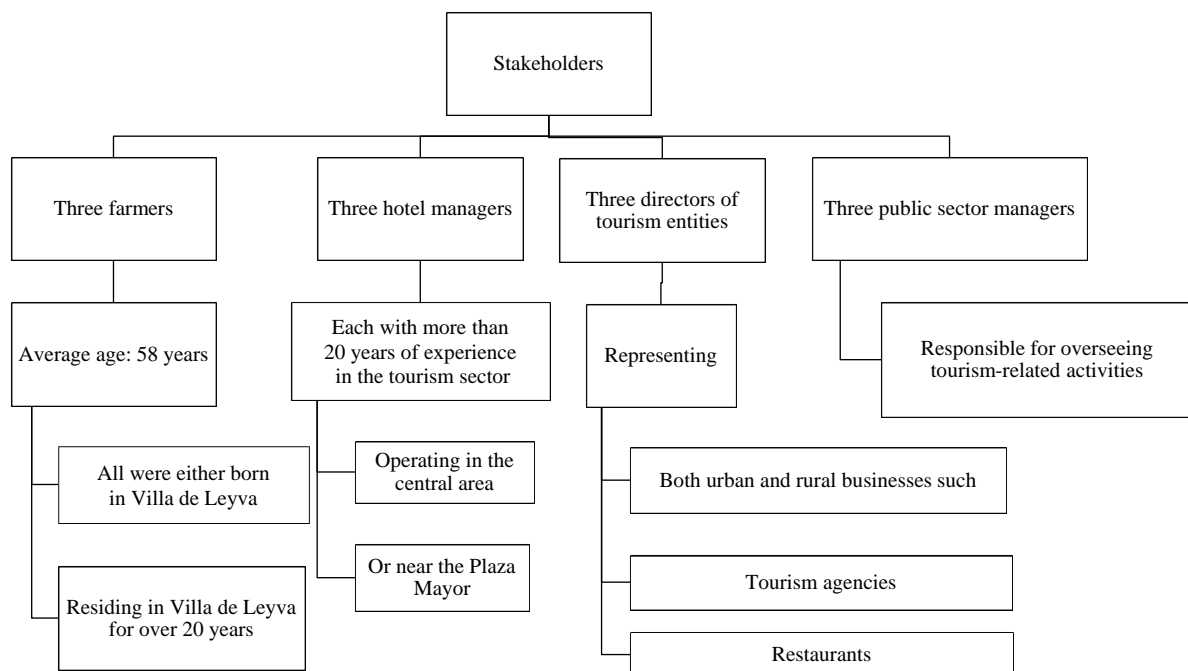


Figure 2. Case selection

3) Data collection: Information was gathered through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, allowing in-depth discussions that enhanced the research findings. Conducted in August and September 2023, the interviews focused on three main categories: tourism, impacts, and strategies. Farmers were asked about their perceptions of tourism and sustainability, the positive and negative impacts they had experienced, their involvement in local tourist routes, the municipality's key attractions, and their awareness of implemented projects. For hotel managers, the questions explored the incorporation of sustainable tourism practices in their operations, their collaboration with other projects, the community's interest in these practices, and the motivations behind their business strategies. Tourism entities provided insights into their role in promoting local employability, their objectives in Villa de Leyva, and their contributions to cultural preservation. Finally, public sector managers were consulted on the implementation of sustainable initiatives and their strategies in education, environmental protection, and community participation.

4) Systematization of the case study: This section involved presenting and evaluating specific sustainability practices identified for each of the contexts mentioned above.

## RESULTS

This section presents the research findings, highlighting how sustainability is being implemented in the tourism sector in Villa de Leyva.

