

Tourism Policies of Himachal Pradesh: An Evolution, Evaluation, and Structural Framework

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Abstract

This research paper examines the trajectory of tourism policy development in Himachal Pradesh, a Himalayan state in northern India that has emerged as one of the country's premier tourist destinations. Through a comprehensive analysis of tourism policies from 1991 to 2019, this study traces the evolution of policy frameworks from fundamental regulatory mechanisms to sophisticated sustainable tourism architectures. The paper evaluates the structural components, strategic objectives, and implementation mechanisms across four policy iterations—1991, 2005, 2013, and 2019—identifying significant paradigm shifts in approach. These include the transition from infrastructure-focused development to community-centric sustainable tourism, the incorporation of global sustainability frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, and the progressive refinement of institutional mechanisms for policy implementation. The research also critically assesses the challenges encountered in policy execution, including the strain between tourism growth and environmental preservation, the complexities of multi-stakeholder coordination, and the difficulties in balancing commercial interests with community benefits. The paper concludes by synthesizing lessons learned and proposing directions for future policy frameworks that can address emerging challenges while building upon the foundational strengths established over three decades of policy evolution.

Keywords: Tourism Policy, Sustainable Development, Himachal Pradesh, Policy Evolution, Destination Governance, Community Participation

1. Introduction

Tourism occupies a paradoxical position in the discourse on regional development. It is simultaneously celebrated as an engine of economic growth and criticized for its potential to degrade the very environmental and cultural assets upon which it depends. (Sharma, 2004) (Catudan, 2016) (Mishra, 2025) This paradox is particularly acute in mountain regions, where fragile ecosystems, limited carrying capacities, and distinctive cultural formations intersect with growing tourist demand for authentic experiences in pristine environments. (Shah & Bhatt, 2025) The Indian Himalayan Region exemplifies these complexities, having experienced dramatic growth in tourist arrivals while confronting the challenges of sustainable resource management. (Al-Romeedy & Hussein, 2025)

Himachal Pradesh, a constituent state of the Indian Union located in the northwestern Himalayas, presents a compelling case study in the evolution of tourism policy. Reorganized as a full-fledged state in 1971, Himachal Pradesh has witnessed a remarkable transformation in its tourism sector. From approximately 6.5 million tourist arrivals in 2004, the state recorded over 19.6 million visitors in 2017–2018, a figure nearly three times its resident population (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Tourism policy of Himachal Pradesh 2019, 2019). This exponential growth has generated significant economic benefits while simultaneously raising urgent questions about sustainability, carrying capacity, and the distribution of tourism's benefits among host communities.

The policy response to these challenges has evolved considerably over three decades. From the initial 1991 policy framework, through the comprehensive 2005 policy, the sustainable tourism-focused 2013 policy, to the most recent 2019 policy iteration, the state has progressively refined its approach to tourism governance. (Verma & Ahlawat, 2023) This evolutionary trajectory reflects not only changing domestic and international tourism dynamics but also a deeper learning process about what constitutes effective tourism policy in environmentally sensitive and culturally distinctive regions.

This paper undertakes a systematic analysis of this policy evolution, addressing three primary research questions: First, how have the core objectives and strategic approaches of Himachal Pradesh's tourism policies evolved between 1991 and 2019? Second, what structural consistencies and innovations characterize the state's tourism policy architecture? Third, what factors have shaped policy effectiveness, and what lessons emerge for future policy development?

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond the boundaries of Himachal Pradesh. As mountain tourism destinations worldwide grapple with similar challenges of balancing growth with sustainability, the Himachal experience offers valuable insights into policy design, implementation

mechanisms, and the iterative process of policy refinement. Moreover, as the global community pursues the Sustainable Development Goals—particularly Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) and Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production)—the integration of sustainability principles into tourism policy assumes renewed importance.

2. Literature Review: Tourism Policy and Sustainable Development

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Tourism Policy

Tourism policy, as an academic field, has evolved considerably over the past half-century. Early conceptualizations treated tourism policy primarily as an instrument for economic development, focusing on infrastructure creation, investment attraction, and foreign exchange earnings (Hall C. M., 2008) (Anshul Kumar et al., 2025) this economistic orientation reflected the broader developmental paradigm of the post-war era, which prioritized measurable economic outcomes over social and environmental considerations.

Subsequent scholarship has significantly expanded the conceptual boundaries of tourism policy. (Jenkins, 2015) Argues that tourism policy must be understood as a multi-dimensional phenomenon encompassing economic, social, cultural, environmental, and political dimensions. This expanded conceptualization recognizes that tourism's impacts permeate virtually all aspects of societal functioning, requiring policy frameworks that transcend sectoral boundaries and engage diverse stakeholder interests.

The governance turn in tourism studies has further enriched theoretical understandings of tourism policy. (Bramwell & Lane, 2011) Emphasize that effective tourism policy requires collaborative governance arrangements that bring together government agencies, private sector actors, civil society organizations, and host communities. This governance perspective challenges hierarchical, state-centric models of policy formulation and implementation, highlighting the importance of networks, partnerships, and participatory processes.

2.2 Sustainable Tourism as Policy Paradigm

The concept of sustainable tourism emerged in response to growing awareness of tourism's negative environmental and social impacts. Drawing on the broader sustainable development discourse crystallized by the Brundtland Commission (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), sustainable tourism has been defined as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (WTO, 2005)

The translation of sustainable development principles into tourism policy has proven conceptually and practically challenging. (Hunter, 1997) Identifies multiple interpretations of sustainable tourism, ranging from "tourism-first" approaches that prioritize economic growth within environmental constraints to "environment-first" approaches that subordinate tourism development to ecological preservation. (Kumar, Anshul, 2025) These differing interpretations

have significant implications for policy design, influencing decisions about carrying capacity, visitor management, and the distribution of tourism benefits.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 provided renewed impetus for integrating sustainability into tourism policy. Goal 8 explicitly targets sustainable tourism as a means of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, while Goal 12 calls for developing tools to monitor sustainable tourism's impacts on job creation and local culture promotion (Niti Aayog, 2018). This global framework offers both normative guidance and practical benchmarks for tourism policy development.

