



Exploring the role of sports facilities and public services in Buriram's sports tourism for sustainability

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Abstract

This study assesses the potential of Buriram, Thailand, for sustainable sports tourism through sports facilities and public service management. Using a mixed-methods approach, it combines interviews with key informants ($N = 11$) and surveys of tourists ($N = 384$). Statistical and thematic analyses reveal that Buriram's sports facilities, such as the Chang Arena, Chang International Circuit, and Buriram Marathon, significantly support tourism sustainability. High tourist satisfaction is linked to modern public services, though improvements in service equity are needed. Personal factors, such as age and income, influence satisfaction, with younger tourists favoring modern amenities. The study recommends tailored public services and infrastructure upgrades to enhance sustainability efforts.

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Introduction

Sustainable sports tourism integrates environmental, economic, and social benefits, creating long-term tourism solutions (Weed & Bull, 2009). Buriram, Thailand, has rapidly grown as a sports city, increasing its tourism income by 305.33 percent in 2022, largely due to major sports infrastructure like Chang International Circuit, Buriram United Football Club, and Buriram Marathon, which meet international standards (Buriram Provincial Statistical Office, 2023; Buriram Provincial Tourism and Sports Office, 2018). Designated as a "Sports City" in 2018, Buriram emphasizes the

role of sports facilities in tourism growth. However, a gap remains in understanding the role of these facilities as sustainable tourism resources and the impact of public service management on tourist satisfaction (Hritz & Ross, 2010; World Tourism Organization, 2019).

This study explores two critical aspects: the sustainability potential of sports facilities and tourist satisfaction with public services. It also examines how personal factors like gender, age, and income influence satisfaction and sustainable development using a mixed-methods approach involving interviews and questionnaires.

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Literature Review

Sports Tourism and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sport tourism, as defined by Delpy (1998), encompasses travel for participation, spectating, or visiting sport-related attractions, including categories like resorts, cruises, and events. The goal of sustainable sports tourism is to integrate environmental, economic, and social principles to create a balanced model that benefits all stakeholders (Hritz & Ross, 2010; Mollah et al., 2021). This requires frameworks that involve local communities and prioritize ecological practices (O'Brien & Ponting, 2013; Wang et al., 2024). As Gibson (1998) emphasizes, improved coordination between sport and tourism agencies, multi-disciplinary research, and overcoming departmental divides in education are crucial for advancing the field. Cheng et al. (2023) highlights the need for strategies that go beyond policy tweaks, emphasizing community-based ecotourism (Upadhayaya, 2019) and alignment with the SDGs through strategic communication (Francesca, 2023; World Tourism Organization, 2019). Studies have also shown that local perceptions of tourism's impact on social development are crucial, considering economic, cultural, and environmental factors (González-García et al., 2022; Higham, 2021; Yang et al., 2022). In Thailand, low-carbon tourism promotes sustainability by integrating economic and environmental goals (Bhaktikul et al., 2021), while events like marathons highlight the potential of sports tourism to enhance sustainable development (Arici et al., 2023). Overall, the field has contributed significantly to the literature, demonstrating that sustainable development in sports tourism must go beyond economic growth to include innovation in public services and resource protection (Mesci, 2020).

The Role of Sports Facilities as Tourism Resource Potential

Sports facilities play a crucial role in enhancing tourist satisfaction by providing essential amenities that make destinations more functional and attractive (Peng & Zhou, 2022). They are particularly important in health tourism, where visitors seek wellness and medical services (Morissan & Gan, 2021). Despite ongoing debates regarding their economic impact, sports facilities remain key to sustainable tourism, especially in the post-COVID-19 era (Weed, 2020). Effective infrastructure and transport systems are vital for socio-economic growth (Lv, 2022), while strategically placed facilities can boost economic benefits, improve quality of life, and address seasonality through

indoor stadiums, though weather-dependent sports like skiing remain challenging (Feng & Humphreys, 2018; Hodžić & Huremović, 2022). Events such as marathons can attract significant numbers of tourists but require proper management and community engagement to succeed. Studies on Buriram's tourism potential align with Kanchanakitti's (2002) findings in Chiang Mai, emphasizing the need for cross-sector collaboration in developing sports facilities. Sustainable planning is essential for mitigating environmental impacts and promoting year-round tourism (Jittangwattana, 2016; Kanchanakitti, 2002). This research adapts the concept of resource potential in sports tourism, focusing on five key components: amenities, which enhance visitor comfort; sport equipment, ensuring access to necessary gear; sport personnel, providing trained staff for smooth operations; attractions, offering key tourism draws; and accommodation, meeting diverse lodging needs (Buhalis, 2000; Jittangwattana, 2016; Kanchanakitti, 2002).