### Villa de Leyva's case

Villa de Leyva, originally named Villa de Nuestra Señora de Santa María de Leyva, was founded in 1572 by Andrés Díaz Venero de Leyva. Located in the Alto Ricaurte region of the Boyacá department in Colombia, it spans an area of 128 km<sup>2</sup> and has an average temperature of 18.1°C (64.6°F) (Alcaldía de Villa de Leyva, 2020). Villa de Leyva is celebrated for its colonial architecture and was designated as a Colombian architectural heritage site in 1954. In 2017, Villa de Leyva earned recognition as a sustainable tourism destination from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism of Colombia, becoming the eighth destination to receive this prestigious certification under the Colombian Institute of Technical Standards and Certification. This achievement required a strong commitment to responsible tourism, efficient operation of water treatment facilities, and mindful management of public services (Gobernación de Boyacá, 2017). Villa de Leyva is a municipality with natural, cultural, and historical attractions, which provide a significant advantage in attracting many visitors. It hosts approximately 107 tourism service companies, including tour operators and event organizers, making tourism a fundamental activity for the local economy. However, the growing tourism industry has caused environmental degradation caused by both visitors and tourism businesses, highlighting the need to implement processes to protect the municipality's heritage and environment (Sudarmanto et al., 2025). The Municipal Development Plan 2020-2023 emphasizes the importance of strengthening sustainability and social cohesion, as well as increasing investment in the rural population. Additionally, the plan underscores the necessity of regulating the use of tourist attractions and operators to prevent negative impacts on nature. Despite its tourism potential, the municipality lacks projects that ensure both quality services and preservation efforts, which could negatively affect the community (Alcaldía de Villa de Leyva, 2020). The following section presents an analysis of the interview data collected from the stakeholder groups, focusing on three categories: sustainable tourism in Villa de Leyva, sustainability strategies, and social, environmental, and economic impacts.

### Sustainable tourism in Villa de Leyva

Table 1 provides an analysis of the interview data, highlighting key insights. Farmers identify tourism as the primary economic driver for the municipality due to its historical, natural, architectural, colonial, and tranquil attractions, which draw both national and international tourists. While they acknowledge the benefits of employment and economic growth, they also emphasize the need to implement measures to preserve Villa de Leyva's future.

Table 1. Sustainable tourism in Villa de Leyva

Category	Farmers	Hotels	Tourism Organizations	Public Entities
Tourism in Villa de Leyva	- One of the main economic sources for the municipality	- Offers hotel and gastronomic services tied to the town's heritage	- Provides national and international gastronomic services	- A public tourism policy is being implemented in Villa de Leyva
	- Hosts cultural and historical attractions	- Local tourism regulations require the training of hotel workers	- Ensures quality and safety in services - Offers a variety of tourist options	- Provides training for tourism service providers in best practices - The municipality hosts a variety of festivals
Sustainable Tourism in Villa de Leyva	- Focuses on conserving and sharing local values	- Preserves traditional architecture	- Faces challenges with waste separation and timely collection	- The municipality holds a sustainability certification
	- Seen as a growth opportunity but requires strict control to preserve traditions	- Incorporates ecological gardens and hires local staff	- Promotes environmental awareness among clients during tours and activities	- Promotes the integration of "Tourism-Friendly Schools"
		- Includes sites of archaeological interest		- Conducts cleanup campaigns as part of <i>Colombia Limpia</i>
		- Collaborates in events and festivals		

In the hotel sector, there is a strong commitment to sustainable tourism. Hoteliers demonstrated environmental and social responsibility by constructing facilities thoughtfully, fostering partnerships with the community, and supporting cultural

festivals. They also educate guests on local attractions and eco-friendly practices, actively encouraging ecological tourism and the use of locally sourced products. Tourism organizations offer unique experiences in gastronomy, high-quality services, and certified safety, supported by well-trained local staff. However, challenges remain in waste separation within establishments and inadequate waste management. Public entities are actively implementing policies to mitigate negative impacts in line with sustainable tourism certification requirements. They provide training through the Tunja Chamber of Commerce to promote best practices and foster partnerships. Furthermore, they organize cleanup initiatives such as *Colombia Limpia* and encourage the participation of "Colegios Amigos del Turismo" (a group of schools related with tourism-based education).

### Sustainability strategies

Table 2 outlines the sustainability strategies and the positive and negative aspects of tourism. Farmers appreciate the increased employment opportunities but emphasize the need to preserve the municipality's infrastructure and environmental wealth. They also propose making their daily activities more visible to visitors and advocating for inter-village collaboration to develop tourist routes that benefit all local communities involved. Hotel managers highlight the importance of raising visitor awareness about resource conservation, alongside ensuring efficient management of public services and fostering community development. Tourism entity leaders prioritize effective waste management strategies, including separation and composting, to reduce environmental impacts. Public entities focus on implementing awareness campaigns and conducting regular inspections to ensure compliance and sustainability within tourism establishments.