2.3 Policy Evolution and Learning

The study of policy evolution draws on theories of policy change and learning (Hall C. , 2011) distinguishes between three orders of policy change: first-order change involving adjustments to policy settings, second-order change involving modifications to policy instruments, and third-order change involving paradigm shifts in policy goals and assumptions. This typology provides a useful framework for analyzing the trajectory of tourism policy development over time.

Policy learning—the process through which policymakers incorporate experience and evidence into policy design—has received increasing scholarly attention. (Bennett & Howlett , 1992) distinguish between instrumental learning (about policy instruments), social learning (about policy problems and goals), and political learning (about policy processes and strategies). Effective policy evolution requires all three forms of learning, enabling policymakers to refine instruments, reframe problems, and navigate political complexities. (Kumar et al., 2025)

2.4 Tourism Policy in the Indian Himalayan Context

Tourism policy in the Indian Himalayan Region presents distinctive challenges and opportunities. The region's ecological fragility, cultural diversity, and historical isolation create conditions that differ markedly from lowland and urban tourism destinations. (Nepal & Chipeniuk, 2005) notes that mountain tourism development must contend with issues of accessibility, seasonality, and carrying capacity that are less prominent in other contexts. They also identify community participation as a critical success factor for mountain tourism development. Their research in the Himalayas demonstrates that tourism initiatives involving local communities in planning and benefit-sharing are more likely to achieve sustainability outcomes than top-down, externally driven projects. This finding has significant implications for policy design, suggesting the importance of institutional mechanisms that enable community voice and agency.

The Indian Himalayan Region has experienced dramatic tourism growth in recent decades, generating both economic opportunities and environmental pressures. (Kumar, Anshul, 2023) The (Niti Aayog, 2018) report on mountain tourism highlights the need for carrying capacity-based planning, waste management infrastructure, and mechanisms for distributing tourism benefits to local communities. These recommendations resonate strongly with the policy directions evident in Himachal Pradesh's recent policy frameworks.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Document Selection and Analysis

This study employs qualitative document analysis as its primary research method. The core data sources comprise four tourism policy documents from Himachal Pradesh: the 1991 Tourism Policy, 2005 Tourism Policy, the 2013 Sustainable Tourism Development Policy, and the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Policy 2019. The selection of these documents enables diachronic analysis of policy evolution across nearly three decades. Each policy document represents a distinct moment in the state's tourism development trajectory, reflecting contemporary challenges, priorities, and policy approaches. The documents vary in length, structure, and detail, with later policies exhibiting greater comprehensiveness and strategic sophistication.

3.2 Analytical Framework

The analysis employs a multi-dimensional framework derived from tourism policy scholarship. This framework examines each policy document across several dimensions:

1. **Policy context** considers the conditions prompting policy formulation or revision, including tourism growth patterns, identified challenges, and broader developmental priorities.
2. **Policy vision and objectives** examine the stated goals and purposes of each policy, identifying both continuity and change in policy aspirations.
3. **Strategic approaches** analyze the means through which policies propose to achieve their objectives, including the identification of priority themes, target markets, and intervention areas.
4. **Institutional mechanisms** investigate the organizational arrangements proposed for policy implementation, including new institutions created, existing institutions strengthened, and coordination mechanisms established.
5. **Incentive structures** examine the fiscal and regulatory instruments deployed to shape tourism development, including subsidies, tax concessions, and regulatory requirements.
6. **Sustainability integration** assesses how environmental, social, and economic sustainability concerns are addressed within each policy framework.

4. Chronological Analysis of Tourism Policies

4.1 The Foundational Framework: 1991 Policy

The **Tourism Policy of 1991** of Himachal Pradesh was introduced by the state government to develop tourism in a planned and sustainable way. The policy recognized that the state has rich natural beauty, a pleasant climate, snow-covered mountains, and a unique cultural heritage that could attract tourists from across India and abroad. Because of this potential, the government decided to promote tourism as an important sector for economic growth and employment

generation. The policy aimed to improve tourism facilities and encourage balanced development while protecting the fragile environment of the Himalayan region.

One of the major goals of the policy was to strengthen tourism infrastructure. The government focused on improving roads, transportation, accommodation, and other basic facilities for visitors. Popular tourist destinations such as Shimla and Manali already attract many tourists, but the policy emphasized upgrading services and facilities to provide a better experience to travelers. At the same time, the government also wanted to develop new and less explored areas so that tourism benefits could reach different parts of the state and overcrowding at major destinations could be reduced.

Another important feature of the policy was the encouragement of private sector participation. The government invited private investors and entrepreneurs to establish hotels, resorts, restaurants, and other tourism services. This partnership between the government and the private sector was expected to increase investment in tourism and create more job opportunities for local people.

The policy also aimed to diversify tourism activities in the state. Along with sightseeing, it promoted adventure tourism such as trekking, mountaineering, skiing, and river rafting. Cultural tourism and pilgrimage tourism were also encouraged to showcase the traditions, temples, and festivals of Himachal Pradesh.

