

Urban Political Economies of Sustainable Tourism: Comparing Jakarta and Seoul

Budiman Mahmud Musthofa¹, Diaz Pranita²,
Serge Silatsa Nanda^{3*}, and Chulmo Koo⁴

^{1,2}Tourism Business Management Program, Vocational Education Program, Universitas Indonesia,
Depok, Indonesia 16424

³Political Science Program, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia,
Depok, Indonesia 16416

⁴College of Hotel & Tourism Management, Kyung Hee University, Seoul, Republic of Korea 02447

¹b.mahmud@ui.ac.id, ²d.pranita@ui.ac.id,
^{3*}nanda.serge@uiii.ac.id, ⁴helmetgu@khu.ac.kr

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Abstract

Although urban tourism policies have embraced sustainability, most frameworks often overlook the political-economic arrangements that determine the governance of sustainability and its implementations. This is most pronounced in Asian cities, given the highly diversified institutional pathways and state-market relationships. To address this gap, this study explored how the implementation of sustainable urban tourism in Jakarta and Seoul is affected by specific configurations of capitalism. Utilizing the concepts of variegated capitalism and developmental environmentalism, the study explained how the two megacities with contrasting political economies of sustainable tourism address the environmental, social, and governance aspects of sustainable tourism. Based on qualitative interviews, policy documents, and national statistics, the study finds that Jakarta is predominantly a hybrid neoliberal setting with fragmented regulation, CSR-oriented environmentalism, and donor-recipient community partnerships. Conversely, Seoul adheres to a developmental state model that incorporates sustainability into the core of culture and smart urbanism policies as a part of its long-term planning. The differences in the implementation of the four pillars of sustainable tourism emphasize the limited applicability of universal or prescriptive governance models. The study positions sustainable tourism within the institutional pluralism of capitalism and, in doing so, advances the political economy of urban sustainability for metropolitan policymakers to balance economic growth, social equity, and ecological sustainability.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, urban governance, variegated capitalism, developmental environmentalism

Introduction

As the world is shifting into sustainable development, the phenomenon of sustainable tourism is becoming a focal point of urban development, facilitating the integration of economic growth, environmental preservation, and sociocultural equity (Krabokoukis & Polyzos, 2023; Wang & Cheablam, 2025). Given that the world's urban settlements are the focal points of human activities, they experience extreme ecological stress, and the need for sustainable tourism is imperative. Planning such tourism fulfills the SDG 8 and 12 subset indicators, as indicated by Miller & Torres-Delgado (2023). Cities in the Global South, particularly Jakarta (Indonesia) and Seoul (South Korea), are indicative of the socio-environmental issues of rapid urbanization. These are the frontline cities in the battle for sustainable tourism and the demonstration of urban resilience.

While sustainability is widely endorsed in global tourism discourse, scholars have increasingly critiqued the technocratic and managerialist framing of sustainable tourism, which often obscures the political and institutional structures that shape outcomes (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Fletcher et al., 2019). Research indicates the importance of political economy in providing a powerful framework for the analysis of sustainable tourism development by investigating the balance of economic systems, governance, and societal power dynamics over policy and practice (Manioudis & Meramveliotakis, 2022; Saayman & Li, 2023). There is thus a growing call for a political economy perspective that captures the tourism sector as situated within broader systems of governance, market regulation, and development planning (Bianchi, 2018; Mosedale, 2016). This perspective captures how the capacity of the state, capitalist dynamics, and historical development of institutions delimits the governance of sustainability in cities.

Although sustainable tourism has become a central policy concern in many Asian cities, existing scholarship pays limited attention to how different political-economic configurations shape sustainability outcomes in practice. Most studies assess tourism performance, destination branding, or stakeholder participation (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018), but pay limited attention to the institutional logics through which environmental, social, and governance outcomes are produced. Studies of urban sustainability similarly highlight policy initiatives, the strong role of the state, and long-term infrastructural planning without interrogating how variations in state capacity and market coordination pathways generate divergent policy trajectories (Acuto & Rayner, 2016; Lowe et al., 2022). This creates a conceptual and empirical gap in understanding why cities with comparable sustainability ambitions diverge in practice. Also, this creates a gap in understanding why cities with tourism sustainability ambitions diverge in implementation.

This study attempts to fill that gap by looking at sustainable tourism practices in relation to two globalizing cities with different institutional trajectories: Jakarta, Indonesia's capital,

and Seoul, South Korea's capital. They are both major national and regional tourism hubs and are experiencing rapid urbanization and shifts in tourist demographics, and are undergoing post-pandemic recovery (Akbar et al., 2024; Martinez & Masron, 2020; Yoo et al., 2024). However, they differ greatly in terms of governance and the political economy of development.

Such differences should not be considered as a binary model. Rather, they represent a constellation of political economies that shape the governance of sustainability on the environmental, economic, social, and governance frameworks of the polity. Jakarta is an example of a hybrid neoliberal regime characterized by corporate social responsibility (CSR) environmentalism, dual economies, fragmented social inclusion, and multi-actor governance with weak enforcement (Kidokoro et al., 2022; Yang, 2024). Conversely, Seoul demonstrates synergistic coordinated development with state hierarchical ecological governance, local economic growth, cultural inclusion, collaboration, and cohesive bureaucratic structures aimed at attaining sustainability (Lee & Woo, 2020; Lee et al., 2025). By such systematic comparisons of arrangements, the study moves beyond articulating distinctions and explores the impact of different forms of capitalism on the rapidity with which sustainability becomes embedded in the policy and practice of a given society. Such an approach situates the governance of sustainable tourism not as a policy of a homogeneous unit, but as the product shaped by the capitalism of in given complexity.

Drawing on the contrasts provided by the political economies of Jakarta and Seoul, the study explains the institutional architecture of sustainable tourism governance. These different trajectories provide the basis for relational analysis of the interconnection between state, policy and regulatory frameworks, and market-society arrangements as they demonstrate distinct integrations of the principles of sustainability into legislation and policy-making. By comparing these cases, the research helps to theorize how varieties of capitalism produce different modalities of urban sustainability governance. Thus, demonstrating the various institutions and historical contexts that the global frameworks governing sustainable tourism and its governance in terms of urban form have poorly considered.

This study seeks to examine how political-economic systems influence governance and urban tourism sustainability in Jakarta and Seoul. More specifically, the study asks, how do the environmental, economic, social, and governance factors of sustainable tourism differ in the two cities? In what ways do the institutional frameworks, relations between state and market, and the regulatory mechanisms ascribe to distinct forms of capitalism in tourism sustainability? To answer these questions, the study applies the concepts of variegated capitalism (Brenner et al., 2010; Peck & Theodore, 2007), as well as the nascent theory of developmental environmentalism (Thurbon et al., 2023). Variegated capitalism responds to the global neoliberal convergence theory by providing evidence of institutional diversity, spatial differentiation, and path dependence as forms of governance in capitalism. It offers a comparative framework for studying the various forms of capitalism and their mediating relations with sustainability in different contexts. Developmental environmentalism, within the East Asian political economy discourse, explains how some states pursue ecological goals through industrial and urban policies, providing alternatives to market-driven or donor-

sponsored sustainability models. Methodologically, the study draws on qualitative interviews and document analysis within a structured comparative framework.

Variegated Capitalism and Developmental Environmentalism

This research study is guided by a theoretical framework rooted in the political economy literature on the spatial and institutional diversity of capitalism. Using the concept of variegated capitalism (Brenner et al., 2010), the study analyzes Jakarta and Seoul as products of distinct but interconnected capitalism trajectories shaped by uneven neoliberalization and differentiated state capacities. To capture the specificity of East Asian sustainability governance, the framework incorporates developmental environmentalism (Thurbon et al., 2023), which theorizes the integration of environmental concerns within the structure of developmental-state institutions. Working within these two perspectives enables a comparative understanding of how variations in capitalism shaped the governance of tourism and urban policy in response to the global sustainable development agenda.

As cities deal with the consequences of climate change, rising inequalities, volatile global tourism, and global pandemics, the positive impacts of sustainable tourism on urban development have come into focus. Future positive global tourism needs to be sustainable. It is defined as tourism that satisfies the wants of current visitors and the needs of the host region while improving future opportunities. Sustainable tourism has four key dimensions: environmental stewardship, economic resilience, social and cultural integrity, and institutional governance (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2023; Lozano-Oyola et al., 2012; Miller & Torres-Delgado, 2023; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). While these dimensions are accepted in global policy rhetoric, their implementation is greatly influenced by the political economy, the state's capacity, and historical institutional path dependencies. We argue that urban sustainable tourism governance needs to transcend the technocratic or managerialist framework and move towards a political economic approach, adopting the perspectives of variegated capitalism and developmental environmentalism.

The focus of this analysis is Jakarta and Seoul through the lens of variegated capitalism and developmental environmentalism, with the understanding that capitalism can take different forms through different institutional arrangements and does not have to take a singularly neoliberal approach. Rather than assume there are only two possibilities of case determination, the study treats cases as manifestations of different forms of capitalist logic across the four interconnected dimensions of sustainability: environmental, economic, social, and governance. Each of these dimensions indicates the different configurations of state's capacity, market presence, and social action that determine sustainability outcomes. It is this multidimensional nature of the analysis that helps in utilizing the concept of variegation. Neoliberal flexibility, eco-capitalism, participatory inclusion, and hybrid governance of Jakarta stand in contrast to developmental coordination, endogenous innovation, institutionalized inclusion, and bureaucratic coherence of Seoul. This helps in demonstrating the different political economies that shape the governance of various sustainability dimensions.