Tourism in Villa de Leyva has brought several benefits, including job creation for residents, a diverse range of accommodation options, and a favorable environment for entrepreneurship driven by the town's natural attractions and tranquil ambiance. Additionally, opportunities for training and development aimed at implementing sustainable practices are highlighted, attracting responsible visitors, and fostering a culture of sustainability. In contrast, farmers emphasize the rising cost of living as a significant drawback. They also stress the need for greater attention, advocating for prioritization in training and certifications, as well as improved security in rural areas; Hotels point out a lack of entrepreneurial mindset among residents. While they offer various awareness activities, they cannot ensure that guests follow through on them. Hoteliers also warn about the loss of traditions and the increasing volume of waste in the municipality; and, lastly, public entities identify the influx of foreign visitors as a major challenge, which intensifies insecurity. They also highlight the lack of adequate protection in rural areas, emphasizing the need for stronger intervention from authorities.

Table 2. Sustainability strategies

Category	Farmers	Hotels	Tourism Entities	Public Entities
<b>Sustainability Strategies</b>	- Promotion of job opportunities for young people.	- Notices encouraging conscious use of water and electricity by guests.	- Implementation of a waste separation system.	- Organization of responsible water and energy use campaigns.
	- Commitment to preserving buildings and resources.	- No use of dryers; washed clothes are air-dried using sunlight.	- Significant reduction in the use of public services.	- Conducting inspections of tourist establishments.
	- Interest in showcasing nature, labor, and traditional attractions.	- Offering locally sourced food.	- Utilization of food waste, even when the amount discarded is minimal.	- Reorganization of street vendors.
	- Active participation in inter-village tourism initiatives.	- Implementation and use of solar panels.		- Prohibition of flyer distribution and street vending.
<b>Positive Aspects</b>	- Participation in tourism highlights daily activities such as weaving.	- A broad range of hospitality options is available.	- Accessible to all social strata.	- Variety of tourist plans.
	- Increasing interest among native inhabitants, who train and work in museums, artisan clothing businesses, and some collaboration with the Tourism Department.	- Tourists are drawn by hospitality.	- Presence of tourism entities, such as hotels, agencies, and restaurants.	- Hotels with varying price ranges, among others.
		- Strong commitment to preserving cultural heritage and traditions.		- Abundance of tourist attractions, including museums, galleries, and handicrafts.
		- Implementation of sustainable practices attracts more tourists.		- Proximity to other towns.
<b>Negative Aspects</b>	- Increase in the cost of basic public services.	- No effective measures to raise tourists' awareness of resource use.	- Loss of local traditions due to foreign influence.	- Influx of foreigners has affected the quality of tourist services.
	- Lack of knowledge among farmers about sustainability issues.	- High tourist traffic generates significant waste in Villa de Leyva.	- Tourism impacts the provision of public services.	- Waste proliferation due to the large number of visitors to Villa de Leyva.
	- Obstacles in obtaining safety and quality certifications.	- Lack of specialization in offering typical Villa de Leyva cuisine.		- Tourist activity causes the migration of local residents.
	- Risk of losing traditions.			

### Social, environmental, and economic impact

Socially, a significant portion of the local population is compelled to relocate to nearby cities due to rising costs of land and public services. On the other hand, residents knowledgeable about history, politics, and tourism actively engage in tourism

projects. They share their knowledge and expertise with visitors, emphasizing the importance of preserving both the environment and the area's rich cultural heritage. Also, opportunities are provided for young people to receive training and participate in tourism-related sectors such as gastronomy, hospitality, and customer service. Hotels are committed to providing high-quality lodging services. They also strive to hire trained staff, including residents and individuals affected by Colombian armed conflict, with skills in customer service. While they express a willingness to support the community, they face challenges due to the lack of regulation regarding the legal framework for the economic activities of farmers. The analysis of tourism entities reveals that most business owners come from outside Villa de Leyva, selecting this location as an ideal setting to establish their ventures. In this context, these entrepreneurs are actively involved in the local community, providing employment, and adopting business practices that address waste collection issues. Additionally, they promote environmental awareness, local history, and participation in ecological walks among tourists. Public entities demonstrate a strong commitment to identifying the social, economic, and environmental impacts of mass tourism in Villa de Leyva. They have observed significant shifts in local labor dynamics, including increased migration and the acceptance of lower wages. Moreover, the growing number of tourists has led to a marked rise in waste generation, affecting both rural and urban areas (Table 3).