The 1991 policy framework, to the extent it can be reconstructed from available sources, appears to have focused on several core elements. First, it addressed the registration and regulation of tourism service providers, creating a mechanism for quality assurance and consumer protection. Second, it contemplated infrastructure development priorities, including transportation connectivity and accommodation capacity. Third, it established foundational institutional arrangements, including the framework for what would later become the comprehensive Tourism Development Board structure.

The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development and Registration Act of 2002, which followed nearly a decade later, can be understood as building upon and systematizing the regulatory framework initiated in 1991. This Act provided for the "registration of persons engaged in tourist trade, constitution of the Tourism Development Board and other matters connected therewith" (Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development and Registration Act, 2002, Preamble). The Act's focus on registration mechanisms and board constitution reflects the continuing priority accorded to establishing orderly governance of the tourism sector.

4.2 Comprehensive Vision: 2005 Policy

The 2005 Tourism Policy represents a significant expansion in both scope and ambition compared to its predecessor. The policy opens with a mission statement declaring its intention "to make tourism the prime engine of economic growth in the state by positioning it as a leading global destination by the year 2020" (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Tourism Policy, 2005)

This ambitious vision signals a fundamental shift in the perceived role of tourism—from one economic sector among many to a potential driver of statewide development.

The policy's context section provides revealing insights into the state's tourism trajectory. It notes that tourist arrivals had reached 6.5 million in 2004, roughly equivalent to the state's population, with foreign tourists comprising approximately 204,000 of this total (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation , Tourism Policy, 2005)It also observes that the number of hotels had increased from 350 to 1,710 between the mid-1980s and 2005, with corresponding growth in hotel rooms from 6,300 to 36,000. This dramatic expansion, partly attributed to tourism diversion from Kashmir due to political instability, had generated both opportunities and challenges.

The policy identifies eight objectives, ranging from establishing Himachal Pradesh as a leading tourist destination to safeguarding the state's natural and manmade heritage. Particularly noteworthy is Objective 4, which commits to promoting "sustainable tourism, which is not only environmentally compatible but also leads to economic betterment of the rural people" (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation , Tourism Policy, 2005)This explicit recognition of sustainability and rural benefit distinguishes the 2005 policy from purely growth-oriented frameworks.

The SWOT analysis included in the policy reveals sophisticated awareness of tourism's complexities. Strengths identified include the state's five distinct seasons, political stability, salubrious climate, and rich cultural heritage. Weaknesses encompass inadequate air and rail connectivity, seasonal concentration of tourist flows, saturation of established destinations, and limited marketing resources. Opportunities identified include potential for activity-based tourism, heritage tourism, and film tourism, while threats include environmental degradation, haphazard construction, and social disruption from commercialization.

The strategic framework elaborated in the policy addresses multiple dimensions of tourism development. Infrastructure development receives substantial attention, with recognition that civic infrastructure in major destinations was under serious strain. The policy proposes upgrading infrastructure in priority towns, leveraging central government funding, and welcoming private investment in areas including hill stations, ski slopes, airports, ropeways, and hotels.

Human resource development emerges as a significant concern, with the policy noting that "availability of skilled work force is essential for delivery of professional services of the highest order" (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation , Tourism Policy, 2005)The policy commits to strengthening the existing Food Craft Institute cum Hotel Management Institute at Kufri and establishing additional institutes in Kangra and Kullu districts.

The marketing strategy outlined in the policy demonstrates growing sophistication in tourism promotion. Proposals include creating a "Destination Himachal Fund" through collaboration among the Tourism Development Board, temple trusts, and the private sector; developing tourism films for electronic media and international fairs; installing touch-screen kiosks at major airports

and railway stations; and organizing familiarization tours for tour operators. These initiatives reflect recognition that effective destination marketing requires coordinated efforts and adequate resources.

The policy's treatment of regulatory mechanisms reveals attention to quality assurance and consumer protection. It references the H.P. Registration of Tourist Trade Act, 2002, and proposes strengthening inspection mechanisms, delegating powers to hotel associations, and expanding the tourist police force to 500 personnel. It also proposes classifying roadside eateries and tourism units to ensure tourists receive value for money.

The thrust areas identified in the policy—rural tourism, eco-tourism, pilgrimage tourism, adventure tourism, unexplored destinations, and health tourism—establish a diversified product portfolio that reduces dependence on conventional leisure tourism. The detailed treatment of rural tourism is particularly significant, proposing the identification and notification of rural tourism villages, exemption from luxury tax for small homestays, promotion of local cuisine and handicrafts, and simplified registration procedures. This rural tourism focus represents an early articulation of what would later become central themes in sustainable tourism policy.

4.3 Sustainability Mainstreaming: 2013 Policy

The 2013 Sustainable Tourism Development Policy marks a significant paradigm shift in Himachal's tourism policy approach. For the first time, sustainability moves from being one objective among many to the organizing principle around which the entire policy framework is structured. This shift reflects both global developments—including the growing influence of sustainable development discourse—and state-specific factors, including mounting evidence of environmental stress in popular destinations.

The policy's preface, authored by the Chief Minister, frames the policy imperative in terms of managing growth sustainably. It notes that tourist arrivals had increased from 6.55 million in 2004 to 16.15 million in 2012, observing that "the need of the hour, given our fragile ecosystem, is to ensure that this growth continues sustainably". This formulation acknowledges the complexities between growth aspirations and environmental constraints while affirming commitment to both.

The vision statement articulates an ambitious long-term goal: "To make sustainable tourism one of the prime engines of socioeconomic growth in the State by establishing it as a leading global sustainable tourism destination by 2029". The 2029 target horizon, sixteen years from the policy's adoption, signals recognition that sustainability transformation requires sustained effort over extended timeframes.