The unsustainable model of sustainable tourism remains a contested political space, marked by institutional diversity and socio-economic inequities. While the four pillars suggested by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council GSTC and other global organizations are useful, they could lead to the sociological oversimplification of the structural conditions that enable or constrain the practice of sustainability (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011). Taking the environmental pillar as an example, the waste minimization, biodiversity conservation, and green infrastructure policies cannot be evaluated independently of the financial streams, legal frameworks, and enforcement capacities of the local states. The same goes for economic sustainability, which is often framed in the context of employment and revenue generation; it brings to the surface issues such as who tourism serves, the distribution of monetary benefits, and types of tourism economies highlighted.

The political economy of tourism is most pronounced in cities where there is competition for land, infrastructure, tourism identity, and global capital framework tourism flows within the global economy's infrastructure. More recent works have focused on the idea of variegated capitalism to describe the uneven development of a given system of capitalism within a particular region and during a specific period (Peck & Theodore, 2007; Peck & Tickell, 2002). This approach challenges the convergence theory, which assumes that neoliberalism operates in a homogenizing manner. It instead argues that such capitalist restructuring gives rise to an institutionally embedded diversity, described as "path-dependent, territorially specific, and relationally constituted" diversity in governance and forms of capitalist accumulation. In this case, Jakarta and Seoul do not serve as deviant examples of a so-called sustainable tourism model; rather, they illustrate different capitalistic paradigms that, throughout time, have fundamentally altered the notion of sustainability in each place.

Jakarta reflects a hybrid neoliberal model with dispersed regulation, reliance on external funding, and privatized governance. Rather than state-led planning, environmental sustainability is regulated through CSR initiatives, public-private partnerships, informal community interventions, and voluntary group planning. Achieving economic sustainability occurs through a dual system: first, grassroots tourism initiatives, informal economic activities, and cultural heritage sites; and second, large-scale commercial contracts masked by environmental, social, and governance (ESG) claims, often lacking robust accountability. Initiatives pertaining to social sustainability are developed by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and heritage bodies with little institutional collaboration. Governance features a lack of uniform regulatory compliance, poor oversight, and increased fragmentation of control that is dominant in former colonial regions and is characteristic of neoliberal decentered governance (Banerjee, 2003; Büscher & Fletcher, 2015).

Seoul embodies the principles of developmental environmentalism (Thurbon et al., 2023), as influenced by East Asia's developmental state, which incorporates environmental considerations into economic planning. Here, urban planning integrates the construction of smart cities, green street infrastructure, and cultural restoration projects to support sustainable tourism. The state continues to govern tourism development by siloing and coordinating sustainability across indicators, instruments, and agency sectors. Endogenous innovation provides economic sustainability through small businesses and new digital

cultural tourism and cultural industry economic sectors. Social sustainability is attained by the development of human capital, urban social inclusion, and the official recognition of cultural heritage. The system embodies a high bureaucratic system coherence and technocratic, centralized but consultative planning (Evans & Karvonen, 2014). Compared to each other, Jakarta and Seoul exemplify the frameworks in showing the multiplicity of capitalist diversity and urban sustainability.

The perspective of variegated capitalism is unique in that it does not oversimplify economic differences to simple dichotomies. It places these differences in the relational geographies of policy diffusion, institutional imitation, and intra-urban rivalry (Ward & McCann, 2011). Rather, it situates them within relational geographies of policy diffusion, institutional imitation, and intra-urban rivalry. Neither Jakarta nor Seoul is an insulated model; instead, they are nodes within a global network of tourism knowledge exchange and regulatory diffusion. Domestic political interests, bureaucratic traditions, and even the strategic agency of local actors shape the implementation of global cross-sustainability indicators. Standards of the environment and laws of heritage protection are also internationally negotiated and locally prioritized.

The focus on sustainable tourism from this perspective highlights the various levels of sustainable governance. Unlike the vast literature on national tourism strategies, governance at the city level is now the center of policy contestation and implementation. Urban regimes, as described by Mossberger and Stoker (2001), “a coalition of public, private, and civil society actors which governs a city,” not only allocate of governance resources but also frame the problems and successes of governance. Unlike Jakarta, which has ad hoc and project-based urban regimes, Seoul has institutionalized regimes with strong metropolitan and developmental national planning links.

An integration of the frameworks of variegated capitalism and developmental environmentalism enables a comprehensive investigation of urban tourism governance. Such integration enables us to move beyond the ‘how’ of the policy and performance metrics and ask the more critical questions: which sustainability goals are articulated? Who defines them? What institutional architecture is used to achieve them? What forms of capital, whether economic, cultural, or administrative, shape the trajectories of tourism development? What political economies are present? Moreover, how do they balance the trade-offs of economic growth, ecological sustainability, and social integration?

Jakarta and Seoul serve as analytically rich endpoints for this type of analysis. In this case, Jakarta is an example of an exposed, donor-dependent, hybrid neoliberal model, while Seoul exemplifies an integrated, technocratic, and state-led model. The two together represent the type of spatial and institutional heterogeneity the variegated capitalism framework seeks to define. This framework views the pillars of sustainability not as stand-alone outcomes to be achieved, but as outcomes of the different forms of capitalism that can be articulated and sustained.

The analytical framework employs these theoretical insights through four interlinked dimensions: environment, economy, society, and governance. Each of these dimensions

exemplifies the specific ways in which the different capitalisms determine the attainment of sustainability through different configurations of market-state relations. Table 1 summarizes the analytical dimensions of variegated capitalism and the developmental environmentalism that structure the comparative analysis of sustainable tourism governance in Jakarta and Seoul, and which analysis sections further this empirical analysis.

Table 1. Comparative Analytical Framework for Sustainable Urban Tourism in Jakarta and Seoul

Dimension	Jakarta	Seoul	Political Economy Framing
Environment	CSR-driven, fragmented, community-led conservation	Infrastructure-integrated, state-led ecological planning	Neoliberal flexibility vs. developmental state
Economy	Dual model: grassroots + corporate ESG branding	Endogenous development through small-scale enterprises	Eco-capitalism vs. coordinated capitalism
Social	Community engagement, cultural preservation, informal sector	Embedded cultural economy, smart tourism, human capital	Participatory vs. institutionalized inclusion
Governance	Formal reporting, weak enforcement, NGO-driven partnerships	Implicit regulation via smart urbanism and centralized planning	Hybrid governance vs. bureaucratic coherence

Furthermore, Table 1 illustrates that the comparative synthesis political economy of sustainable tourism encompasses numerous trajectories instead of one. Jakarta's hybrid neoliberalism emphasizes flexibility, pluralism, and external inducements. Conversely, Seoul's developmental environmentalism incorporates sustainability into the guided planning of the state and endogenous innovation. Together, these configurations illustrate the variegated character of capitalism in shaping urban sustainability outcomes.

Research Method

This study investigates how distinct political-economic systems influence the governance and outcomes of sustainable urban tourism in Jakarta and Seoul. The research engages comparative qualitative case study methodology, collecting and analyzing documentary, statistical, and interview data within a pre-established comparative framework.

This study utilizes a structured comparative design, which focuses on analytical advantages of cross-case variation rather than universal causal mechanisms (Anckar, 2008; Mello, 2021). Both cities have different political-economic systems, administrative capacities, and development trajectories, though both face challenges in integrating sustainability into their urban tourism policy. Hence, the variation in governance and logic regarding sustainability across the institutional constellations of Jakarta and Seoul provides analytical space to capture the scope of differences in hybridity and Seoul's developmental environmentalism. This is the approach taken in the recent comparative political economy

and urban studies, which attempt to derive analytical benefits from variation (Kumar et al., 2024; Murakami, 2025). Therefore, this study is designed not to seek universal causal explanations but to examine how different capitalist orders influence sustainability trajectories across urban contexts.

This study recognizes that the two cities analyzed vary widely in their socio-economic systems, in their governance systems, and in their patterns of development (Joo, 2023; Martinez & Masron, 2020). Referred to here, then, is not an attempt at symmetrical comparison of performance, but an effort at analyzing the role of institutional arrangements and the systems of their minimal intervention in the economic processes, of the essences of market freedoms, and on the processes of achieving sustainability. Hence, the distinctions in the two cases are not treated as divergences but rather as the presence of development regimes and neoliberal governance systems that fundamentally determine the configurations of tourism governance in relation to the state, market, and society (Brenner et al., 2010; Thurbon et al., 2023).

The analysis adopts a political-economic perspective, interpreting the four pillars of sustainable tourism—environmental, economic, social, and governance. These dimensions ensure comparability across cases while situating each within its historical and institutional context. Across the four dimensions, Table 2 presents indicators that connect sustainability practices to institutional structures.