Table 3. Social, environmental, and economic impact

Category	Farmers	Hotels	Tourism Entities	Public Entities
<b>Social Impact</b>	- Opportunities for young people are limited.	- Interaction between locals and foreigners.	- Non-local entrepreneurs establish businesses in Villa de Leyva.	- The community is being integrated into training programs.
	- Need to train farmers in tourism.	- Creates job opportunities for individuals affected by armed conflict.		
<b>Economic Impact</b>	- Growth in infrastructure requires specialized labor.	- Hotels must present certifications and accounting records to the state for oversight of their activities.	- Dependence on tourism as the primary economic driver for the municipality.	- Investment in festivals and events.
	- Land costs in Villa de Leyva have increased significantly.		- Job creation for local residents.	
<b>Environmental Impact</b>	- Irresponsible use of resources by some tourists.	- Staff commitment to environmental impact training.	- Implementation of natural composting.	- Increase in waste associated with tourist influx.
	- Villa de Leyva has one of the most equipped fire brigades due to frequent fires.	- Information provided on digital platforms for suppliers and clients regarding environmental measures.	- Protocols to raise environmental awareness among clients.	- Campaigns promoting responsible water and energy use.
		- Difficulty in waste separation.		

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to analyze the perceptions of residents, public officials, and tourism managers in Villa de Leyva regarding sustainable tourism and their interest in its development. The findings highlight the need for change. Accordingly, Olszewski-Strzyżowski (2022) emphasizes the necessity of transforming current dynamics. Responsible tourism poses a challenge that requires the commitment of tourists, the community, and service providers, all of whom must adhere to existing regulations. Furthermore, it is essential to implement concrete actions across all ventures and tourism events to effectively contribute to sustainable development (Alcaldía de Villa de Leyva, 2020).

### Sustainable tourism in Villa de Leyva

The findings highlight the benefits derived from tourism activities. In this context, Lee & Jan (2019) point out that in Taiwan, tourism is perceived as an effective strategy to combat poverty by generating employment and creating diverse job opportunities to meet visitors' needs. Likewise, Olszewski-Strzyżowski (2022) emphasizes the importance of customer service, recreation, and transportation. Like Villa de Leyva, countries such as Austria, Norway, and Guatemala maintain strong ties to their colonial and cultural heritage while offering visitors tranquil settings. According to Moreira et al. (2022), rural areas provide opportunities for reflection and connection with nature, where climate, culture, and gastronomy play pivotal roles. Consequently, hotels in Villa de Leyva and the surrounding are actively working to preserve Boyacá's cultural traditions. The results indicate a strong interest in implementing actions to promote sustainable tourism. In this regard, Dolnicar & Greene (2025) conclude that achieving sustainability requires changes from all stakeholders.

However, respondents highlight the need for increased engagement from public organizations, a concern echoed by Gkoumas (2019) in his study of Rhodes, Greece. He emphasizes that successful tourism innovation requires well-prepared governmental institutions, policies, laws, and local actors. Similarly, Ortega et al. (2021) observe that in the Eco Museum of Puerto López, sustainability is driven by collaboration among public representatives, educators, and locals. In Villa de Leyva, public entities are working to develop training programs and initiatives aimed at regulating sustainable practices among tourism operators, residents, and visitors. Villa de Leyva faces significant challenges due to the absence of an efficient system for collecting and sorting waste in both urban and rural areas. Sancho (2005) warns that improper waste management, compounded by increased tourist activity, poses a serious environmental threat. In contrast, Suluo et al. (2023) illustrate how tourism ventures in Tanzania have successfully addressed this issue through organizations dedicated to processing and managing tourism-generated waste. This highlights the potential for similar strategies to be implemented in Villa de Leyva. Public services have become more expensive due to the mass influx of tourists, mirroring the challenges described by Tinoco (2003) regarding irresponsible management in Peru. This issue directly impacts both residents and

tourists, as the increased demand for essential services, such as potable water supply, leads to higher costs and deteriorating availability. Burbano et al. (2022) observe a similar trend in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Ecuador. To address this challenge, it is crucial to implement measures that safeguard public services, recognizing them as a fundamental right.