Public Service and Tourist Satisfaction

Effective public service management is key to high satisfaction in sports tourism, integrating organizational structure, leadership, and decision-making to ensure quality services (Millet, 1954; Şengel et al., 2022). Millett's (1954) principles, including equitable access, which ensures all tourists have fair access to services, timeliness, providing services promptly to meet needs, ample resources, ensuring sufficient resources to handle demand, and continuous service, maintaining reliability over time, are essential for sustainable tourism and satisfaction across sectors like health, infrastructure, and environmental management (Han et al., 2021; Millett, 1954; Yang et al., 2022). Service quality and a positive destination image drive tourist loyalty (Bader et al., 2023; Jeong et al., 2019), while fair evaluations and sustainable practices enhance experiences (Han et al., 2021; Zulvianti et al., 2022). New Public Management (NPM) and public-private partnerships (PPPs) improve service efficiency through collaboration (Isolana, 2023; Makinde, 2022), and collaborative governance fosters trust and sustainability (O'Brien & Ponting, 2013). Using Millett's (1954) framework helps assess tourist satisfaction with public services at tourist spots by ensuring services are equitable, timely, and continuous.

Influence of Personal Factors on Tourism

Personal factors, including traits, preferences, and socio-demographic characteristics, significantly influence tourist behavior and satisfaction. Spiritual and cultural attributes, along with factors like hospitality, safety,

and amenities such as accommodation and transportation, also impact satisfaction (Agustinawati & Yusuf, 2019). Chen (2010) found that men focus more on competition in sports tourism, while women emphasize social and experiential aspects. Gender, age, education, occupation, and income further shape preferences. Younger tourists may seek adventure, while older ones prefer relaxation. Education and occupation influence preferences for cultural tourism, and income affects destination choices (Vargas et al., 2021). Community attachment and sociodemographic factors also affect residents’ perceptions of tourism (Alrwajfah et al., 2019), and engaging locals enhances satisfaction and destination branding (Trihandoyo et al., 2024). Understanding these factors allows providers to tailor experiences, improving satisfaction and loyalty.

Methodology

This study, part of a dissertation on the “Model of Sustainable Sport Tourism Management in Buriram Province,” focuses on two objectives: assessing the potential of sports facilities as tourism resources and evaluating tourist satisfaction with public service management. It also examines how personal factors (gender, age, education, occupation, income) influence satisfaction and sustainable development. A sample of 384 tourists was surveyed using a semi-structured questionnaire, which included both closed-ended

and open-ended questions. The sample size of sports tourists in Buriram was determined using Krejcie & Morgan (1970) formula, with a 5 percent margin of error and 95 percent confidence level, applied to a finite population. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics \bar{X} , SD , t -tests, χ^2 , and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value is 0.941, indicating high data suitability for factor analysis. Bartlett’s Test shows a χ^2 of 9151.249 with significance ($p < .05$), confirming the correlation matrix is appropriate for further analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three key stakeholders—sports facility managers, government officials, and private sector representatives—using purposive sampling, focusing on Chang Arena, Chang International Circuit, and Buriram Marathon. The selection of eleven key informants ensured that the most relevant decision-makers with in-depth knowledge provided insights, a practical approach given the scope and COVID-19 limitations. The study integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, highlighting how sports facilities and public services align with SDGs. The instruments were validated with IOC scores of 1.00 (questionnaire) and 0.96 (interviews). Reliability was confirmed with a tryout of 30 non-sample tourists using Cronbach’s alpha, with values above .70 indicating reliability. Figure 1 shows this study’s conceptual framework, with solid lines indicating the specific focus of this manuscript, which covers only part of the full research.

