

THE SUSTAINABILITY DILEMMA: INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE OF TOURISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE EPOCH

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Abstract

The pursuit of sustainable development through tourism represents a profound governance challenge within the contemporary international system. This paper critically examines how the global tourism industry engages with the three pillars of sustainable development, economic viability, environmental integrity, and social equity, within the fragmented architecture of global governance. From an International Relations (IR) perspective, tourism is not merely an economic sector but a transnational vector of environmental change and socio-cultural exchange, making its governance a critical test case for global sustainability. The paper argues that the existing international governance regime, characterized by soft-law instruments from bodies like the UNWTO and UNEP, voluntary corporate social responsibility initiatives, and certification schemes, is fundamentally inadequate to align tourism's growth with the imperatives of planetary boundaries and intra- and inter-generational equity. It investigates the inherent tensions, such as the prioritization of economic growth over ecological conservation, the displacement of local communities for tourism development, and the unequal distribution of tourism's benefits and costs between the Global North and South. Through a critical analysis of global climate policy (e.g., tourism's carbon footprint), biodiversity conservation efforts, and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this paper reveals significant governance gaps and power asymmetries. It concludes that without a transformative shift towards binding international regulations, equitable financing mechanisms, and the meaningful inclusion of local and indigenous voices in tourism governance, the industry will continue to exacerbate the very sustainable development challenges it purports to solve.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Tourism Governance, Environmental Integrity, Social Equity, Global North-South Divide, Transnational Regulation.

A. INTRODUCTION

The advent of the Anthropocene, a proposed geological epoch signifying humanity's dominant influence on planetary systems, demands a fundamental re-evaluation of the governance structures overseeing global economic activities (Steffen et al., 2015). Within this context, international tourism emerges as a uniquely potent and paradoxical force. It is simultaneously lauded as a powerful engine for economic development, contributing significantly to GDP and employment in many nations, and decried as a significant vector of anthropogenic change, responsible for substantial environmental degradation and socio-cultural disruption. This duality gives rise to what this paper conceptualizes as the "sustainability dilemma": the inherent and intensifying contradiction between the industry's pursuit of economic growth and its escalating ecological and social liabilities.

As the world emerges from the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, international tourist arrivals are not only recovering but are projected to surpass pre-pandemic levels, reaching 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO, 2023). This resurgence brings renewed economic optimism to many countries, particularly in the Global South, where tourism is often seen as a pathway to development. However, it also intensifies concerns about the industry's sustainability. The

imperative to effectively govern this global phenomenon has never been more acute, as the environmental and social costs of unchecked tourism growth become increasingly evident.

This dilemma is starkly manifested in tourism's complex and often contradictory relationship with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While the tourism sector is explicitly recognized for its potential contributions to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 14 (Life Below Water), its conventional, volume-oriented growth model actively undermines other critical goals. The industry's substantial carbon footprint, estimated at 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Lenzen et al., 2018), directly opposes the objectives of SDG 13 (Climate Action). Tourism's rapacious demand for land, water, and coastal resources threatens SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 15 (Life on Land), while its socio-economic disruptions can exacerbate local inequalities, running counter to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). This inherent tension raises a critical question that forms the core inquiry of this paper: How does the contemporary international governance architecture manage the structural conflict between tourism-led economic development and the finite biophysical limits of the planet in the Anthropocene?

This article aims to make three distinct contributions to the scholarship on International Relations (IR) and tourism studies. First, it employs the Planetary Boundaries framework (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015) as a novel analytical tool to conduct a biophysically grounded assessment of the efficacy of the tourism governance regime, moving analysis beyond conventional economic metrics. This approach is critical because traditional tourism studies often focus on local-level impacts, whereas the Anthropocene requires a global, systemic perspective that accounts for the cumulative pressures of transnational mobility on Earth system stability. Second, it dissects the tourism governance landscape as a prime example of "regime complexity" (Alter & Raustiala, 2018), revealing how institutional fragmentation and a preference for soft law systematically impede effective environmental regulation. By mapping the overlapping mandates of various international bodies, the paper exposes the structural "governance gaps" that allow the industry to expand without adequate oversight. Third, it advocates for a paradigm shift from the often-co-opted discourse of "sustainable tourism", which frequently serves as a veneer for business-as-usual growth, to a more robust, justice-centered "stewardship model" that is philosophically and operationally aligned with the challenges of the Anthropocene. This model emphasizes the moral and legal obligations of the international community to protect global commons and ensure the rights of those most vulnerable to tourism's negative externalities.