Table 2. Operationalization of Analytical Dimensions

Dimension	Political-Economic Interpretation	Key Indicators
Environmental	How ecological management is structured within different capitalist logics	Waste management, energy transition, water conservation, biodiversity protection
Economic	How tourism markets and investments reflect state-market coordination	Enterprise type, fiscal incentives, innovation, employment generation
Social	How inclusivity, equity, and cultural reproduction are embedded in governance	Community participation, cultural heritage preservation, accessibility, safety
Governance	How regulation, partnerships, and accountability are institutionalized	Policy integration, regulatory instruments, civil society engagement, transparency mechanisms

Data is collected by triangulating diverse qualitative sources, which include (a) national and local policies; (b) statistical information provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025) for Indonesia and the Seoul metropolitan government; and (c) interviews with key informants and experts in a less-formalized manner.

In-depth interviews are conducted with six purposively selected respondents with expertise in tourism, governance, and sustainability. A total of six interviews are conducted, three in Jakarta and three in Korea. In Jakarta, respondents include two policy-making officials from the Jakarta regional government and one director of a multinational tourism company

headquartered in Jakarta. In Seoul, two respondents are master's students in Korea and are also working in the communications and digitalization sectors. Then, one respondent is a Korean professor who is an expert in tourism, global cities, and digitalization. Each interview lasts approximately 90 minutes and is conducted in English and Bahasa Indonesia, with translation assistance where necessary.

Interview transcripts are analyzed together with documents and reports, after translation when required. Thematic coding drawing is applied from both inductive and deductive approaches (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2015; Proudfoot, 2016). The two guiding theoretical frameworks and the four sustainability pillars are applied to develop the preliminary set of deductive codes. Initial codes encompassed themes such as *state capacity*, *market coordination*, *community participation*, *policy integration*, and environmental management.

Subsequently, through repeated readings and a constant flux of data, inductive codes begin to take shape to spot recurring patterns and designs in sustainable tourism governance (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Fife & Gossner, 2024). Emerging codes like *fragmented CSR-driven programs*, *state-led ecological planning*, *informal participation*, and *coordinated policy coherence* are recursively distilled into the interpretive concepts list in Table 1. Categories such as *neoliberal flexibility* or *bureaucratic coherence*, therefore, represent interpretive synthesis in which empirical patterns are anchored but, to some extent, abstracted away through theories. Careful coding is done manually to facilitate deep interaction with the data, and categories are iteratively adjusted through a continuous process of revision and refinement. This is done in accordance with Fuchs's (2023) recommendations for qualitative tourism research. The analysis is strengthened through triangulation across several data sources (interviews, policy documents, and statistical data), thereby demonstrating consistency and convergence of evidence (Morgan, 2024; Noble & Heale, 2019).

Syntheses are carried out after coding, which comprises matrix-based comparative analyses (Naeem et al., 2023; Reading & Merrill, 2018), where emerging topics are carefully fitted into the four analytical quadrants (environmental, economic, social, and governance) to pinpoint both similarities and differences across the cases. This meticulous cross-case synthesis permitted the study to establish connections between the political-economic structures and the sustainability results for each city. Thus, enabling the further development of the underlying analytical framework to explain the impact of institutional variety on the governance of urban tourism. These analytical steps are summarized in Figure 1.

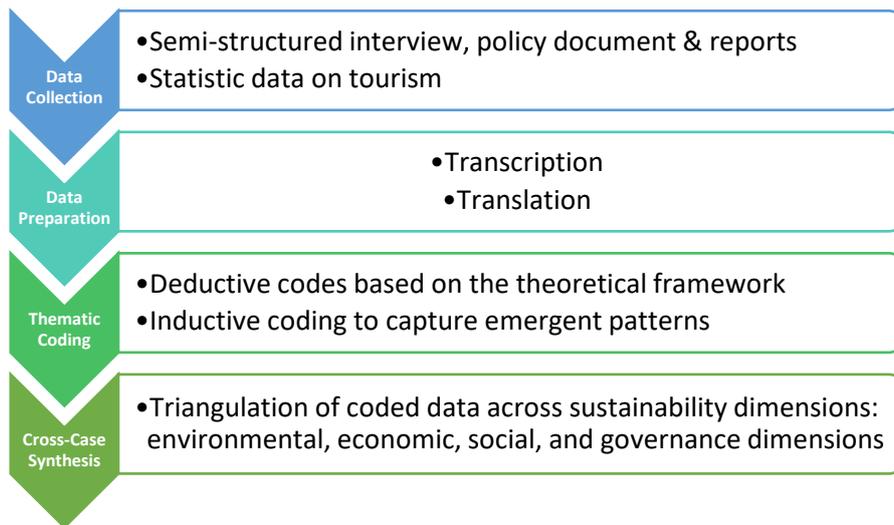


Figure 1. Summary of data collection and analysis process

Contextual Overview: Urban Tourism in Jakarta and Seoul

Over the past decade, domestic demand, international arrivals, and the COVID-19 pandemic have all impacted and shaped tourism in both Jakarta and Seoul. The construction of tourism infrastructure, the backbone to each city, further enhances the focus of international visitors on Jakarta and Seoul. This section seeks to provide insight into comparative international tourism with official data to support continuous sustainable development in tourism.

Tourism in Jakarta is predominantly regional, focusing on domestic travelers. As we retrieved from the Central Bureau of Statistics of Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), 2025), all administrative regencies of Jakarta witnessed an abrupt decrease in the number of tourists in 2020, which was followed by steady recovery from 2021 onward (Figure 2). As of 2024, the structure of visitation surpassed pre-pandemic levels. Jakarta Barat continued to dominate the city in tourist volume, surpassing 18 million visits in 2023 and maintaining similar numbers in 2024. Jakarta Timur was a close second, increasing from 14 million visitors in 2019 to 17 million in 2023. These regions seem to have better infrastructure, appeal, and proximity to important infrastructure and attractions. Central Jakarta and Kepulauan Seribu remained the least visited regions, the latter consistently attracting under a million visitors annually, despite a strong potential for ecotourism. This points to the need for specific development plans aimed at augmenting the commercial and tourism activity and diversifying the commercial centers' tourism benefits.

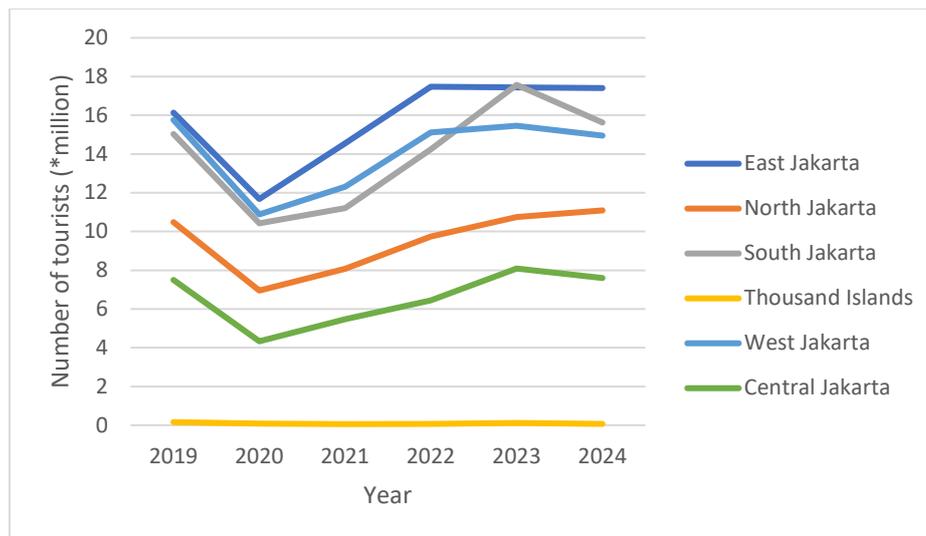


Figure 2. Number of Tourists by Regency in Jakarta (2019-2024)

Source: BPS's (2025) data

Before 2020, international tourism to Jakarta was increasing, though it remained below the national average. Foreign visits to the city grew steadily from 2 million in 2010 to 3.5 million in 2019. Then, in 2020, foreign visits to the city dropped to under 1 million, recovering slowly to just over 1 million in 2022. In contrast, total foreign arrivals to Indonesia reached almost 16 million in 2019, only to plummet during the pandemic. Bali and Yogyakarta dominate in comparative international tourism, while the rest, particularly Jakarta, lag. This over-reliance on domestic travel and tourism poses other challenges, enlarging the international tourism visibility gap. To promote equity in tourism and boost Jakarta's international tourism competitiveness and appeal, integrated infrastructure and tourism management systems for urban and rural areas are important to the tourism sector (BPS, 2025).

The most visited tourist sites in Jakarta illustrate this domestic tourist focus (Figure 3). Taman Impian Jaya Ancol (Ancol Dreamland) is again the most visited site in 2022, receiving more than 13 million guests, a remarkable recovery considering the steep decline in visitors in 2020, and 2021 was the poorest travel year on record; this is her second year in a row. Ragunan Zoo also retained its runner-up position with more than 6.5 million attendees, and Monas (National Monument) improved to attract over 5 million visitors in 2022. In contrast, visitors to the National Museum and Museum of History in Jakarta, culturally significant repositories of artifacts, were disgracefully low, at less than 0.5 million each. These patterns indicate a growing preference among visitors to spend their recreational time on leisure and hobby pursuits, with little or no balance with available heritage facilities.