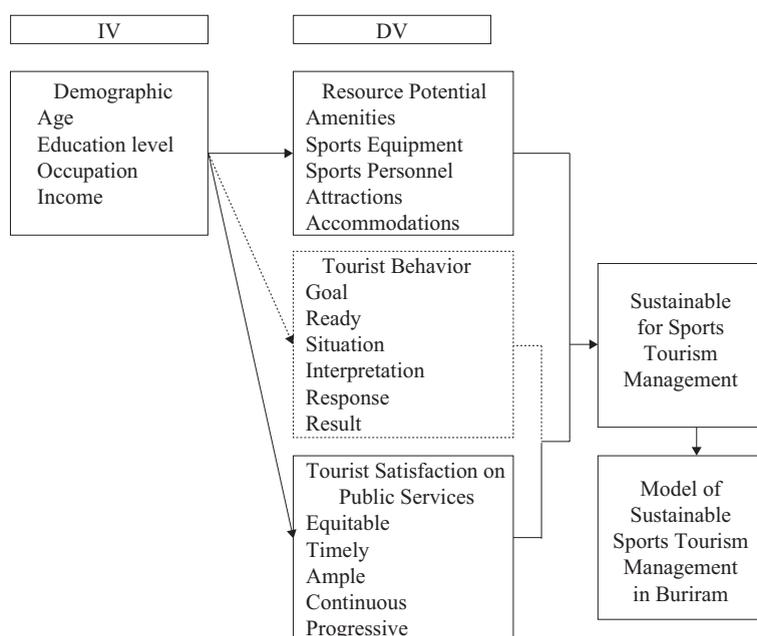


Figure 1 Stating the conceptual framework

Results

Potential of Sports Facilities as Sustainable Tourism Resources

Table 1 presents the qualitative findings from open-ended tourist questionnaire surveys, summarizing key factors influencing tourism and economic growth, categorized into five main areas.

The findings from Table 1 highlight several key factors that influence tourism and economic growth from the perspective of tourists. These include the quality and certification of amenities, the availability and safety of sports equipment, the professionalism and training of sports personnel, the attractiveness of local attractions, and the adequacy of accommodations. Tourists noted high satisfaction with the comprehensive facilities, well-maintained equipment, and the overall organization

of events, which significantly contribute to Buriram's reputation as a sports tourism destination.

Table 2 provides key stakeholder insights on the potential of sports facilities as sustainable tourism resources.

The findings from Table 2 present stakeholder perspectives on the role of sports facilities in promoting sustainable tourism. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of achieving global certifications and maintaining high standards for amenities. They also highlighted the role of sports facilities as key drivers of tourism and economic growth, particularly through hosting international events. Government officials stressed the need for supporting infrastructure development and ensuring compliance with safety regulations, while private sector representatives focused on the economic opportunities created by sports tourism, including service provision and event sponsorship.

Table 1 Buriram sports facilities influencing tourism and economic growth

Aspect	Chang Arena	Chang International Circuit	Buriram Marathon
Amenities	FIFA, AFC certified; comprehensive facilities including locker rooms, first aid, restrooms, and viewing zones.	FIA, FIM certified; extensive amenities like garages, grandstands, mobile toilets, and viewing zones.	Gold Marathon standards include restrooms, first aid points, and tent areas.
Sports Equipment	Competition and training gear with detailed usage information for participants, judges, and spectators.	Safety and competition equipment with dedicated usage information.	Competition gear, digital timing systems, and usage info for participants.
Sports Personnel	Trained specialists including doctors and physical therapists, multilingual staff, and licensed judges.	Trained marshals, inspectors, multilingual staff, and regular safety training.	Trained judges, medical staff, pacemakers, and host-trained locals.
Attractions	High-quality venue attracting competitors, events on weekends, and community involvement.	Prominent competitions with a high-standard track, weekend events, and scenic routes.	Scenic race routes connected to local attractions, designed to attract tourists, and weekend events.
Accommodation	Secure accommodation with waiting areas, restrooms, backup power, and radio communication.	Comprehensive safety systems, a medical center, public telephones, waiting areas, and restrooms.	Tent areas for participants, safety systems, restrooms, and backup power.

Table 2 Stakeholder perspectives on sports facilities as resources in Buriram

Stakeholder	Perspective	Details	Sample Quotes
Owners and Managers of Sports Tourism Attractions	Certification & Standards	Prioritize achieving and maintaining global certifications and providing world-class amenities for diverse events.	“Certified by FIFA, AFC, AFF. Prepared with locker rooms, first aid, restrooms.” “FIA Grade 1, FIM Grade A. Comprehensive amenities including garages, grandstand.”
Government Officials	Tourism Promotion & Infrastructure Development	View facilities as key tourism drivers, support infrastructure, enforce regulations, promote sustainability.	“Support the development of transportation, accommodation, and amenities.” “Ensure compliance with health measures and safety regulations.”
Private Sector Representatives	Economic Opportunities & Service Provision	See facilities as catalysts for economic growth, provide services, sponsor events, engage in promotion.	“Sports facilities are drivers of economic growth through increased tourism.” “Investing in and sponsoring sports events provides visibility.”