The mission statement elaborates on the means through which this vision will be achieved: "To use sustainable tourism as a means to provide better employment and greater business opportunities for residents, to contribute to the protection of the state's unique natural and cultural heritage and to ensure the long-term prosperity and good quality of life to future generations in

Himachal Pradesh". This formulation explicitly links tourism to community benefit, heritage protection, and intergenerational equity—core principles of sustainable development.

The policy's five goals address branding, community benefit, visitor experience, investment environment, and human resource development. While these goals echo themes from the 2005 policy, their articulation within a sustainability framework introduces new emphases and priorities.

Goal 2 "To ensure sustainable tourism which primarily benefits host communities and supports natural and cultural heritage preservation," represents a particularly significant evolution. The 2005 policy had addressed community benefit and heritage preservation, but the 2013 formulation elevates these concerns to co-equal status with tourism growth. The policy language suggests that community benefit is not merely a desirable byproduct of tourism development but a central criterion for judging tourism's success.

The strategic framework organized under Goal 2 elaborates on community benefit mechanisms. These include facilitating locally-owned micro, small, and medium tourism enterprises; providing entrepreneurship development programs; identifying destinations based on community receptivity alongside tourism potential; extending and updating the homestay policy with stronger architecture preservation requirements; and increasing training accessibility for rural communities. The natural heritage preservation strategies outlined in the policy demonstrate growing sophistication in environmental governance. Proposals include inventorying ecological systems in key destinations, working with the State Pollution Control Board to establish environmental regulations, requiring environmental impact assessments in ecologically sensitive areas, coordinating with relevant departments to strengthen sustainable tourism standards, and motivating panchayats to protect the environment through incentives. The cultural heritage preservation strategies similarly reflect expanded ambition. The policy proposes mapping and inventorying material and intangible cultural heritage, establishing promotional mechanisms for heritage revival and protection, promoting local products and Himachali cuisine, and incentivizing cultural practices in destinations through panchayat engagement.

Goal 3 addresses visitor experience and destination safeguarding, introducing several innovative elements. These include prioritizing tours involving closer relations with host communities, developing Centers of Excellence for Handlooms and Handicrafts, improving visitor interpretation through enhanced signage, upgrading tourist information centers, and improving accessibility through transportation planning and ropeway development.

The health, safety, and security provisions in the 2013 policy expand upon earlier frameworks. Proposals include increasing trained police presence in key tourist sites, prohibiting tourist solicitation at transportation hubs, and regulating tourism activities according to seasonality. These measures reflect recognition that visitor safety and comfort are essential components of destination quality.

Goal 4's treatment of investment and private sector development reveals an important evolution in thinking about public-private partnerships. The policy proposes evaluating commercially viable projects on an open competitive tender basis, implementing fee programs based on willingness-to-pay measures, offering tax holidays for sustainable tourism projects in secondary areas, providing tax benefits for energy conservation and water saving technologies, and facilitating microfinance access for small enterprises.

The governance provisions in **Goal 5** represent perhaps the most sophisticated element of the 2013 policy. The proposed institutional architecture includes a strengthened Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Board serving as advisory and coordinative body, a Monitoring and Evaluation Cell at state level, Marketing Cells for priority markets, District-level Tourism Development Councils for implementation, and awareness programs for stakeholders at all levels.

Particularly innovative are the provisions for integrating sustainable tourism into educational curricula. The policy proposes encouraging universities to offer sustainable tourism courses, integrating sustainable tourism into primary school curriculum, incorporating sustainability into guide training, providing tourism training for taxi drivers, and offering skill-oriented courses for unemployed youth. These educational initiatives recognize that sustainable tourism transformation requires not only policy frameworks but also widespread cultural change and skill development. (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, The Sustainable Tourism Development Policy, 2013)

4.4 Strategic Consolidation: 2019 Policy (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, The Himachal Pradesh tourism Policy, 2019)

The 2019 Sustainable Tourism Development Policy represents the most comprehensive and strategically sophisticated iteration of Himachal's tourism policy framework. Building upon the sustainability foundations established in 2013, the 2019 policy introduces enhanced analytical depth, expanded thematic coverage, and more detailed implementation planning.

The policy's preface notes that tourist arrivals had increased from 16.15 million in 2012–2013 to 19.6 million in 2017–2018, observing that "the need of the hour, given our fragile ecosystem, is to ensure that this growth continues in a sustainable manner". This formulation echoes the 2013 policy while acknowledging continued growth pressure on the state's environmental and social fabric.

A significant innovation in the 2019 policy is its explicit articulation of linkages between state tourism policy and global frameworks, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals. The policy notes that it "has been framed to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly SDGs 8 and 12 through various objectives directed towards the socio-economic growth of host communities, offering quality experience to travellers, protection of the natural-cultural environment and state's destinations, and creating an investment friendly environment for private investors" explicit alignment with global frameworks demonstrates policy learning and integration of international best practices.

The vision statement articulates a refined ambition: "Positioning Himachal Pradesh as a leading global sustainable tourism destination for inclusive economic growth. The addition of "inclusive" to the economic growth formulation signals enhanced attention to distributional outcomes, building upon the community benefit focus of the 2013 policy.

The mission statement identifies four interconnected purposes: protection of natural and cultural heritage, improved quality of life and better employment opportunities, enhanced tourist experience, and innovation through private sector participation. This formulation maintains the sustainability focus while explicitly incorporating private sector innovation as a means rather than an end.

The guiding principles articulated in the policy—sustainable tourism, inclusive tourism, and Atithi Devo Bhava—provide normative foundations for policy implementation. The inclusive tourism principle, defined as intending "to reduce poverty by integrating disadvantaged groups, so that they can participate in and benefit from tourism activities" , represents a particularly significant commitment to social equity.