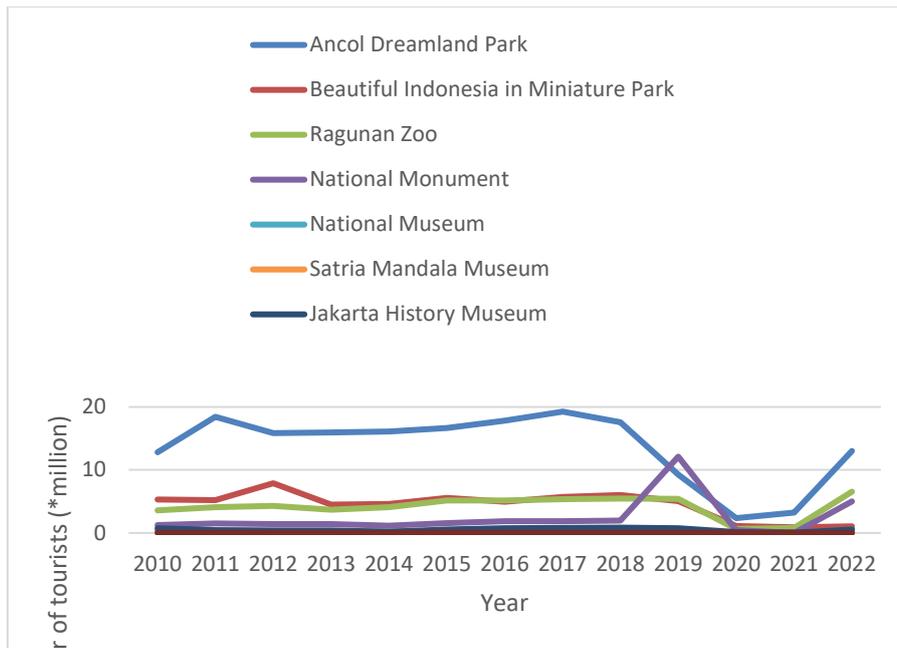


Figure 3. Top touristic attractions in Jakarta (2010-2022)

Source: BPS's (2025) data

By contrast, indicators suggest an advanced internationalized tourism economic system in Seoul. The figure from the Seoul Metropolitan Government (2025) shows a consistent upward trend in international visitors from 3.68 million in 1996 to 17.5 million in 2019. The numbers, although more severe due to the pandemic, show a rapid improvement trend post-2022, with tourism numbers in the region reaching 11 million in 2022 and continuing to increase through 2023. The top tourists still come from the same top 3: China, Japan, and the USA. Chinese Outbound Tourism (COT) also peaked in 2016, with 8 million trips. COT to Seoul has declined over the last few years amid ongoing geopolitical tensions. On the other hand, Japanese and American outbound tourists have clearly recovered to pre-pandemic levels—a considerable post-2022 inflow from Southeastern Europe.

Tourism activities in Seoul are concentrated in some specific areas (Figure 4). Jongno-gu, which has historical accessible palaces and cultural sites, has consistently been the highest-receiving tourist district, reaching a peak of 9 million in 2016 and recovering to over 8.6 million in 2023. Jung-gu also attracts a significant number of tourists through Myeongdong's shopping and entertainment centers, while Songpa-gu remains a key leisure hub with Lotte World and Olympic Park. In contrast, the more residential Nowon-gu and businesses-focused Gangnam-gu receive lower tourist numbers in the year. Recovery trends in areas like Jongno-gu and Songpa-gu demonstrate the effectiveness of integrated urban planning for Seoul in preserving heritage and leisure tourism.

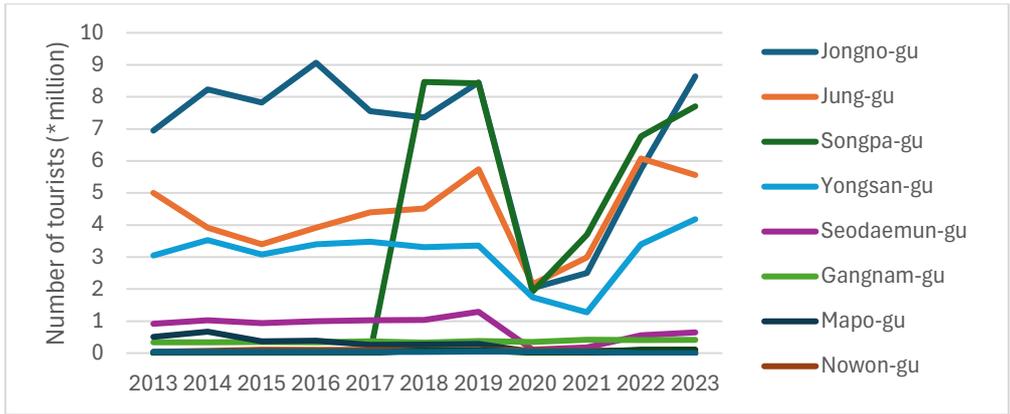


Figure 4. Number of tourists by district in Seoul (2013-2023)

Source: Data from the Seoul Metropolitan Government (2025)

Data on preference clearly shows that Seoul’s tourism economy is centered on commercial zones (Figure 5). Over 80 percent of international tourists shopped at outlets in Myeongdong and Namdaemun from 2012 to 2019. Cultural sites such as palaces and traditional markets were less popular with visitors. Recently developed entertainment hubs such as Hongdae and Gangnam continue to rise in popularity as they cater to an increasingly lifestyle-oriented and experiential tourism. Although traditional sites continue to be important for culture, the decrease in visitors reflects consumer trends in international metropolitan tourism.

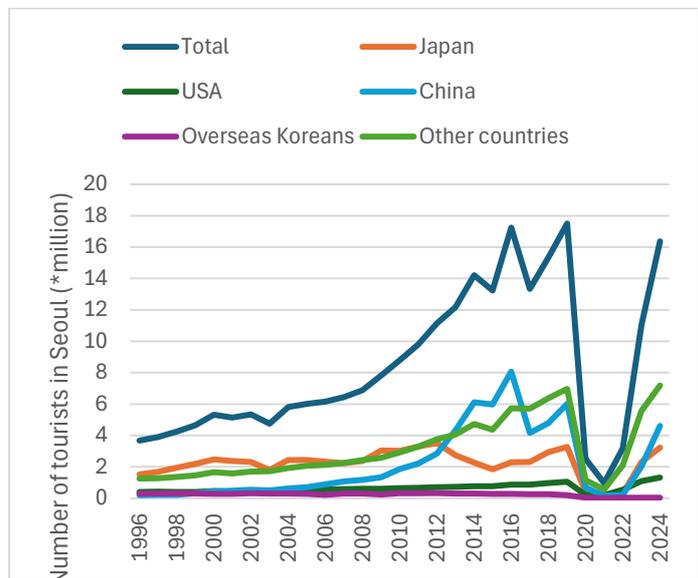


Figure 5. Origin and number of foreign tourists in Seoul (1996-2024)

Source: Data from the Seoul Metropolitan Government (2025)

Overall, Jakarta and Seoul have different features in their tourism geographies. Jakarta depends on domestic tourists and centers on recreation; on the other hand, Seoul has diverse international traffic and advanced logistical systems, acting as a global-level hub. This results in different attitudes toward the region's economics, environmental stewardship, multi-jurisdictional politics, and how the two cities manage sustainable tourism. These contextual profiles lay the empirical field for juxtaposition in the analysis section.

Analysis

Environmental Sustainability Practices in Jakarta and Seoul

Jakarta and Seoul have rapidly expanding metropolitan areas, and urban tourism infrastructure has developed in parallel, as has the focus on urban tourism from a sustainable development perspective. Analysis builds on the tourism dynamics described in the contextual overview, where the prominent attractions of Ancol Dreamland, Ragunan Zoo, Kota Tua in Jakarta, and the palace and heritage areas in Seoul determine the environmental outcomes of the cities.

Waste governance exemplifies the divergence in environmental configurations. In Jakarta, waste management in tourism areas like Ancol Dreamland and Kelapa Island reflects an environmental management model that is decentralized and largely community – private sector driven. Sustainability practices are largely framed through corporate CSR programs and donor-supported initiatives rather than citywide ecological planning. One interviewee noted that “companies usually take the lead on green events through CSR, but cross-agency coordination is still weak.” Another explained that “the city government mainly uses waste management indicators, not broader sustainability measures.” There is minimal state support, which has given rise to community-based support systems, such as waste banks. Although such bottom-up approaches enhance participation and raise awareness, they also signal the state's retreat from the long-term infrastructural responsibilities. For instance, at the Kota Tua heritage complex, waste remains mixed although waste-separation bins are provided (Figure 6), and no on-site waste management or processing program has yet been implemented.