The argument proceeds as follows: the current governance architecture is fundamentally ill-equipped to reconcile tourism growth with ecological limits due to institutional fragmentation, reliance on soft-law mechanisms, and power imbalances favoring economic interests. This thesis is developed through theoretical engagement with Ecological IR and regime complexity literature, empirical analysis of governance mechanisms, and specific case studies from Indonesia, a nation grappling with the acute pressures of tourism development. The paper is structured into four main sections: an introduction that frames the sustainability dilemma, a methodology section outlining the research approach, a findings and discussion section that analyzes the governance complex and its failures, and a conclusion that synthesizes the argument and proposes concrete policy recommendations.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative, critical-analytical methodology to deconstruct the international governance regime for sustainable tourism in the Anthropocene. The research design follows a systematic qualitative approach, utilizing document analysis and comparative case study synthesis to examine the structural and normative dimensions of global tourism governance.

1. Document Selection and Criteria

The primary data for this study consist of international policy documents and peer-reviewed academic literature. Document selection was guided by three specific criteria: (1)

Institutional Relevance, focusing on high-level strategic documents from the UNWTO, UNEP, UNESCO, and the World Bank that explicitly address tourism sustainability; (2) Temporal Recency, prioritizing documents and studies published between 2020 and 2025 to capture the post-pandemic governance shift; and (3) Thematic Alignment, selecting texts that engage with the intersection of tourism growth, planetary boundaries, and regime complexity

2. Data Analysis and Analytical Framework

The analysis was conducted using a thematic coding framework derived from regime complexity theory (Alter & Raustiala, 2018) and the planetary boundaries framework (Steffen et al., 2015). Data were processed through three coding cycles:

- Descriptive Coding: Identifying the stated goals, institutional mandates, and regulatory mechanisms (e.g., soft law vs. hard law).
- Analytical Coding: Categorizing governance pathologies, such as "forum shopping," "strategic ambiguity," and "accountability gaps."
- Synthesis: Comparing the normative rhetoric of international documents with the empirical realities observed in the selected case studies.

The comparative analysis of the Indonesian case studies (Bali, Komodo, and Lake Toba) followed a cross-case synthesis technique. Each case was analyzed for (a) the specific planetary boundary under pressure, (b) the conflict between national economic priorities and international conservation norms, and (c) the degree of local/indigenous inclusion in decision-making.

3. Normative vs. Empirical Distinction

This study maintains a clear distinction between normative argumentation and empirical analysis. The normative component evaluates the "ought" of tourism governance, proposing a stewardship model based on justice and ecological integrity. The empirical component analyzes the "is", documenting the actual performance and structural failures of the existing regime based on policy outcomes and case study data. This distinction ensures that the proposed policy recommendations are grounded in a rigorous critique of current institutional performance.

4. Limitations of the Study

While this research provides a comprehensive critique, it has certain limitations. First, as a qualitative study based on document analysis, it does not include primary field interviews with policymakers, which might offer additional nuances into institutional decision-making. Second, the focus on Indonesia, while analytically powerful, may not capture the full diversity of tourism governance challenges in other Global South contexts with different political-economic structures. Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of international environmental law means that new regulatory developments post-2025 may alter the governance landscape described herein.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Architecture of Inadequacy: A Fragmented and Toothless Regime

The international governance of tourism is not a unified regime but a fragmented complex of institutions and norms that creates an illusion of oversight while failing to impose meaningful constraints on the industry. This condition of "regime complexity" (Alter & Raustiala, 2018) is the primary structural feature of tourism governance and a key source of its ineffectiveness. The landscape is characterized by a weak institutional center, the peripheral involvement of powerful environmental bodies, and a prevailing preference for voluntary, non-binding soft-law mechanisms.