The population of Villa de Leyva faces growing security challenges stemming from the surge in tourist arrivals. Marchan et al. (2023) highlight that in Peru, insecurity has persisted over the past five years, impacting major tourist destinations due to terrorism. Comparably, Lee & Jan (2019) report that in Taiwan, residents have observed increased crime rates linked to tourism. As a result, authorities are encouraged to implement robust security measures, as these challenges have profound social and economic consequences, with rural areas in Villa de Leyva being among the most vulnerable.

### **Sustainability strategies**

Protecting cultural and environmental heritage in Villa de Leyva is crucial for fostering responsible and economically sustainable tourism, a perspective supported by Del Valle (2017) in Venezuela, and Muresan et al. (2016) in Romania. Both studies highlight the critical role of safeguarding tangible and intangible assets in achieving sustainable tourism development. In Taiwan, efforts go beyond conservation by educating tourists on environmentally responsible behaviors (Lee & Jan, 2019). Preserving these resources ensures the long-term viability of tourist attractions and their ability to draw visitors. Conversely, neglecting such efforts can lead to economic decline. Baloch et al. (2023) underscore the importance of prioritizing environmental considerations over commercial gains in their study of Pakistan.

Given these insights, Villa de Leyva must implement targeted measures that balance tourism-driven commerce with the mitigation of consumption and pollution impacts in local establishments—a challenge that requires urgent attention.

An effective strategy to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism is waste separation for composting, which can be used as natural fertilizer. Hamón (2008) highlights similar initiatives in Monserrate, including ecological points along pathways and cleanup campaigns organized with local merchants. In Tanzania, tourism businesses prioritize proper waste sorting as a step toward fostering corporate sustainability (Suluo et al., 2023). Similarly, in the Galápagos Islands, improving waste collection systems is proposed as a way to protect ecosystems (Burbano et al., 2022). Implementing such measures in Villa de Leyva, such as installing visible trash bins and ecological points in tourist establishments, is essential to reduce environmental impact and promote sustainable practices. The creation of the Public Tourism Policy in Villa de Leyva is an initiative that requires the participation of tourism entities and the local community for its effective implementation. This approach aligns with Gazzola et al. (2018), who, in their study of the cycling tourism model in Italy, highlight the critical role of public-private partnerships. To achieve sustainable and fair outcomes, it is crucial to involve residents in tourism planning and decision-making, fostering inclusive and equitable growth. Mandić et al. (2025) emphasize the need to promote partnerships between the public and private sectors, as well as the importance of implementing context-specific policies and tourism models that promote cultural preservation and the development of local communities.

Residents and farmers have actively contributed to the tourism sector by sharing traditional activities such as milking, harvesting, and weaving. Mwesumo et al. (2022) illustrate how integrating sustainable innovation processes, as seen in Traena, Norway, can attract more visitors. Following the COVID-19 crisis, Polukhina et al. (2021), Pérez (2024), et al. (2025) and Harb et al. (2025) observe that tourists have shown a growing interest in engaging with nature and local communities. Building on these examples, the farmers of Villa de Leyva have an opportunity to safeguard and share their cultural heritage. By aligning with specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), they can showcase the region's natural and urban landscapes to both domestic and international visitors, fostering intercultural dialogue and raising awareness about the unique value of the area. A significant positive impact of tourism in Villa de Leyva is the creation of job opportunities for residents. These positions not only enhance the quality of life for the community but also align with the global trend identified by Manzoor (2019) and Stoiljković et al. (2025), which underscores tourism as a key driver of employment and economic growth. In Tanzania, Suluo et al. (2023) highlight the obligation of tourism companies to involve rural communities in their workforce to improve economic conditions. Similarly, Lee & Jan (2019) emphasize the necessity for tourism businesses in Taiwan to prioritize hiring residents. In the city of Jiulong, China, Zeng et al. (2024) concluded that tourism companies that collaborate with local communities create a long-term positive impact, reduce barriers, and minimize conflicts. In this sense, they build relationships based on trust, equality, and cooperation.