Figure 6. Waste-Separation Bins at Kota Tua Jakarta.
Source: One respondent in Jakarta

A lack of systematic support structures further fragmented governance, which aligns with Harvey's (2005) neoliberal public sector retrenchment framework that critiqued the outsourcing of environmental governance. Although more formal interventions such as Waste Management Site-Reduce, Reuse, Recycle (TPS 3R) units and composting schemes in areas like Kota Tua, these are mostly tactically unreactive in implementing, rather than strategically assimilating. As outlined by Jessop (2005), hollowed-out state governance is said to diffuse across a multitude of unaccountable and incoherent actors.

In contrast, Seoul demonstrates a robust, state-led waste governance regime grounded in regulatory enforcement and public compliance. Legally required waste separation hijacks social habits, becoming a civic routine glucose-chained to civic infrastructure. Respondents highlighted recycling, cultural internalization of citizenship behavior, and the impact of civics. Seoul intertwines infrastructure and long-term planning sustainability. Environmental actions appear in developmental environmental states (Thurbon et al., 2023), where actions emerge through the managed intersection of policy, infrastructure, and social norms. Recycling in Seoul is culturally integrated and normatively supportive: "The act of waste separation is a cultural norm, not just a regulation." Civic environmentalism stems from strong compliance and trust by offspring in effective governance, and these attributes reflect the idea of embedded autonomy by Evans (1995), in which states are comparatively insulated from capture by organized interests but remain interdependent with social actors.

Disparities are further accentuated when we look at the governance of energy use and transition in tourism. In Jakarta, energy initiatives at tourist destinations such as Ancol Dreamland and Sebir Island exhibit a fragmented, market-driven orientation. Policy documents for initiatives such as fuel consumption (BBM) monitoring and solar energy (solar panel) facility installations are corporate ESG obligations or donor-driven projects rather than public energy transition concern. Additionally, local conservation projects, such as mangrove restoration in North Jakarta, are typically community-led and dependent on NGO or donor support, reflecting limited institutional coherence at the city level. These actions fall under performative governance: acting strategically to sustain the appearance of visibility and bounded sustainability without undermining the fossil fuel political capital energy system that structures capital energy in Indonesia. These confirm the fragmentation that sustainability reporting remains largely voluntary, and environmental indicators focus on waste management and cleanliness rather than integrated ecological planning.

These initiatives are symptomatic of neoliberal environmental governance, in which the sustainability of socio-ecological systems is contracted to private actors, and reputation rather than real deep structural changes is sought. Sector is a governance approach with limited cross-state coordination and supervision of the energy system transitions, described as elite capitalism, where coherence is absent from policy because of rent-seeking and regulatory capture (Carney & Witt, 2014; Hadiz & Robison, 2014).

Seoul's approach differs markedly. Respondents pointed to green infrastructure, such as electric buses, energy-efficient public buildings, and eco-mobility initiatives, as part of the city's green planning, integrated with the greater metropolitan planning. These are not simply

exercises in corporate social responsibility but rather are integrated into the public-private modernization of the sector within the smart city paradigm. The South Korean government is actively engaged in the formulation of energy policy and the integration of sustainability in transport, housing, and tourism at the center of policy in neoliberal governance. One participant mentioned, “Environmental planning is part of the national urban strategy; projects like the Cheonggyecheon restoration show how ecological design is built into development.” The alignment across policy levels in this instance exemplifies the conception of development environmentalism described by Thurbon et al. (2023). In this case, the state’s innovation with respect to the policy and the resultant investment with respect to the flows of the economy, both production and consumption, are within the framework of modern green.

Governance rationalities continue to diverge regarding conservation practices. In Jakarta, water-saving technologies, such as greywater recycling and seawater treatment, have been implemented in Ancol Dreamland, a site dedicated to elite tourism. These technologies are reframed as compliance rather than viewed as public goods for the entire citizenry. These scarce programs fulfill the branding objectives for the area and embody what While et al. (2004) refer to as the territorial ecological fix: solutions to ecological challenges that are advertised to attract investment but do not resolve the service inequity. The tourist enclave is still illustrative of a much deeper pattern of peripheral green capitalism; the socio-environmental inequities are so deep-seated that the public is granted concessions only when they benefit the market.

In contrast, water conservation practices in Seoul are better managed, planned, organized, and equitable. Unlike privately owned and restricted areas, automatic watering systems and water-saving facilities are installed in public areas. One commentator pointed out the climate-responsive design that reflects the successful integration of sustainable practices into everyday life in the city. These climate-responsive design choices, which reflect evidence-based design, complement public and government policies aimed at equitable access to natural resources. Yet again, the developmental state model is evident, for in the conservation of water there are no commodities for sale to high-end tourists. It is a public service that comes as a prerequisite in the everyday life of the city.

The unsustainable frameworks of conservation and biodiversity management are evident in tourism management. The Ancol marine restoration and *ex-situ* breeding programs are among Jakarta’s biodiversity interventions directed to tourism and are not part of any cohesive ecological plan. These programs are presented as conservation efforts yet only represent neoliberal attractions, epitomizing the ecological fix (Castree, 2008). The manipulation of biodiversity to bolster brand value supersedes any ecological aim and, to reiterate, supports governance and corporate brand propaganda. Aritenang (2022) considers the absence of city-wide biodiversity intervention, planning, and regulatory frameworks as indicative of a weak state—one that remains unwilling or unable to move beyond ecological stewardship of donor projects, flagship tourism, and tourism-based projects.

The management of biodiversity in Seoul relies on coordinated land-use planning and policy management. Projects like the restoration of the Cheonggyecheon Stream (Figure 7)

and protected hiking trails, for example, are deployed as ecological infrastructure in the stream's urban design. The stream's users highlighted, as public goods, the habitat monitoring and ecological education governmental initiatives, implying a more profound temporal perspective. These actions are embedded within national policies on the environment, showing how a developing state can respond to ecological crisis and govern biodiversity more directly. In Seoul, the spectacle of conservation goes beyond mere visual appeal for tourists. It is deeply incorporated into the structures of policy and the core of sustainable development.



Figure 7. Restored Cheonggyecheon Stream in Seoul

Source: Carrasco (2024)

In Jakarta, there is a tangible lack of cohesion, and the city operates under a neoliberal agenda in which the concept of sustainability is merely a form of branding and is limited to elite areas, donor incentives, and corporate logos, as suggested in the agenda of Jakarta's fragmented neoliberalism. On the contrary, Seoul illustrates a coordinated, developmentalist rationality in which environmental aims are consummated and goal-setting achieved, with fully institutionalized, strategically integrated, and equitably distributed environmental policies. These investigations emphasize the explanatory potency of variegated capitalism in the context of uneven environmental governance in urban tourism (Kim & Thurbon, 2015; Thurbon et al., 2023). As demonstrated, sustainability cannot simply be classified as a technical or managerial concern. Instead, it is the outcome of a political economy determined by institutional capability and the type of regime in place, as well as the governance between the state, capital, and society, which shapes the norms.

These observations uncover contrasting environmental logic rooted in different political-economic configurations. In Jakarta, neoliberal environmental responsibilities flow to private and community stakeholders through partnerships with CSR and NGOs, resulting in an unequal yet participatory conservation practice. Within a developmental model, Seoul exemplifies systematic, strategic, coordinated sustainability through state environmental planning, structured bureaucratic infrastructure relations, and state environmental sustainability-oriented mesoscale investment. This contrast indicates the impact of capitalist pluralism on the environmental governance of urban tourism. Despite the differences, both cities demonstrate a hybrid urban governance system. Jakarta's government sometimes

facilitates lead control of integrated development, while Seoul sometimes hybridizes public policies with market mechanisms, illustrating the fluidity and hybrid extensiveness of urban sustainability governance.

Social Sustainability of Tourism in Jakarta and Seoul

Social sustainability in tourism governance is influenced by certain political-economic configurations in which tourism governance is embedded. These cities also demonstrate the extreme opposite variations in flexible composite features of community participation, culture and heritage preservation, tourists' satisfaction, mobility, security, and civic educational uplift within the developmentalist and neoliberal capitalist frameworks. These differentiations demonstrate the phenomenon of the social sustainability of a politically constructed condition and unevenly explain the integration of sustainability in different urban tourism geographies.

In the case of Jakarta, the social foundations of sustainable tourism are community involvement and informal participation without formal organizational inclusion. Porous boundaries serve as a motivational constraint to civic engagement, purportedly because public engagement overcomes the absence of public provision. There is a consistent emphasis by respondents on the considerable involvement of peripheral local civil society and cultural associations in the maintenance of tourism initiatives, particularly in the heritage and creative sectors. One respondent explained, "Community members maintain cultural festivals and local attractions; most of these activities run without government funding." Another respondent explained, "Many informal workers and small businesses support tourism in old Jakarta, but they are rarely included in official planning meetings."

These observations correspond with findings from public activities of residents from Setu Babakan, Sebira Island, and Tidung Island, including but not limited to eco-education, heritage preservation, and small-scale entrepreneurial activities. The tourism activities and the revitalization of culture in communities such as Kota Tua and Setu Babakan, despite a high degree of volunteer contributions, suffer from weak relationships with formal governing structures. This condition reflects a participatory model of inclusion that appreciates community initiatives. However, such models become reliant on informal community structures and external facilitators to sustain the initiatives.