The thematic framework elaborated in the policy identifies ten tourism themes for development: ecotourism, agro/organic tourism, snow tourism, lake tourism, adventure tourism, pilgrimage tourism, cultural and heritage tourism, health and wellness tourism, film tourism, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing, Exhibitions) tourism. This expanded thematic portfolio, compared to the 2005 policy's thrust areas, reflects both product diversification and recognition of evolving tourist preferences.

A notable innovation in the 2019 policy is the inclusion of a table mapping theme-wise performance of districts and potential areas. This analysis identifies existing well-performing districts for each theme and potential districts for future development, providing an empirical foundation for targeted intervention. For example, the table identifies Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur as existing well-performing districts for eco-tourism, while identifying Kangra, Chamba, Mandi, Kullu, and Shimla as potential districts for eco-tourism expansion

The policy's strategic framework is organized around six objectives, each with associated strategies and action points categorized by timeframe (short-term: 0–3 years; medium-term: 3–5 years; long-term: 5–10 years). This temporal structuring represents a significant advance in implementation planning, translating broad strategic directions into concrete, time-bound actions.

Objective 1 addresses tourism diversification through theme-based development, with strategies encompassing product promotion, infrastructure optimization, and innovative marketing. The action points include both familiar initiatives—such as brand ambassador engagement, trade fair participation, and film tourism encouragement—and innovative elements, including GI tagging of key state products, merchandising initiatives, and sponsorship of national and international events

Objective 2 focuses on safeguarding destinations through sustainable interventions, with strategies encompassing guideline strengthening, carrying capacity-based planning, and green

practice encouragement. The carrying capacity provisions are particularly significant, proposing destination control mechanisms for pristine areas including Chandra Tal, Pin Valley, and the Great Himalayan National Park. Proposed measures include online permit systems, guided tours to monitor visitor activities, restricted vehicular use, and limited access for high-impact tourists with environmental compliance requirements

The green practices provisions address solid waste management, water conservation, energy conservation, equipment upgradation, and air pollution reduction. The policy proposes strict enforcement of water conservation techniques, effective wastewater treatment, and monitoring of commercial water connections

Objective 3 addresses community benefits through strategies including homestay registration strengthening, community-based tourism support, and year-round tourist engagement. The homestay provisions require compliance with existing guidelines, mandatory professional certification every three years, and online registration linking to the HPTDC website.

The community-based tourism support provisions include financial incentives for rural tourism development, funding for community-managed activities, microfinance facilitation for small enterprises, and prioritization of local residents—particularly women and minority groups—in training and employment. The long-term action point proposing an e-commerce portal for rural products and tourism taxi services demonstrates forward-thinking about digital platforms' potential to connect local producers with tourists.

Objective 4 addresses capacity building and human resource development, with strategies encompassing institutional strengthening and skill development programs. The institutional strengthening provisions include expanding the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Board to include thematic experts, technically strengthening district tourism offices, establishing a separate Monitoring and Evaluation division, and creating an inter-departmental convergence committee headed by the Chief Secretary.

The skill development provisions include preparation of a comprehensive Human Resource Development Plan, development of standardized training modules, certified capacity building programs for all districts, special training courses for women, apprenticeship programs, and training in local cuisine preparation and handicraft development

Objective 5 addresses safe, secure, and inclusive tourism, with strategies encompassing safety and security, trekking tourism master planning, cultural product promotion, accessibility improvement, and ICT integration. The safety provisions include developing a trekkers' safety app, strengthening adventure sports regulations, mandating certification for high-risk activity management, and developing disaster-resilient infrastructure.

The accessibility provisions address barrier-free tourism through pilot infrastructure upgradation for specially-abled visitors, tailored information for differently-abled tourists on the tourism website, and promotion of accessible tourism products and services

The ICT integration provisions are particularly detailed, proposing ICT-enabled Tourist Information Centres with state-of-the-art visualization techniques, digital screens promoting culture and heritage, smart ticketing features providing seamless travel across destinations, and pilot tourist smart guide apps for Shimla, Manali, and Dharamshala offering contextual recommendations based on tourist preferences

Objective 6 addresses investment environment creation, with strategies encompassing PPP-based development and single window system facilitation. The single window provisions reference the Himachal Pradesh Single Window (Investment, Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2018, proposing simplified processes for project approvals, time-bound and paperless procedures, and creation of a Tourism Facilitation and Investment Cell with thematic experts.

The incentives and concessions chapter of the 2019 policy provides detailed specifications of fiscal incentives for eligible tourism units. These include capital investment subsidies ranging from 5% to 10% of fixed capital investment with ceilings up to ₹3 crore, depending on project type and location category; viability gap funding for PPP projects through transparent bidding; infrastructure support for approach roads and water pipelines; stamp duty and registration fee reimbursements for large enterprises; additional incentives for Himachal bonafide entrepreneurs; manpower development subsidies; energy audit assistance scaled to BEE star ratings; and marketing support for participation in domestic and international events.

The detailed categorization of areas into A, B, and C categories, with Annexure II specifying which villages and towns fall into each category, demonstrates sophisticated spatial targeting of incentives. Category A areas—remote, lesser-known areas with tourism potential—receive the most favorable incentive treatment, reflecting policy intent to disperse tourism benefits beyond established destinations.

5. Comparative Analysis across Policy Iterations

5.1 Continuity and Change in Policy Objectives

Comparative analysis of the three complete policy documents reveals significant continuity in core objectives alongside progressive refinement and expansion. The 2005 policy's eight objectives, the 2013 policy's five goals, and the 2019 policy's six objectives share common concerns with destination branding, economic growth, community benefit, environmental protection, and investment facilitation. However, the articulation and prioritization of these concerns evolve significantly over time.