At the heart of this complex lies the UNWTO, an institution with a fundamentally conflicted mandate. Established in 1975 as the United Nations' specialized agency for tourism, the UNWTO is tasked with promoting "responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism" (UNWTO,

2023). While it champions the discourse of sustainability and has endorsed initiatives like the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism, its institutional DNA is oriented towards promoting growth. Its success is measured not by the reduction of tourism's ecological footprint but by the expansion of international arrivals and receipts. The organization's flagship publication, the World Tourism Barometer, focuses almost exclusively on economic indicators, reinforcing a narrative that equates success with volume (UNWTO, 2023). This pro-growth bias ensures that sustainability remains a secondary concern, often relegated to the status of a marketing strategy or a voluntary add-on. The organization's reliance on codes of conduct and certification schemes, which lack independent verification and penalties for non-compliance, epitomizes the soft-law approach that dominates the sector.

This institutional weakness at the center is compounded by the tangential and often powerless role of major environmental regimes. The UNFCCC, the cornerstone of global climate governance, does not address the tourism sector as a whole, leaving its significant emissions footprint largely unregulated. While the Paris Agreement calls for economy-wide decarbonization, tourism is not singled out for specific targets or mechanisms. The ICAO's CORSIA scheme for international aviation, a critical component of global tourism, has been widely condemned as an inadequate offsetting mechanism that falls far short of the absolute reductions required by the Paris Agreement (Lenzen et al., 2018). CORSIA allows airlines to continue growing emissions while purchasing carbon offsets of questionable quality, a strategy that has been criticized as a form of greenwashing.

Similarly, both the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention lack the legal authority to override national development decisions, rendering them largely impotent when their conservation objectives conflict with a state's economic agenda. The CBD's Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development, adopted in 2004, are non-binding and have not been accompanied by a robust monitoring and reporting framework. UNESCO can designate sites as World Heritage, but it cannot prevent member states from pursuing development projects that threaten these sites. The "in danger" listing is often applied too late to prevent irreversible damage, and the threat of delisting is rarely credible due to political sensitivities.

This fragmented architecture creates three key governance pathologies. First, it enables "forum shopping," where states and industry actors can choose to engage with the institutions that are most sympathetic to their economic interests while marginalizing those that prioritize environmental or social concerns. For example, a state might emphasize its commitment to the UNWTO's voluntary sustainability guidelines while ignoring its obligations under the CBD. Second, it leads to "strategic ambiguity," where high-level declarations and guidelines are phrased in vague terms that allow for multiple interpretations and avoid clear, measurable commitments. This ambiguity serves to maintain a consensus among diverse actors but at the cost of effective regulation. Third, it results in significant "accountability gaps," as there are no clear mechanisms for monitoring compliance or imposing penalties for non-performance. The reliance on voluntary reporting and self-certification means that there is little transparency or external oversight of the industry's actual impact.

Governance on the Ground: A Microcosm of Failure in the Indonesian Archipelago

The systemic flaws of this global governance architecture are not merely theoretical; they have devastating real-world consequences. The case of Indonesia, a nation that has aggressively pursued tourism-led development as a cornerstone of its economic strategy, serves as a powerful microcosm of these failures. Indonesia's tourism sector has grown rapidly in recent decades, driven by the global popularity of destinations like Bali and the government's designation of "Super Priority" tourism areas such as Lake Toba and Komodo. However, this growth has come at a significant environmental and social cost, revealing the deep inadequacies of both national and international governance.

1. Bali: The Paradise Paradox

Bali is a stark archetype of the "tourism trap," where a destination becomes a victim of its own success. Decades of relentless, poorly regulated growth have pushed the island's ecosystem

to a breaking point. The narrative of "overtourism" is evidenced by severe environmental degradation, including a water crisis driven by the demands of hotels and villas, overwhelming plastic pollution that chokes beaches and waterways, and the conversion of vital rice paddies and wetlands into tourism infrastructure (Utama et al, 2024). The degradation of the ancient Subak irrigation system, a UNESCO World Heritage landscape that has sustained Balinese agriculture for centuries, is a powerful symbol of this cultural and ecological erosion. The Subak system, which embodies a philosophy of harmony between humans and nature, is being systematically dismantled to make way for resorts and commercial developments (Muda, 2025).