The representative models of communities are often romanticized in policy. Self-help models or community-driven models, as Lipton (1993) describes, operate under an anti-politics machine known as projects, which depoliticize development as blame is removed from the government and placed on the communities. This form of community-driven tourism falls within the broader scope of neoliberalism, where there is an uneven or fragmented system of governance; the focus on local self-determination and self-reliance shifts inequities within the system around financing, regulation, and infrastructure.

In contrast, Seoul's tourism expansion epitomizes a type of institutionalized inclusion, stemming from cultural engagement and human-capital formation offered by the state and urban policies. Some respondents perceive seamless collaboration among local

administrations, academe, and cultural institutions in promoting creative and smart tourism. For instance, one respondent noted, "The city invests in training programs and digital platforms so residents can participate as cultural interpreters and guides." Another remarked, "Our cultural economy is part of the tourism strategy; creative industries and smart-tourism programs are planned together." Stakeholders in and around Bukchon Hanok Village and Insadong are co-managed for tourism through bed and breakfasts, craftsmanship, and cultural entertainment, which are also safeguarded by a protection zone and municipal sponsorship. The instance of the Haenyeo divers of Jeju Island is an example of the form of subsidized ecological work and a place-governance framework, where traditional activities are integrated into the discourse of sustainability.

These support institutionalized inclusion statements by emphasizing the integration of cultural participation, education, and digital innovation into tourism governance. This institutionalization allows citizens' participation to be formalized within structured programs and measurable performance frameworks. These arrangements embody what are termed 're-embedded markets', where the state is involved in shaping economic activities towards collective cultural objectives (Kim & Thurbon, 2015). Unlike the former bypasses of governance, the communities in Seoul are enmeshed within developmentalist planning systems that operate through the devolution of power, heritage, subsidized labor, and civic identity through tourism and national development.

The institution of cultural preservation further emphasizes the differences in approaches and ideological framing. The two cities differ in the circumstances underlying the development of state's and community's cultural policy. The major heritage sites of Jakarta, Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park (TMII), Setu Babakan, and Glodok, are often curated with a performance approach to heritage theater as a spectacle. These are mainly identity sites that geographically represent the nation. TMII is more about mass participation in the creation of cultural heritage than participatory heritage making. Even in performance and craft, residents' participation is restricted to state- and market-framed roles. This fits into the symbolic economy of urban development (Vodopivec & Dürr, 2019), in which cultural space is created for tourism consumption and preserved only in the sense that it is marketed as preserved, reinforcing depoliticized, marketized logics.

Seoul offers an alternative trajectory. To some extent, cultural heritage at Kogyeong Palace and Korean Folk Village is incorporated into civic and historical education. At the same time, neighborhoods like Bukchon function as "living museums," which are part-managed by the community and part-managed by the urban planners. Respondents observe the use of bilingual interpretation, subsidized cultural education and jointly implemented heritage interpretation and cultural education that is done jointly. Such processes indicate developmental state's intention to cultivate cultural reproduction by merging heritage into spatial planning, tourism development, public education systems, and knowledge systems (Jaeger & Breen, 2016). Rather than relying solely on market principles to capture culture, Seoul's governance model seeks to embed cultural value within larger frameworks of national identity and social investment.

The visitor satisfaction metrics expose the underlying assumptions of competing institutions. In Jakarta, eco-sustainability projects focused on eco-performance and the rehabilitation of mangroves at Setu Babakan, Sabira Island, TMII, and PIK, designing the tourist experience. While participation in civil society activities such as these offers the potential for greater ecological awareness and opportunities for rich and complex engagement, the existing feedback system is informal and passive, described by Bulkeley et al. (2014) as modular sustainability. The reliance on anecdotal accounts, comments on social media, and social media chatter points to a lack of institutional capacity to conduct thorough assessments. This lack of cohesion exemplifies what Peck & Tickell (2002) describe as roll-out neoliberalism: the restructuring of governance systems via soft systems and market-driven incentives, without the public goods on which those systems are built.

Compared to Jakarta, travelers in Seoul experienced the integration of government and smart cities. Respondents commented on the cohesive integration of digital services, transportation systems, and signage systems, as well as the real-time evaluation of interface systems. While these components may seem like separate innovations, they are embedded within a larger institutional framework where public tourism is the domain of public infrastructure. This is the approach proposed by Thurbon et al. (2023) in developmental environmentalism and illustrates the place of tourism within a sustainable environment. It emphasizes the unique experience as regulated, controlled, and innovatively developed from technological advances. It certainly differs from Jessop's (2005) strategic-relational state in that tourism and the experience are possibly used to enhance state control.

Considering accessibility in tourism as an indicator of social sustainability reveals the inclusiveness of the tourism sector within public policy. In Jakarta, accessibility as an issue is attended to through a mosaic of initiatives such as the inclusion of TMII and Ancol's inclusive design features, as well as Kidzania's CSR services. Also, *Kartu Jakarta Pintar* (KJP) – Jakarta's education assistance program – plus subsidized tourism for over 700,000 underprivileged students. While commendable, the initiatives tend to be sporadic and driven by external funding, corporate collaborations, or city government pilot projects. Here, accessibility is the hybrid governance framework in which redistribution is episodic and arbitrary rather than law-based or regulated. As Wissink (2019) indicates, such a provision deficiency is characteristic of urban governance under neoliberalism, where redistribution is episodic rather than structural.

Seoul showcases publicly funded inclusive tourism practices. Public areas and transport have accessibility measures such as ramps, elevators, stroller paths, and braille signs. These things go beyond technical fixes and exemplify the results of sustained legal supervision, especially the "Act on Promotion of Transportation Convenience for Mobility Disadvantaged Persons." In this case, accessibility becomes one of the urban citizenship frameworks. The application of universal design tourism in Seoul exemplifies pervasive neoliberalism (Peck & Theodore, 2007), characterized by state control, redistributive social policy, and a greater market.

The patterns of institutional divergence are accompanied by aspects of safety and security. The Jakarta administration has increased safety infrastructure tourism at flagship tourist destinations, such as Dunia Fantasi (Dufan) and TMII, in response to COVID-19. The use of health posts, visitor monitoring, and certification of health, sanitization, and safety (CHSE) shows increased concern for risk governance. These systems, however, are often uneven in their application because they target only partially corporate-compliant, high-value tourism sites. Jakarta's safety operations fall under what Ong (2006) refers to as graduated sovereignty. In this case, safety and state protection are offered only selectively and hierarchically based on spatial and economic considerations. Therefore, urban safety is contingent, uneven, and market-driven on the hierarchy of tourist attractions.

Seoul is a global leader in safety and security infrastructure integration within public systems. Preemptive safety measures such as multilingual alert systems and real-time monitoring are in place at public transport hubs and tourist sites. Safety measures are not limited to privileged areas; they are systematized throughout the entire city, supported by public infrastructure spending and civic trust. This exemplifies a high-capacity state framework in managing social risks within tourism by framing public safety as a social right and a mandatory requirement for global competitiveness (Peck & Theodore, 2007). Instead of relying on a fragmented system of certifications or reactive, event-driven measures, Seoul's security framework is unified under coordinated policy frameworks along with anticipatory governance strategies.

Education and awareness complete the social sustainability spectrum, demonstrating how tourism is a vehicle for civic pedagogy. In Jakarta, educational activities like the recycling stations at TMII or the eco-tours conducted at JAQS are, for the most part, limited in scope and funded through CSR or donor-driven initiatives. In TMII, for instance, facilities such as bicycles are provided to raise awareness among visitors of vehicle pollution (Figure 8). While these initiatives bolster environmental awareness, they are inequitable and poorly aligned with the national curriculum. Public learning is symbolically structured, illustrating a governance approach called "governance by projects" (Swyngedouw, 2005), in which governance is achieved through fragmented, ad hoc sustainability strategies devoid of comprehensive or integrated long-term frameworks.



Figure 8. Tourists with guides use bicycles in TMII, Jakarta

Source: One respondent in Jakarta

Seoul differs from Jakarta in its public works model, in which sustainability education is taught in schools, museums, and parks. Parks and museums incorporate sustainability education, and public environmental messaging is displayed on signage, interactive exhibits, and through tourism promotion. For instance, a Smart Tourist Information System, a multilingual digital tourist information kiosk (Figure 9), is installed at major tourist and transportation hubs across Seoul to inform the public. Advanced degrees in sustainable tourism and ecological governance also contribute to the sustainability education ecosystem. Integrating sustainability education reflects the developmental environmentalist paradigm that views civic knowledge as critical to ecological modernization and global competitiveness (Thurbon et al., 2023).



Figure 9. Digital Tourist Information Kiosk in Seoul

Source: Visit Korea Committee (VKC), 2020

Social sustainability within urban tourism is more intricate, as localized initiatives are within more extensive governance and capitalist logics. Jakarta is a case within variegated capitalism, emblematic of a participatory hybridized neoliberal model defined as donor-dependent, projectized, and fractured public authority. By contrast, Seoul represents the inclusion of an advanced East Asian developmental state in the coordination of developmental inclusion; social participation is incorporated into policy frameworks designed to contain the dynamics of culture and its economic modernization, wherein the state restrains the social dimension of tourism. These extremes show the political economy of place and its contextual inclusiveness and equity in transforming tourism into the urban context. Jakarta is more participatory and Seoul is more coordinated. Both show hybrids along the continuum of state–society relations, with Jakarta community initiatives more formalized and Seoul’s participatory programs more integrated within bureaucratic frameworks.