In Villa de Leyva, tourism entities actively contribute to local development by integrating residents into their operations. This approach aligns with the United Nations' eight Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs), which promotes “decent work and economic growth” as a cornerstone of sustainable development (United Nations, 2023).

The migration of residents from Villa de Leyva to other municipalities due to tourism has a significant negative impact. This trend contrasts with Sancho's (2005) findings, which suggest that sustainable tourism has the potential to reduce youth displacement by fostering economic stability within their communities. In Russia, by comparison, residents have adapted to a shifting economic landscape and successfully learned to coexist with visitors (Polukhina et al., 2021). For Villa de Leyva, the rising cost of living in recent years has posed a substantial challenge, making it increasingly difficult for locals to remain in the area. The lack of infrastructure for people with disabilities is a significant issue in Villa de Leyva. This challenge, however, is not confined to the Boyacá municipality; it is a widespread problem in many regions. For instance, in Chile, particularly in the wine tourism sector, addressing accessibility has become a critical priority, as emphasized by Figueroa & Rotarou (2018).

Recognizing and tackling these gaps in infrastructure is essential to ensure that tourism is inclusive and accessible to all. Another variable to consider is the proliferation of tourism ventures, where the majority of owners are either foreigners or individuals from other regions of Colombia. While this trend brings socio-economic benefits to the community, it also raises concerns about the potential erosion of cultural identity. Baloch et al. (2023) observe that such circumstances may lead locals to adopt the customs of visitors and non-local owners, undermining their authenticity. Similarly, Sancho (2005) argues that this dynamic can be harmful, as the host population often assumes roles primarily as employees.

### **Social, environmental, and economic impact of tourism**

Regarding the social impact, Villa de Leyva has achieved the Sustainable Tourism Certification; however, its implementation remains incomplete. Gazzola et al. (2018) highlight that all stakeholders can play a pivotal role in fostering long-term projects, such as cycling tourism, by contributing innovative ideas. In this context, the interviewed stakeholder groups expressed a strong commitment to advancing sustainability in the region through their daily activities, professional efforts, environmental initiatives, and cultural contributions. In Villa de Leyva, interviews reveal that the local population benefits significantly from diverse employment opportunities. According to Birendra et al. (2021), such trends motivate youth and residents to pursue training and careers in the tourism sector, fostering the creation of additional jobs. Notably, Villa de Leyva stands out for its inclusive hiring practices, which prioritize individuals affected by Colombia's armed conflict.

Once again, it is emphasized that tourism has negatively impacted on farmers in Villa de Leyva, leading to the sale of their land and the displacement of residents due to the unsustainability of staying in the region. This phenomenon resembles the situation in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, where, as noted by Soares et al. (2021), local inhabitants have been displaced due to gentrification—a socio-economic process that, over time, harms the original culture. Cuadra (2017) reinforces this concern, highlighting that rising costs and the importation of goods and services from other regions further exacerbate the issue. In response to this problem, the interviewed stakeholders emphasize the need for action to support the community's socio-economic well-being. They propose the implementation of policies that address the needs of both local residents and tourists, aiming to prevent displacement and ensure visitors can experience the authentic culture of the region.

To continue with the economic impact, hotels express a willingness to support local farmers; however, regulatory barriers imposed by government entities prevent them from purchasing their products. Farmers are discouraged by the challenges of formalizing their operations, which require compliance with various legal requirements, such as worker insurance (ARL) and complete documentation—processes that demand both time and financial investment. Hotels, meanwhile, do not take responsibility for sourcing these products or encouraging farmers to align with sector regulations.

Sancho (2005) highlights that failing to purchase local products results in higher costs for tourism businesses and economic difficulties for residents who produce food and goods. Similarly, Suluo et al. (2023) illustrate that in Tanzania, sourcing locally grown food enhances sustainability and productivity, benefiting both suppliers and buyers. In Indonesia, Purnomo (2021), and in Nepal, Birendra et al. (2021), emphasize the importance of economic plans that prioritize the local community—especially farmers—by enabling them to market their goods and play a vital role in tourism development. To address these issues, it is crucial to implement strategies that empower farmers to establish legally compliant and prosperous businesses. In terms of environmental impact, tourism businesses and public entities collaborate with Corpoboyacá to organize awareness talks and events focused on environmental care. This demonstrates effective management in environmental protection, particularly on farms, and highlights active participation in training sessions and cleanup campaigns. However, it is essential to foster greater awareness among residents (Del Valle, 2017).