The case of Bali demonstrates a critical governance failure at multiple levels. At the local level, there is a lack of integrated spatial planning that would balance tourism development with environmental protection and community needs. Local governments, heavily dependent on tourism revenues, have been captured by development interests, leading to a permissive regulatory environment. At the national level, Indonesia's 2009 Tourism Law, which ostensibly promotes sustainable tourism, has proven to be largely ineffective in imposing meaningful limits on growth. The law lacks clear enforcement mechanisms and is often overridden by economic imperatives. At the international level, the absence of binding norms or oversight means that Bali's crisis is treated as a domestic issue, despite its global significance as a major tourist destination and a biodiversity hotspot.

2. Komodo National Park: Conservation vs. Commerce

The situation in Komodo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, exemplifies the direct conflict between a state's economic ambitions and its international conservation commitments. The central government's push to develop the park as a premium, high-volume destination, including plans for luxury resorts and other large-scale infrastructure, has been met with fierce resistance from conservationists and local communities. Critics argue that this approach commodifies a global public good and threatens the survival of the iconic Komodo dragon and its fragile island ecosystem (Mandić & Leung, 2025). The proposed "Jurassic Park"-style development, which would involve significant construction and increased tourist traffic, has been condemned as "tourism suicide" that prioritizes short-term revenue over long-term conservation.

This case highlights the impotence of international designations like World Heritage status in the face of strong, state-led development pressures, revealing the deep power asymmetries that favor national economic goals over global conservation norms (Kodir et al., 2020). UNESCO can issue warnings and place sites on the "in danger" list, but it cannot legally prevent the Indonesian government from pursuing its development agenda. The case also illustrates the problem of "forum shopping," where the government emphasizes its commitments to economic development forums like the G20 while downplaying its obligations under conservation regimes like the World Heritage Convention.

3. Lake Toba: Top-Down Planning and Local Realities

As one of Indonesia's "Super Priority" tourism destinations, Lake Toba is the focus of a massive, state-driven development effort, supported by international funding from institutions like the World Bank. The government's vision is to transform Lake Toba into a world-class destination that can rival Bali in attracting international tourists. However, the project has been criticized for its top-down approach, which has largely failed to meaningfully include the local and indigenous Batak communities who are the traditional stewards of the lake's cultural and ecological landscape. The region's recent "yellow card" from UNESCO underscores the growing gap between the government's ambitious development blueprint and the deteriorating environmental reality on the ground. The yellow card was issued due to concerns about water quality, deforestation, and the lack of community participation in decision-making.

Lake Toba illustrates the challenge of translating high-level sustainability rhetoric into equitable and effective on-the-ground implementation, especially when local voices are marginalized. The case also highlights the limitations of international funding mechanisms like those of the World Bank, which, despite their stated commitment to sustainability, often support projects that fail to adequately address environmental and social risks. The governance approach

at Lake Toba has been characterized by a lack of transparency, insufficient environmental impact assessments, and a failure to secure the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) of indigenous communities.

Table 1. Analysis of Governance Failures in Indonesian Tourism Case Studies

Case Study	Key Sustainability Challenge	Primary Governance Failure	Manifestation of Regime Complexity	Impact on Planetary Boundaries
Bali	Overtourism, water scarcity, plastic pollution, cultural erosion (Subak).	Lack of integrated planning; capture of local governance by development interests; weak enforcement of national laws.	Policy incoherence between economic growth targets and environmental protection.	Land-System Change, Freshwater Use, Novel Entities (Plastics), Biosphere Integrity.
Komodo NP	Conflict between mass-tourism infrastructure and conservation of a UNESCO site.	Prioritization of national economic ambition over international conservation norms; lack of binding enforcement from UNESCO.	Forum shopping by the state, prioritizing economic development over conservation regimes.	Biosphere Integrity, Land-System Change.
Lake Toba	Top-down development plans leading to environmental degradation and local marginalization.	Failure to ensure meaningful community participation (FPIC); gap between high-level policy and on-the-ground implementation.	Diffusion of responsibility between national government, local authorities, and international funders (e.g., World Bank).	Freshwater Use, Biochemical Flows, Biosphere Integrity.