Destination branding appears consistently across all policies but with shifting emphases. The 2005 policy focuses on establishing Himachal as a leading tourist destination, with branding understood primarily as a marketing function. The 2013 policy elevates this to "global sustainable tourism destination," integrating sustainability into the brand identity. The 2019 policy's "leading global sustainable tourism destination for inclusive economic growth" adds the inclusion dimension, further expanding the brand's normative content.

Economic growth objectives similarly persist while evolving in formulation. The 2005 policy's ambitious mission to make tourism "the prime engine of economic growth" reflects a period when tourism was viewed as a potential lead sector for state development. The 2013 policy tempers this to "one of the prime engines of socioeconomic growth," acknowledging multiple development pathways while maintaining tourism's importance. The 2019 policy's "inclusive economic growth" adds distributional concerns to growth objectives.

Community benefit concerns, present but peripheral in the 2005 policy, assume centrality in both sustainability policies. The 2005 policy's Objective 4 addresses sustainable tourism benefiting rural people, but this appears alongside other objectives without particular emphasis. The 2013 policy elevates community benefit to a core goal, with detailed strategies for locally-owned enterprises, homestay development, and entrepreneurship programs. The 2019 policy further refines this through provisions for microfinance facilitation, women's prioritization, and e-commerce platforms for rural products.

Environmental protection follows a similar trajectory. The 2005 policy's Objective 6 addresses safeguarding natural and manmade heritage, with strategies including fee collection for conservation and heritage building preservation. The 2013 policy's Goal 2 integrates natural and cultural heritage preservation with community benefit, proposing sophisticated mechanisms including ecological inventorying, environmental impact assessments, and panchayat incentives. The 2019 policy's Objective 2 introduces carrying capacity-based planning, destination control mechanisms for pristine areas, and detailed green practice provisions.

5.2 Evolution of Strategic Approaches

Strategic approaches to achieving policy objectives exhibit significant evolution across the three policy iterations. Early strategies focused on infrastructure development and marketing promotion, while later strategies incorporate increasingly sophisticated interventions addressing governance, capacity building, and behavioral change.

Infrastructure development remains a consistent strategic concern but with evolving emphases. The 2005 policy's infrastructure provisions focus on physical infrastructure—roads, airports, hotels, and civic amenities—reflecting the basic development needs of a rapidly growing tourism sector. The 2013 policy expands this to include "soft" infrastructure such as tourist information centers, signage systems, and interpretation facilities. The 2019 policy introduces digital infrastructure—ICT-enabled information centers, smart guide apps, and e-commerce platforms—recognizing technology's transformative potential for tourist experience and local economic participation.

Marketing strategies exhibit similar evolution. The 2005 policy's marketing provisions—brochures, films, trade fair participation, and information centers—reflect conventional destination marketing approaches of the period. The 2013 policy introduces sustainability storytelling as a marketing theme, linking promotional efforts to the state's sustainability accomplishments. The

2019 policy expands this through brand ambassadors, GI tagging of state products, merchandising, and event sponsorships, demonstrating growing sophistication in marketing techniques.

Regulatory approaches evolve from basic registration mechanisms to comprehensive quality assurance systems. The 2005 policy's regulatory framework, building on the 2002 Registration Act, focuses on registration, inspection, and consumer protection. The 2013 policy introduces sustainable tourism criteria, quality ratings incorporating sustainability standards, and mandatory certification requirements. The 2019 policy strengthens this through thematic codes of conduct, strengthened statistical systems for monitoring, and periodic review and upgradation of guidelines.

5.3 Institutional Architecture Development

The institutional architecture for tourism governance exhibits progressive elaboration across policy iterations. The 2005 policy's institutional provisions focus on strengthening the Tourism Development Board, establishing District Tourism Development Councils, and creating coordination mechanisms with other departments. These provisions establish foundational institutional structures but provide limited detail on their functioning and resourcing.

The 2013 policy significantly expands institutional architecture, proposing a Monitoring and Evaluation Cell at state level, Marketing Cells for priority markets, formalized District-level inter-departmental teams, and enhanced coordination mechanisms. The policy also introduces provisions for stakeholder engagement, including mechanisms for community participation in planning and implementation.

The 2019 policy further refines institutional arrangements, proposing technical strengthening of district tourism offices with engineering wings, establishment of a separate Monitoring and Evaluation division, creation of an inter-departmental convergence committee headed by the Chief Secretary, and formation of a Tourism Facilitation and Investment Cell with thematic experts. These provisions demonstrate growing recognition that effective policy implementation requires dedicated institutional capacity across multiple levels and functions.

5.4 Sustainability Integration Deepening

The integration of sustainability principles into tourism policy deepens significantly across the three policy iterations. The 2005 policy mentions sustainability but treats it as one concern among many, with limited elaboration of what sustainability means in practice. The policy's treatment of environmental issues focuses primarily on preventing haphazard construction and managing waste, while social concerns address rural economic participation.

The 2013 policy represents a breakthrough in sustainability integration, organizing the entire policy framework around sustainable development principles. The policy explicitly defines sustainable tourism, references global sustainable development discourse, and structures goals and strategies around sustainability dimensions. The detailed treatment of environmental management, community benefit, and cultural heritage preservation demonstrates sophisticated understanding of sustainability's multiple dimensions.

The 2019 policy deepens this integration through explicit alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, carrying capacity-based planning, and detailed provisions for green practices. The policy's treatment of sustainability extends beyond environmental concerns to encompass social inclusion, economic equity, and cultural preservation, reflecting the holistic understanding of sustainability embodied in the SDG framework.