Integration and Discussion: The integration of Table 1 and 2 shows how Buriram's globally certified sports facilities and well-trained staff contribute to sustainable sport tourism. High tourist satisfaction with amenities and event organization highlights the importance of quality infrastructure for economic growth. Stakeholders emphasized these facilities' role in attracting international events and driving local development. By focusing on infrastructure improvements, community involvement, and sustainability standards, Buriram demonstrates how sports facilities can promote both tourism and long-term environmental and social sustainability. These findings advance the understanding of sustainable sport tourism management.

Tourist Satisfaction with Public Service Management

Table 3 presents tourist satisfaction with public services in Buriram's sustainable sports tourism, including values for mean (\bar{X}), Standard Deviation (SD), and the level of satisfaction across key areas such as equity, timeliness, sufficiency, continuity, and progressiveness.

Table 3 reveals high tourist satisfaction with Buriram's public services in sustainable sports tourism. Equity scored a mean of 4.10 (SD 0.709), indicating strong fairness in service provision. Timeliness had a mean of 4.06 (SD 0.743), showing that services are delivered promptly. Sufficiency, though slightly lower, scored 3.98

(SD 0.800), reflecting generally adequate but improvable service availability. Continuity and progressiveness both scored 4.12 (SD 0.784 and 0.805, respectively), demonstrating consistent and innovative service delivery. Overall, the high scores reflect strong tourist satisfaction with key aspects of public services.

In terms of sustainability, these results emphasize the importance of reliable and innovative services, which are critical to supporting long-term sustainable tourism. The high satisfaction in areas like equity and continuity shows that Buriram's public services contribute to both a positive tourist experience and the sustainability of sport tourism. This consistency in service quality fosters repeat visits and aligns with SDGs by promoting fairness, innovation, and the responsible use of resources, advancing the field of sustainable sport tourism.

Influence of Demographic Factors on Satisfaction

More than half of the sport tourism sample group were female, totaling 213 people, accounting for 55.50 percent, while 171 were male, accounting for 44.50 percent. The majority were between 20–29 years old, totaling 179 people (46.60%), followed by those aged 30–39, totaling 74 people (19.30%). Most participants had a bachelor's degree, with 225 people (58.6%), followed by those with a diploma or equivalent (vocational certificate), totaling 74 people (19.30%). The most common occupation was private company employees, totaling 112 people (29.20%), followed by government officials or state employees, totaling 96 people (25.00%). In terms of income, 137 people (35.70%) had an average monthly income of 10,001–20,000 baht, followed by 101 people (26.30%) with an average monthly income of 20,001–30,000 baht. Tables 4 and 5 analyze how demographic factors like gender, age, education, occupation, and income influence tourist satisfaction with public services in Buriram's sustainable sports tourism.

Table 3 Overall satisfaction with public services for sustainable sports tourism

Service Item	\bar{X}	SD	Level of Satisfaction
Equitable	4.10	0.709	Extremely satisfied
Timely	4.06	0.743	Extremely satisfied
Ample	3.98	0.800	Extremely satisfied
Continuous	4.12	0.784	Extremely satisfied
Progressive	4.12	0.805	Extremely satisfied
Overall	4.07	0.768	Extremely satisfied

Table 4 Public service evaluation: Tourist satisfaction (gender)

Service Item	Male ($N = 171$)		Female ($N = 213$)		t	p values
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD		
1. Equitable	4.134	0.502	4.094	0.458	0.809	.419
2. Timely	4.083	0.581	4.056	0.540	0.478	.633
3. Ample	4.011	0.526	3.965	0.552	0.833	.405
4. Continuous	4.160	0.646	4.097	0.568	0.992	.322
5. Progressive	4.153	0.649	4.107	0.633	0.695	.488
Overall	4.108	0.580	4.063	0.550	0.761	.453

Table 5 Public service evaluation: Tourist satisfaction (age, education, occupation, income)

Personal factors	Tourist satisfaction levels				
	Equitable service	Timely service	Ample service	Continuous service	Progressive service
Age	.052	.133	.555	.409	.018**
Education Level	.000**	.085	.816	.323	.685
Occupation	.363	.439	.387	.294	.183
Income	.083	.149	.021**	.022**	.130

Note: ** Pearson Chi-Square Asymp.