Pathways to Transformative Governance: A Stewardship Model for the Anthropocene

The analysis of the governance complex and the Indonesian case studies reveals that the current paradigm is not merely underperforming but is fundamentally flawed. A transition to a "stewardship model" is necessary, requiring a radical transformation across three key areas:

1. Integrating Planetary Boundaries into Governance

The epistemic foundation of tourism governance must shift from economic indicators to biophysical realities. The Planetary Boundaries framework (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015) provides a scientific basis for this shift. This framework identifies nine critical Earth system processes, including climate change, biosphere integrity, land-system change, and freshwater use, and defines quantitative boundaries for each that, if transgressed, could lead to abrupt or irreversible environmental changes. Tourism significantly impacts at least six of these boundaries. Integrating these boundaries into tourism governance involves establishing science-based targets for the sector's impact on critical Earth systems and embedding these targets into the core reporting and monitoring frameworks of the UNWTO and national tourism strategies (Tian et al., 2024). This would require a fundamental shift in how success is measured, moving away from arrival numbers and GDP contributions towards indicators of ecological sustainability and social equity.

2. Strengthening the Governance Architecture with Binding Regulations

The era of relying on voluntary commitments must end. A new international convention on tourism and sustainability, with legally binding commitments and robust accountability mechanisms, is needed. This convention could be modeled on the Paris Agreement, with nationally determined contributions (NDCs) for the tourism sector that are subject to

international review and ratcheting up over time. Such a framework would move the sector away from the current "race to the bottom" where destinations compete by lowering environmental standards to attract investment. Furthermore, the mandate of UNEP should be expanded to include oversight of the tourism industry's environmental performance, with the authority to conduct independent assessments and issue binding recommendations. This would provide a necessary environmental counterweight to the pro-growth orientation of the UNWTO. An independent scientific body, analogous to the IPCC, should be created to provide authoritative assessments of the sector's global impact, synthesizing research on tourism's contribution to climate change, biodiversity loss, and other environmental challenges (Khan & Razak, 2025). This body could also develop scenarios for sustainable tourism pathways and provide guidance to policymakers, ensuring that governance decisions are based on the best available science rather than political expediency or industry lobbying. The creation of such a body would also help to bridge the "science-policy gap" that currently plagues the sector, where rigorous environmental research is often ignored in favor of short-term economic gains.

3. Centering Justice and Equity

A stewardship model must be explicitly justice-oriented, addressing the unequal distribution of tourism's benefits and costs. This requires the implementation of the "polluter pays" principle through mechanisms like international levies on aviation and cruise tourism, with revenues dedicated to climate adaptation and mitigation in the most vulnerable nations. Such levies could also fund a global tourism sustainability fund that supports community-led conservation and sustainable livelihoods in tourism-dependent regions. Critically, it demands the legal recognition of the rights of indigenous and local communities, including the right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) on all tourism projects affecting their lands and livelihoods (Prayitno et al, 2025). This would empower communities to reject projects that they deem harmful and to negotiate for a fairer share of tourism revenues. It also requires addressing the power imbalances between the Global North and South, ensuring that developing countries have a stronger voice in shaping the global tourism agenda.

Policy Recommendations: Concrete Actions for Government and Industry

Building on the stewardship model, this section outlines specific, actionable policy recommendations for different stakeholders to operationalize the transformative governance agenda.

For International Organizations (UNWTO, UNEP, UNESCO)

Recommendation 1: Establish a Tourism Sustainability Accountability Framework. The UNWTO should develop a mandatory reporting system where member states submit annual "Tourism Sustainability Reports" that include metrics on carbon emissions per tourist, water consumption, waste generation, biodiversity impacts, and community benefit-sharing. These reports should be independently verified and publicly accessible, with non-compliance resulting in sanctions such as exclusion from UNWTO promotional activities.

Recommendation 2: Create an Independent Scientific Panel on Tourism and Planetary Boundaries. Modeled after the IPCC, this panel would synthesize scientific evidence on tourism's impact on Earth systems, produce regular assessment reports, and provide scenario analyses for achieving tourism within planetary boundaries by 2050. The panel should have a mandate to issue early warnings when specific destinations or regions are approaching critical ecological thresholds.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen UNESCO's Enforcement Mechanisms for World Heritage Sites. UNESCO should be empowered to impose binding restrictions on tourism development in and

around World Heritage sites, including the authority to cap visitor numbers, mandate environmental impact assessments with veto power, and impose financial penalties on states that violate conservation commitments. A dedicated World Heritage Tourism Fund should be established, financed by a small levy on all visitors to these sites, to support conservation and community development.