6. Structural Architecture of Tourism Policy

6.1 Policy Framework Components

Analysis of the three complete policy documents reveals a consistent structural architecture that has evolved in sophistication over time. Each policy comprises several core components that collectively constitute the policy framework.

- **Vision and mission statements** articulate the policy's fundamental purpose and direction. These statements have evolved from the 2005 policy's focus on economic growth through destination positioning to the 2019 policy's integration of sustainability, inclusivity, and global positioning. The increasing specificity and ambition of these statements reflect growing policy confidence and clarity about desired outcomes.
- **Situational analysis** component, most developed in the 2005 and 2019 policies, provides empirical grounding for policy interventions. The 2005 policy's SWOT analysis identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats with reasonable specificity. The 2019 policy's theme-wise district performance mapping provides more granular analysis enabling targeted intervention. This evolution toward evidence-based policy design represents significant analytical advance.
- **Goal and objective** structure organizes policy aspirations into manageable categories. The 2005 policy's eight objectives, the 2013 policy's five goals, and the 2019 policy's six objectives vary in number but address similar thematic areas. The 2019 policy's explicit linkage of objectives to SDGs demonstrates growing sophistication in framing state policy within global frameworks.
- **Strategy and action point** framework translates objectives into implementable interventions. The 2019 policy's temporal categorization of action points into short, medium, and long-term timeframes represents a significant advance in implementation planning, enabling prioritization and sequencing of interventions.
- **Incentive structure** provides fiscal and regulatory instruments for shaping tourism development. The progression from the 2005 policy's relatively simple incentive provisions—luxury tax exemption for small units, reduced electricity and water charges—to the 2019 policy's detailed subsidy schedules, viability gap funding mechanisms, and area-based incentive categorization demonstrates growing sophistication in policy instrument design.

6.2 Thematic Architecture

The thematic organization of tourism products has evolved from the 2005 policy's six thrust areas to the 2019 policy's ten tourism themes. This expansion reflects both product diversification and recognition of evolving tourist preferences.

The 2005 policy's thrust areas—rural tourism, eco-tourism, pilgrimage tourism, adventure tourism, unexplored destinations, and health tourism—established a diversified product portfolio that reduced dependence on conventional leisure tourism. Each thrust area received detailed treatment outlining development approaches and implementation mechanisms.

The 2019 policy's ten themes—ecotourism, agro/organic tourism, snow tourism, lake tourism, adventure tourism, pilgrimage tourism, cultural and heritage tourism, health and wellness tourism, film tourism, and MICE tourism—expand this portfolio while maintaining continuity with earlier themes. The addition of snow tourism, lake tourism, film tourism, and MICE tourism reflects emerging opportunities and market segments.

The mapping of themes to districts in the 2019 policy represents a significant advance in thematic planning. By identifying existing well-performing districts and potential districts for each theme, the policy provides a spatial framework for targeted intervention. This approach enables resource allocation based on comparative advantage while supporting geographic dispersal of tourism benefits.

6.3 Institutional Architecture

The institutional architecture for tourism governance has evolved from relatively simple structures to complex multi-level arrangements. Key institutional components include:

The **Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Board** serves as the apex advisory and coordinating body. The 2005 policy proposed strengthening the Board's resources through user charges, PPP project income, and lease revenues. The 2013 policy expanded the Board's role to include approving district action plans and coordinating policy, regulation, capacity development, and monitoring. The 2019 policy proposed including thematic experts in lake tourism, civil aviation, and adventure tourism to enhance Board capacity.

The **Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation** functions as the primary implementing agency. The 2019 policy's provisions for technically strengthening district offices with engineering wings, establishing a separate Monitoring and Evaluation division, and strengthening the statistical cell demonstrate recognition that departmental capacity requires continuous enhancement.

The **District Tourism Development Councils** provide decentralized implementation structures. The 2005 policy's brief reference to Tourism Councils under the Tourism Act 2000 evolves into the 2013 policy's proposal for formalized District-level inter-departmental teams and the 2019 policy's detailed provisions for strengthening district tourism development councils with district officers, industry representatives, and community representation.

The **inter-departmental convergence committee** addresses tourism's multi-sectoral nature. The 2019 policy's proposal for a committee headed by the Chief Secretary with the Secretary of

Tourism as member secretary creates a high-level coordination mechanism for activities requiring multiple department inputs—core infrastructure, safety and security, protected area tourism, religious tourism, waste management, and pollution control.

The **Tourism Facilitation and Investment Cell** provides dedicated capacity for investment promotion and facilitation. The 2019 policy's proposal for a cell with thematic experts, responsible for receiving applications and shepherding them through approval processes, addresses investor concerns about procedural complexity and delays.

6.4 Incentive Architecture

The incentive architecture for tourism development has evolved from relatively simple tax concessions to sophisticated multi-instrument frameworks. Key incentive categories include:

- **Capital investment subsidies** provide direct fiscal support for tourism unit establishment and expansion. The 2019 policy's graduated subsidies—5% of fixed capital investment up to ₹3 crore for hotels and resorts, 10% up to ₹50 lakhs for tented accommodation—reflect differentiated treatment based on project type and scale.
- **Area-based incentives** target investment to priority locations. The 2019 policy's categorization of areas into A, B, and C categories, with Category A (remote, lesser-known areas) receiving the most favorable treatment, operationalizes policy intent to disperse tourism development beyond established destinations.
- **PPP-specific provisions** address projects developed through public-private partnership. The 2019 policy's viability gap funding mechanism, with approval thresholds varying by funding amount (Director up to ₹50 lakhs, Minister up to ₹5 crore, Cabinet beyond), creates a structured process for supporting commercially marginal but socially desirable projects.
- **Infrastructure support** assists in approaching roads and water pipelines. The 2019 policy's 15% support up to specified ceilings addresses connectivity constraints that often impede tourism development in remote areas.
- **Manpower development subsidies** support workforce skill enhancement. The 2019 policy's 50% training cost reimbursement up to ₹10,000 per trainee, with employment retention requirements, links skill development to employment outcomes.
- **Energy audit assistance**, scaled to BEE star ratings, incentivizes environmental performance. The 2019 policy's assistance, ranging from 40% for 1-star ratings to 75% for 5-star ratings, creates financial motivation for energy efficiency improvement.
- **Marketing support** for event participation encourages promotional activity. The 2019 policy's space rent reimbursement up to specified limits for national and international events, and financial assistance for tourism mega-events, supports private sector promotional efforts.