$p < .05$, two-tailed.

The p values in Table 4 indicate that both male and female tourists have similar levels of satisfaction with public services, showing no statistically significant differences. However, the gender-based analysis reveals subtle differences in service expectations. For example, male tourists might prioritize timely services more, while female tourists may place more emphasis on equitable and accessible services. These nuanced preferences, though not statistically significant, can guide targeted service improvements, such as enhancing communication efficiency for male tourists or ensuring service fairness for female tourists, ultimately improving overall satisfaction.

Table 5 highlights the impact of demographic factors on tourist satisfaction with public services. Age significantly affects satisfaction with progressive services ($p = .018$), while education influences satisfaction with equitable services ($p = .000$). Income plays a role, with higher-income groups expressing greater satisfaction with ample services ($p = .021$) and continuous services ($p = .022$). Qualitative insights from interviews suggest that younger tourists prefer innovative and technology-enhanced services, while higher-income tourists expect comprehensive and reliable amenities. Tourists with higher education levels emphasize the need for fairness and transparency in service provision. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) confirmed that the measured items align well with factors influencing satisfaction, with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) score of 0.941 and a statistically significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 9,151.249, p < .05$).

The integration of Tables 4 and 5 shows that gender has minimal influence on satisfaction, while age, education, and income have notable effects. Qualitative insights further highlight demographic-specific preferences, such as younger tourists' desire for innovative services and higher-educated tourists' focus on equity. These findings align with sustainable tourism concepts, as tailoring services to meet diverse needs enhances inclusivity and satisfaction. By offering progressive services for younger tourists and equitable services for

higher-educated individuals, Buriram promotes social equity and supports long-term tourism sustainability. This approach contributes to the field of sustainable sport tourism by ensuring that services address the varied expectations of tourists while fostering economic growth and responsible resource management.

Discussion

The findings emphasize the critical role of sports facilities and public services in Buriram's sustainable sports tourism. High tourist satisfaction was reported for facilities like Chang Arena, Chang International Circuit, and Buriram Marathon, which meet global standards and boost economic growth through international events. Tourists valued the quality of amenities, safety, and professional staffing, highlighting the importance of strong infrastructure in attracting and retaining visitors. Public services were also rated highly in terms of equity, timeliness, and innovation, though improvements are needed in service availability. Personal factors such as age, education, and income influenced satisfaction, with younger tourists seeking modern amenities and higher-income tourists expecting comprehensive services. These findings show how well-managed facilities and services enhance the visitor experience, drive local economic growth, and align with SDGs by promoting fairness, innovation, and responsible resource management. Figure 2 presents the research objectives and key findings.

Based on the research findings, the recommendations in Table 6 are designed to address key service gaps identified in Buriram's sports tourism. Findings showed that while tourists were generally satisfied with facilities and public services, improvements are needed in areas such as equity, innovation, and infrastructure reliability. Younger tourists preferred modern, tech-driven amenities, and higher-income tourists expected comprehensive and high-quality services. Public service gaps were also noted in equity and service availability, with room for improvement in service innovation and environmental sustainability.