In Taiwan, both the government and NGOs actively promote environmental education programs for residents and tourists, aiming to enhance nationwide ecological awareness (Lee & Jan, 2019). Similarly, in Pakistan, initiatives such as tree planting events and infrastructure improvements help mitigate the environmental damage caused by tourism (Baloch et al., 2023). By contrast, Suluo et al. (2023) observe that the community in Tanzania lacks a comprehensive understanding of the negative impacts of irresponsible practices, although government campaigns are working to address this gap. Meanwhile, in Rhodes, Greece, Gkoumas (2019) notes that while entities recognize the value of sustainable tourism, they often favor mass tourism due to its equivalent economic returns and reduced effort. Another significant environmental challenge in Villa de Leyva is the occurrence of forest fires, often triggered by pollution from discarded glass and plastic, improper campfire practices, and cigarette waste. These issues are aggravated by the region's prolonged summers, which accelerate the spread of flames, deplete natural resources, and increase water consumption. Similarly, in Chile, prolonged droughts—intensified by mining activities—have caused significant losses in wine production (Figueroa & Rotarou, 2018).

In response to the risk of fires, Villa de Leyva is supported by one of the largest firefighting teams in Boyacá. However, their efforts are hindered by water shortages and persistent droughts. Furthermore, the influx of tourists during festivals disrupts local flora and fauna, forcing animals like deer to flee or hide from their natural habitats. This demonstrates how tourism influx poses a threat to biodiversity by encroaching on ecosystems (Baloch et al., 2023; Suluo et al., 2023).

A management system is being introduced within tourism entities to oversee public services and foster tourism awareness, establishing standards that prioritize sustainable quality over carrying capacity and large-scale events. This initiative reflects progress in enhancing public service conditions, aligning with usage regulations observed in Romania (Muresan et al., 2016). Nevertheless, ongoing monitoring and effective governance remain essential. In contrast, the Galápagos Islands grapple with significant challenges stemming from political disputes over the adequate provision of essential services, adversely affecting both residents and tourists (Burbano et al., 2022). To address these issues, minimizing resource waste is critical to ensuring mutual benefits for the local community and visitors alike (Dolnicar & Greene, 2025).

### **CONCLUSION**

Villa de Leyva boasts a variety of tangible and intangible attractions, making it a compelling destination for tourists. While it is recognized for its tourism potential and valuable heritage, it is essential to implement actions that align with its Sustainable Tourism Certification. Several issues remain unaddressed, including waste management, the overuse of natural and public resources, rising insecurity, increasing costs in the municipality, and the displacement of local residents, who also require greater support and guarantees. Additionally, improving infrastructure accessibility, particularly for people with disabilities, and managing the influx of mass tourism are critical steps to ensure sustainable development and preserve



the region's appeal. Among the positive aspects, tourism has contributed to job creation and provided valuable opportunities for the community, supported by training programs aimed at enhancing the skills of both businesses and residents. Efforts to preserve natural resources and public services, such as the use of signage and the involvement of trained personnel, are particularly noteworthy. Cooperatives like Corpoboyacá play a key role in maintaining environmental cleanliness through organized campaigns. However, farmers, while acknowledging the economic benefits of tourism, also highlight the significant rise in living costs within the municipality, which has made it increasingly unaffordable. This financial strain has prompted many to migrate. Hotels have shown a strong commitment, positioning themselves as the most engaged stakeholders in Villa de Leyva. Their strategies include hiring local staff, preserving colonial architecture, and actively supporting cultural events. Moreover, they demonstrate diligence by participating in tourism projects and complying with technical standards specific to the tourism sector. Tourism entities demonstrate a strong commitment to advancing sustainability but face external challenges, particularly in waste management. They stress the importance of unified collaboration among authorities, public policies, local communities, and tourism stakeholders to establish effective strategies. This coordination is especially critical for mitigating adverse effects during events that draw large numbers of visitors to Villa de Leyva. Addressing the social, environmental, and economic consequences of mass tourism - such as heightened pollution levels and natural resource degradation - requires targeted actions and sustainable practices.

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