Economic Indicators of Sustainable Tourism in Jakarta and Seoul

Sustainable tourism is not only an environmental and social concern but also an economic endeavor deeply shaped by the institutional architecture and capitalist regimes governing urban development. The cases of Jakarta and Seoul illustrate the peculiarities of

variegated capitalism in the integration of tourism with the local economies of these regions. The current discussion centers on economic indicators such as revenue and environmental exchange, the impact on the local economy, the volume of visitors managed seasonally, sustainable investments made, and job creation.

The differences in political economies, their approach to tourism, and their impacts on the environment are evident in Jakarta and Seoul. Corporations in Jakarta are subject to Indonesian Law No. 40/2007 and Government Regulation No. 47/2012, which require some degree of environmental responsibility. These laws allow firms to self-define the scope of their environmental responsibility. Ancol Dreamland and other corporate respondents increased their environmental sustainability spending (\$0.6 million in the 2024 spending plan), which is still focused on mitigation and maintenance initiatives rather than systemic integration. Similarly, public sector spending on urban competitiveness, framed in the 2024 Jakarta regional budget at \$5.2 million, with investments exceeding \$36.8 million, is considered as sustainable spending. This is the case with neoliberal capitalism, with sustainability as a tool for capital rather than a limit to growth (Harvey, 2005).

In contrast, Seoul's ecological investment strategy is a product of the built environment. State projects such as the restoration of the Cheonggyecheon Stream and Seoulo 7017, which serves public facilities, also constitute ecological rehabilitation integrated into broader urban planning. Although budget details are not reported for these projects, they demonstrate efforts to safeguard the environment through infrastructure remodeling supported by public bureaucracy, accountability, and governance. This illustrates a hardened form of a coordinated capitalist regime where the state seeks to mobilize ecological planning tourism for public utility.

Jakarta and Seoul are no different in terms of how tourism impacts the local economy. Setu Babakan's community-based tourism, along with the Thousand Islands and Kota Tua, fosters opportunities for cultural and economic expression. For instance, the Kota Tua area also provides a space for MSMEs to earn income from tourists by selling traditional food, souvenirs, mini-Dutch-style photo studios, and bicycles, as depicted in Figure 10. Additionally, these efforts exemplify insufficient infrastructure support with reliance on donor aid, portraying 'neoliberalism from below' as a community-backed initiative in the absence of systemic investment (Peck & Theodore, 2007). Simultaneously, Jakarta's corporate-led tourism, spearheaded by Ancol Dreamland, generates employment opportunities and CSR-centered participation. However, these activities are embedded within ESG brand narratives that support the commodification of sustainability without challenging hegemonic extractive growth frameworks (Büscher & Fletcher, 2015).



Figure 10. Small Businesses in Jakarta Tourist Attractions:
Mini-Dutch-Style Photo (left) and Street Vendor (right)

Source: One respondent in Jakarta

On the other hand, Seoul fosters a more embedded economic model. Areas such as Bukchon Hanok and Insadong flourish due to local businesses (Figure 11), further stimulated by zoning and rent subsidies, as well as cultural subsidies. Respondents mentioned city-sponsored initiatives to promote local and creative branding, highlighting the developmental state's role in fostering endogenous growth (Karkut, 2011). Seoul illustrates a coordinated form of capitalism in which tourism is integrated into the economy and society as a form of nourishment and dynamism, highlighting socio-economic resilience, in contrast to Jakarta's fragmented, dual system of bottom-up and corporate branding.



Figure 11. Small Local Businesses in Bukchon Hanok Village, Seoul

Source: Alexis (2017)

Visitor seasonality illustrates differential governance in relation to tourism management. Ancol Dreamland in Jakarta demonstrates growth in attendance but has no concrete plans to manage tourist peak flows. Instead, external catalysts such as the MRT construction or economic changes are relied upon to ease visitor congestion. Jakarta Aquarium & Safari is a rare outperformer, as they apply crowd control through online reservations and variable pricing. A similar quota-based management approach is applied in the Thousand Islands, where marine tourism is restricted by carrying capacity thresholds on an island basis.

Seoul, on the other hand, manages seasonality through quotas and off-peak promotions. For example, Hallasan Mountain in Jeju limits visitor numbers through a reservation-only system. The systematic and rational self-restraint of a state capable of recalibrating the balance between the ecosystem and the inflow of tourists is evident in timed entry periods, off-season events, and multi-site coordination (Kim et al., 2020). Within the framework of variegated capitalism, the fragmented governance system for visitors in Jakarta reflects decentralized neoliberalism, while the spatiotemporal governance in Seoul is evidence of strategic cross-sectoral coordination among tourism, transport, and ecology.

The patterns of sustainable investment show even more differences. In Jakarta, both state and public-private collaborations steer investment toward sustainable projects. Under InJourney, TMII's rehabilitation sustains and integrates inclusivity, sustainability, and cultural retention, while the Sebira Island offshore zone attracts funding for renewables and ecotourism. These actions are positive, albeit highly reliant on donor collaborations, Jakarta's fragmented fiscal tools, and hybrid governance. Also, public-private partnerships have financed outer areas. For instance, Sebira Island has a 400 kWp solar power plant, a subsidized collaboration between the DKI Jakarta Provincial Government and PLN. The Jakarta government encourages investment through fiscal benefits and fast-tracked business licensing for green initiatives. This has been the case for Ancol Dreamland and other projects that have integrated solar-powered infrastructure, electric transport, sustainable waste management, and eco renewables.

Seoul's landmark investments in public green infrastructure, such as Cheonggyecheon and Seoulo 7017, demonstrate the incorporation of sustainability within the framework of national development. These frameworks are also coupled with fiscal and regulatory support, thereby enabling sustainable frameworks within the bureaucracy. While the specifics may not be public knowledge, the alignment of long-term ecological state objectives with infrastructure provision showcases the developmental state (Hong, 2018).

The creation of jobs in sustainable tourism develops along the same lines. In Jakarta, support for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) exists culturally at TMII and Setu Babakan, where locals serve as guides, vendors, and performers. Ancol's support to 283 MSMEs and its training programs for skills in 2024 illustrate the tourism sector's redistributive potential (or at least the CSR-tourism redistributive potential). This reflects a self-organized, sustainable livelihood strategy that shifts, rather than transforms, labor capacity throughout project governance. Conversely, Seoul integrates tourism into its human capital paradigm,

with Kyung Hee University offering specialized tourism training and the Seoul Tourism Organization actively managing tourism MSMEs. Local jobs in cultural areas are community-based, and digital innovations (multilingual apps, AR guides) help stabilize precarious employment. This demonstrates a development model where jobs are viewed not simply in quantitative terms but rather in complex, knowledge-based, and highly valued dimensions within national competition.

These insights reinforce the significance of variegated capitalism when examining the implications of sustainability goals amidst tensions and differences in structures and arrangements. Jakarta's tourism economy operates within an eco-capitalistic system with hybrid governance, CSR, and ecological fragmentation, while in Seoul, eco-capitalism is embedded within coordinated capitalism with a strong developmental state. The political economy of tourism demonstrates not only the differential impacts of these systems but also the eco-institutional structures that can promote or constrain the potential for sustaining transformational change.

Governance Indicators of Sustainable Tourism in Jakarta and Seoul

Sustainable tourism must address the environmental, social, and economic impacts generated by the governance and capitalist configurations that guide urban development. Tourism governance in Jakarta and Seoul reflects the different logics of their respective capitalisms. The most basic governance indicators mentioned and exemplified in this section are policy regulations, relationships with civil society, and governance systems with monitoring and evaluation. This illustrates how the different political economies of these countries shape and influence the systems and pathways used in managing sustainable tourism.

The first layer of institutional differentiation is the policy tourism framework. In Jakarta, the governance of sustainable tourism operates through hybrid and fragmented mechanisms, relying heavily on formal reporting systems, NGO partnerships, and external donor programs rather than cohesive state regulation. Sustainable tourism operates under the purview of national laws like Law No. 10 of 2009 and Ministerial Regulation No. 14 of 2016, which is international, encompassing the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). At the local level, Jakarta enforces these goals through Regional Regulation No. 6 of 2015 and Governor Regulation No. 38 of 2022, which mandate state-owned enterprises toward sustainability and the procurement from MSMEs. The green hotel and CHSE initiatives also have very low uptake, as does the green certification scheme that only a handful of destinations like Untung Jawa Island have.

Respondents described coordination challenges among municipal departments and the limited enforcement capacity of sustainability policies. One interviewee noted, *"Many sustainability activities are reported to the city government, but the follow-up depends on different departments, so implementation is inconsistent."* They reported that these mechanisms are lacking, but formal frameworks for certification do not strangle the urban environment, which

is managed under anti-littering and energy-saving public infrastructure laws, fire safety, and eco-building maintenance. The described deregulatory contrasts reveal variegated capitalism, where Jakarta is a rule-based fragmented neoliberal system, and Seoul sustains a coordinated developmental model with sustainable embedded bureaucracy (Thurbon et al., 2023).