For National Governments (with specific focus on Indonesia)

Recommendation 4: Implement Carrying Capacity Limits and Dynamic Pricing. Governments should establish science-based carrying capacity limits for all major tourism destinations, particularly fragile ecosystems like Bali, Komodo, and Lake Toba. When visitor numbers approach these limits, dynamic pricing mechanisms (higher entry fees or taxes during peak periods) should be used to manage demand. Revenues from these mechanisms should be earmarked for environmental restoration and community compensation.

Recommendation 5: Mandate Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for All Tourism Projects. National legislation should require that all tourism development projects affecting indigenous or local communities obtain FPIC before proceeding. This should be accompanied by capacity-building programs to ensure communities have the technical and legal resources to meaningfully participate in decision-making. In Indonesia, this would apply to projects in areas like Lake Toba and Komodo.

Recommendation 6: Establish a National Tourism Carbon Budget. Governments should set a declining carbon budget for the tourism sector, aligned with national commitments under the Paris Agreement. This budget should cover emissions from international and domestic aviation, accommodation, and ground transport. Airlines and tourism operators should be required to purchase carbon allowances, with revenues invested in renewable energy and sustainable transport infrastructure.

Recommendation 7: Create Protected Tourism-Free Zones. To safeguard critical ecosystems and allow for ecological recovery, governments should designate certain areas as permanently off-limits to tourism development. In Indonesia, this could include portions of Komodo National Park's core zones and critical watersheds in Bali's highlands.

For the Tourism Industry

Recommendation 8: Adopt Science-Based Targets for Net-Zero Pathways. Tourism businesses, particularly large hotel chains and tour operators, should commit to Science-Based Targets (SBTi) for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions in line with the 1.5°C goal. This includes direct emissions (Scope 1), indirect emissions from energy use (Scope 2), and emissions across the value chain (Scope 3).

Recommendation 9: Implement Full Supply Chain Transparency and Accountability. Companies should be required to map and disclose the environmental and social impacts of their entire supply chains, from food and beverage sourcing to construction materials. This should include independent audits to ensure compliance with sustainability standards and human rights protections.

Recommendation 10: Establish Community Benefit-Sharing Mechanisms. Tourism operators should be required to allocate a significant portion of their revenues (e.g., 20%) to local community development funds, managed by community-led organizations. These funds should support education, healthcare, and sustainable livelihood projects that are independent of the tourism industry.

Recommendation 11: Transition to Regenerative Tourism Business Models. The industry should move beyond "sustainable" tourism, which often focuses on minimizing harm, towards "regenerative" models that actively restore ecosystems and strengthen local cultures. This includes investing in nature-based solutions, supporting local food systems, and promoting slow, low-impact travel.

For Civil Society and Local Communities

Recommendation 12: Develop Community-Led Monitoring and Advocacy Networks. Local communities and NGOs should be supported in developing their own monitoring systems to track the environmental and social impacts of tourism development. This data should be used to hold governments and industry accountable and to advocate for more equitable and sustainable policies.

Recommendation 13: Promote Tourism Literacy and Responsible Travel Campaigns. Civil society organizations should lead public education campaigns to increase awareness among tourists about their ecological and social footprints and to promote responsible travel behaviors. This includes encouraging tourists to choose sustainable operators, respect local cultures, and minimize their waste and resource consumption.

D. CONCLUSION

The international governance of tourism in the Anthropocene is at a critical juncture. The current regime, characterized by institutional fragmentation, soft-law mechanisms, and a pro-growth bias, is structurally incapable of managing the industry's escalating ecological and social liabilities. The case studies from Indonesia, Bali, Komodo, and Lake Toba, vividly illustrate the real-world consequences of these governance failures, where national economic ambitions systematically override international conservation norms and local community rights.

To move beyond the "architecture of inadequacy," a transformative shift towards a stewardship model is required. This model must be grounded in the biophysical realities of planetary boundaries, supported by binding international regulations, and centered on principles of justice and equity. The 13 policy recommendations outlined in this paper provide a roadmap for this transformation, offering concrete actions for international organizations, national governments, the tourism industry, and civil society. The choice before the international community is clear: continue with a business-as-usual approach that risks ecological and social collapse, or embrace a bold, transformative governance agenda that secures a sustainable and equitable future for tourism in the Anthropocene. The time for incremental change has passed; the era of planetary stewardship must begin.

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