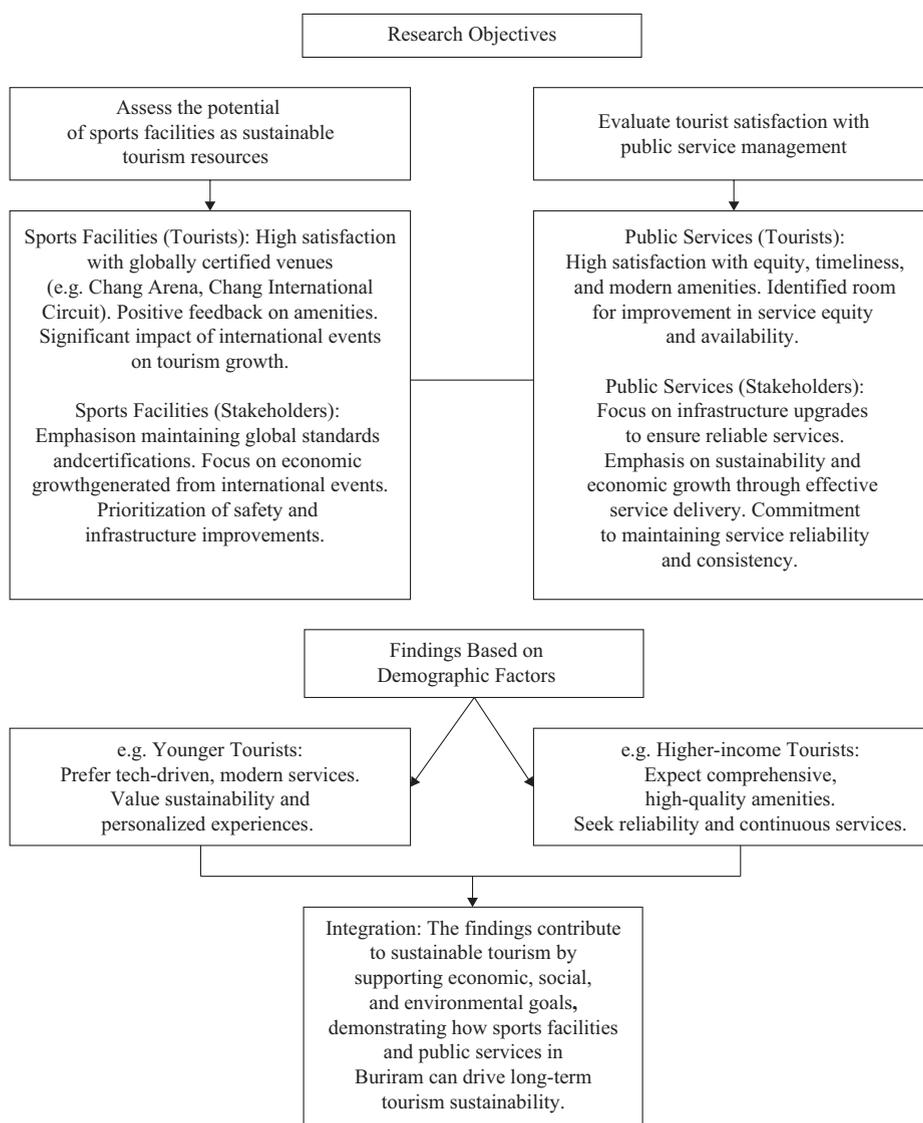


Figure 2 Stating the objectives and key findings diagram

Table 6 Recommendations for enhancing public services in Buriram’s Sports Tourism Aligned with SDGs

Service area	Key recommendations	Target demographic	Target SDGs
Progressive Services	Integrate modern technology and amenities	Younger tourists	SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
Equitable Services	Ensure accessible and fair services	Higher education level tourists	SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
Ample Services	Increase the variety of equipment and accommodations	Higher-income tourists	SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
Continuous Services	Maintain high service standards	Higher-income tourists	SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
Sustainable Practices	Implement eco-friendly services	Tourists from diverse occupational backgrounds	SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production SDG 13: Climate Action
Community Engagement	Involve locals in tourism initiatives		SDG 1: No Poverty SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

In response, Table 6 provides targeted recommendations aligned with the SDGs. For example, Progressive Services (SDG 9) suggest integrating real-time technology to attract younger, tech-savvy tourists. Equitable Services (SDG 10) focus on ensuring fair access through multilingual services and enhanced facilities for differently abled tourists. Ample Services (SDG 8) emphasize expanding accommodations and sports equipment to support economic growth. Continuous Services (SDG 11) aim to ensure reliable infrastructure during events, while Sustainable Practices (SDGs 12 & 13) advocate for eco-friendly initiatives, reducing environmental impact. Lastly, Community Engagement (SDGs 1 & 11) encourages local involvement in tourism to create jobs and reduce poverty.

Conclusions

This study highlights the importance of sports facilities and public services in promoting sustainable sports tourism in Buriram, with high tourist satisfaction in areas such as timeliness and modern amenities, though improvements in equity and service availability are needed. Demographic factors, including age and income, influenced tourist preferences, with younger visitors favoring tech-driven services and higher-income tourists expecting more comprehensive offerings. Theoretically, the study connects infrastructure and public services to sustainability goals, while academically, it contributes to sports tourism literature by incorporating public service management. Practically, it provides insights for policymakers to prioritize service upgrades, innovation, and equity, in line with the SDGs. Limitations include the impact of the COVID-19 situation and the focus on a single location, suggesting future research should explore other destinations and cross-cultural differences to enhance understanding of sustainable sports tourism strategies.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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