Regarding institutional partnerships with civil society, a respondent explained that in Jakarta, NGOs often run environmental and tourism projects; the government's role is mostly to provide permits and reports, not continuous supervision. The public-private partnership model is used extensively. In Setu Babakan, the Betawi Cultural Institute (LKB) participates in the formulation of cultural heritage policy alongside the local government, thereby aiding community empowerment along with traditional culture. There are corporations such as Ancol, that partner with both public and private entities like Bappeda and the Lions Club, on the green shellfish restoration project. On the other hand, Kehati, an environmental program, is involved in a participatory, community-based mangrove conservation program (Hardjono et al., 2023). Supporting policy analysis demonstrates similar behavior. It focuses on sustainability programs within the dominant multi-project framework, with overlapping jurisdictions spanning the Tourism and Creative Economy Agency, the Environment Agency, and the Regional Development Planning Agency. Accountability mechanisms focus on compliance reporting rather than outcome evaluation, reflecting a system of hybrid governance that blends public authority with civil society and private-sector initiatives.

Seoul-based governance practices are subject to similar forms of bureaucratic integration. Therefore, a rationally organized form of sustainable tourism governance is evident in ongoing urban projects that are sustainable operations under major developments such as Cheonggyecheon and Seoulo 7017. Respondents noted focused policy integration and coherence related to tourism, the environment, and urban development. For example, one respondent noted that sustainability is not a separate program; it is already embedded in our master plans and smart city frameworks. This description aligns with the local policy framework to match high levels of environmental, technological, and tourism governance. All functions are under one unit within a single bureaucratic framework. Decision-making is achieved through digital governance across agencies to maintain flexibility in governance and accountability across domains.

Collaboration at the community scale is observed in Bukchon Hanok Village, where local government, NGOs, and community members work together to manage cultural tourism and preserve the site. However, the interviews reveal a limited understanding of the role of NGOs in policymaking, indicating a more complex form of governance that is technocratic and where the state coordinates rather than a more 'hands-on' civil society. The respondent said, "Different departments coordinate with partners automatically through digital planning systems, so projects rarely overlap." Again, the differences in these arrangements illustrate differing trajectories of capitalism: Jakarta's governance system is more decentralized and participatory, albeit quite fragmented, in contrast to Seoul, which is more centralized, expert-driven, and aligned with a coordinated capitalist model (Kim & Scott, 2018).

The degree of transparency and accountability in tourism governance differs between these two cases. Jakarta is more advanced in monitoring the engagement of industry partners in the area. For instance, PT Pembangunan Jaya Ancol (Ancol) has annual sustainability reports and complies with the Financial Services Authority Regulation POJK No.51/POJK.03/2017. The sustainability report details relevant expenditures, emission reductions, and waste management. Other institutions, such as TMII and Pacific Place, also hold CHSE and Green Hotel certifications. Certain sustainability frameworks have also been incentivized through national environmental awards such as Kalpataru and Adipura. However, gaps in monitoring and enforcement remain. In contrast, Seoul's monitoring system is embedded in the city's centralized and digitalized governance system. The lack of focus on tourism evaluation may indicate a more comprehensive governance system, one in which tourism is neither neglected nor regulated in isolation but integrated within the broader urban management system. The results support the theory of diverse capitalism. Jakarta clearly demonstrates a hybrid and more regionally responsive model, responding to the absence of formal transparency modalities. At the same time, Seoul is more proactive in its responsiveness, a clear example of internalized bureaucratic rationalism.

This comparison shows how certain political-economic structures influence governance systems. Jakarta exemplifies neoliberal adaptability in governance and sustainability, where the government is absent, and external actors and temporary partnerships stabilize institutional capacity. Seoul's bureaucratic coherence exemplifies a model of a developing country, where a dense union invites the fusion of sustainability with urban modernization. Such contrasts illustrate the institutional configurations that moderate a city's capacity to manage sustainable tourism within a plurality of capitalism. Figure 12 illustrates this study's empirical work by comparing the levels of participation in Jakarta and Seoul across the four analytical pillars of sustainable tourism, thereby creating a paradox.

Table 3. Summary Comparative Political Economics Configurations of Sustainable Urban Tourism in Jakarta and Seoul

Indicator	Jakarta	Seoul
Environmental	CRS-driven, fragmented, community-led	Infrastructure-integrated, state-led
Economic	Grassroots + corporate ESG branding	Endogenous, coordinated small enterprises
Social	Community participation, informal inclusion	Institutionalized inclusion, smart tourism
Governance	Hybrid, NGO-led coordination	Bureaucratic coherence, centralized planning

Table 3 shows that in Jakarta, sustainability governance emerges from a decentralized, participatory governance model. Such a model also encompasses a diffuse, operationalized environmental governance model that encompasses CSR, community-level conservation, and selective law enforcement. These features align with interview accounts that describe weak

inter-institutional cohesion, shadow consortia, and reliance on externalities that signal neoliberalist flexibility. In contrast, Seoul's configuration demonstrates a more closed and institutionalized model: ecological planning is supported by urban infrastructure strategies, synergistic support structures are provided to micro-entrepreneurs, and social inclusion is achieved through regulated cultural and digital tourism activities. These characteristics are consistent with a developmental state paradigm, further reinforced by high-quality and coherent documents that support adaptive urbanism and streamlined bureaucratic structures.

By comparing Jakarta and Seoul, this research illuminates their distinct positions on the map of diverse capitalism. It also demonstrates that this distinction is not binary, as both cities are hybrids. While Jakarta adopts fully integrated city-led projects, Seoul employs market-based tools. Thus, this visualization adds a more detailed and empirical understanding to the findings and helps readers understand how institutional heterogeneity influences sustainable tourism governance across diverse contexts.

This research broadens the understanding of diverse capitalism by examining two Asian cities with similar regional political economies and distinct approaches to and implementation of tourism sustainability. Jakarta depicts a hybrid neoliberal-postcolonial configuration in which governance is the result of concessions between state, market, and community actors. Meanwhile, Seoul embodies a model of a built environment distinguished by coordinated, state-mediated planning and a cohesive policy framework. These results illustrate diversity within capitalism, which is not simply a national-level phenomenon. At the sub-national level, regional urban sustainability is articulated through differing environmental governance, social integration, and inter-institutional alignment determined by distinct historical institutional contexts.

Conclusions

This research has examined how political-economic diversity shapes the governance and practice of sustainable urban tourism through a comparative analysis of Jakarta and Seoul. The findings indicate that sustainability in these two cities reflects neither the policies in place nor the ability to technically do it, but rather the persistent institutional logic that shapes how actors are coordinated, resources are mobilized, and tasks are distributed. The Jakarta case explains how the hybrid flexible neoliberal configuration results in fragmented and participatory governance, in which incoherent regulations are replaced by CSR, community-based governance, and donor collaborative governance in participatory development. In the case of Seoul, the developmental state model invests in long-term planning, socially embedded infrastructure, and coordinated enterprise support, resulting the more integrated social and economic resilience, managed inclusively and culturally, as well as the remaining coordinated enterprise.

Together, the cases show that the governance of sustainable tourism is also variegated capitalism in action, in that distinct state-market interrelations of governance and coordination give rise to different institutional configurations. At the same time,

sustainability, in its general definition, remains permanent. This comparative analysis shows that both cities are hybrid and therefore defy the dominant dualistic frameworks. For example, Jakarta sometimes deploys integrated state-directed initiatives, and Seoul, to a great extent, employs market-based and digital governance mechanisms. This hybridity confirms that urban sustainability is the outcome of complex, context-specific political-economic relations rather than generalizable frameworks or prescriptive governance models.

Furthermore, this research offers three main contributions. First, in the political economy of sustainable urban tourism, the research, for the first time, conceptually integrates the lenses of variegated capitalism with developmental environmentalism. Second, the research defends its claim with empiric comparative evidence that disparate institutional configurations influence the environmental, economic, social, and governance pillars of sustainable tourism across two disparate Asian mega-cities. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this research exemplifies the need for situated, institutionally informed governance that other cities with growth, equity, and ecological resilience tensions may learn from.

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About Authors

Budiman Mahmud Musthofa is a faculty member in the Program Study of Tourism Business Management, Vocational Education Program, Universitas Indonesia. Currently, he serves as Head of Department of Applied Social Humanities. His research interests are tourism, sustainability issues, community development, social welfare, and cultural anthropology and sociology.

Diaz Pranita is a faculty member in Tourism Business Management of Vocational Program of Universitas Indonesia. Currently she serves as Head of International Office. Her research interests are in tourism, smart technology, creative economy and strategic management.

Serge Silatsa Nanda is a Researcher whose interdisciplinary work focuses on International Political Economics with emphasis on Global Environmental Politics and effective governance. Holding advanced degrees in Forestry, Natural Resource Management

and International Relations, his research leverages rigorous data analysis to provide insights to inform sustainable global policy.

Chulmo Koo is professor at the Smart Tourism Education Platform within the College of Hotel and Tourism Management at Kyung Hee University South Korea. A leading scholar in smart tourism, he has built an exceptional record of research and academic contributions across tourism and hospitality.

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