7. Critical Evaluation and Implementation Challenges

7.1 Implementation Gaps

While policy documents articulate ambitious visions and detailed strategies, implementation has encountered significant challenges. Several factors contribute to implementation gaps.

- **Resource constraints** limit the scope and scale of policy implementation. The 2005 policy noted that "the total budget with the Department of Tourism is less in comparison to the other tourism-oriented States in the country" (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, 2005, p. 9). While later policies propose enhanced resourcing through Tourism Sub-Plans and PPP mechanisms, adequate funding remains a constraint on implementation capacity.
- **Coordination challenges** impede multi-sectoral policy implementation. Tourism development requires inputs from numerous departments—Public Works, Urban Development, Irrigation and Public Health, Forest, Transport, and others—each with its own priorities, procedures, and budgetary cycles. The inter-departmental convergence committee proposed in the 2019 policy addresses this challenge, but effective coordination remains difficult to achieve in practice.
- **Capacity limitations** affect implementation quality at multiple levels. District tourism offices often lack technical staff for project appraisal and monitoring. Local bodies may lack expertise in tourism planning and management. The 2019 policy's provisions for technical strengthening and capacity building acknowledge these limitations but implementation requires sustained effort over extended timeframes.
- **Monitoring and evaluation weaknesses** constrain adaptive management. While the 2013 and 2019 policies propose strengthening statistical systems and establishing monitoring cells, comprehensive data on tourism impacts, tourist profiles, and destination conditions remain limited. Without robust monitoring, evidence-based policy adjustment is difficult.

7.2 Complexities and Trade-offs

Tourism policy implementation confronts inherent complexities and trade-offs that require careful navigation.

- **Growth versus sustainability** complexities are perhaps most fundamental. The 2005 policy's ambition to make tourism "the prime engine of economic growth" sits uneasily with sustainability constraints. While later policies frame sustainability as enabling rather than constraining growth, the practical challenge of managing increasing tourist numbers within ecological limits remains acute. The 2019 policy's carrying capacity provisions for pristine areas acknowledge these complexities but implementation requires difficult decisions about access restrictions and visitor limits.
- **Quality versus quantity** trade-offs involve choices about tourist segments and volumes. The 2005 policy's aspiration "to attract quality tourist and to increase their stay in the State" (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, 2005, p. 5) reflects recognition that high-spending, longer-staying tourists generate greater economic benefit with lower

environmental impact than mass tourism. However, transitioning from volume to value requires market repositioning that may face resistance from established tourism businesses.

- **Private profit versus community benefit** complexities arise in benefit distribution. While policies increasingly emphasize community benefit, market forces tend to concentrate tourism gains in better-educated, better-capitalized segments of society. The 2019 policy's provisions for microfinance facilitation, women's prioritization, and local product e-commerce address this complexities but require sustained implementation effort.
- **Preservation versus access** dilemmas affect heritage and natural sites. The 2019 policy's proposal for restricted access to pristine areas with higher fees for low-impact, high-income tourists reflects Bhutanese practice, but such approaches raise equity concerns and may face political resistance.

7.3 Stakeholder Dynamics

Policy implementation involves multiple stakeholders with diverse interests and influence.

- **Private sector actors**—hotels, tour operators, transport providers, adventure sports operators—are central to tourism delivery. Their cooperation is essential for quality standards, sustainable practices, and employment generation. However, profit maximization incentives may conflict with sustainability objectives, requiring regulatory frameworks and incentive structures that align private interests with policy goals.
- **Host communities** are increasingly recognized as primary stakeholders whose support is essential for sustainable tourism. The 2013 and 2019 policies' emphasis on community benefit reflects recognition that tourism cannot thrive in communities that feel exploited or excluded. However, community interests are not monolithic, requiring attention to intra-community distributional dynamics.
- **Government agencies** at multiple levels—state, district, panchayat—shape implementation through their policies, programs, and administrative actions. Alignment across these levels is essential for coherent implementation but difficult to achieve given different mandates, capacities, and political dynamics.
- **Tourists themselves** are stakeholders whose preferences and behaviors shape tourism impacts. The 2019 policy's codes of conduct and visitor interpretation initiatives seek to influence tourist behavior, but effectiveness depends on tourist awareness and compliance.

7.4 Emerging Challenges

Several emerging challenges will shape future tourism policy development.

- **Climate change** poses existential threats to Himalayan tourism. Glacial retreat, changing snowfall patterns, and increased extreme weather events affect the very attractions—snow, lakes, forests, biodiversity—that draw tourists to the region. Adaptation strategies, including product diversification and infrastructure resilience, will be increasingly important.

- **Over-tourism** in popular destinations while other areas remain underdeveloped continues to strain infrastructure and ecosystems. The 2019 policy's thematic diversification and area-based incentives address this challenge, but redirecting tourist flows requires sustained marketing and infrastructure development in lesser-known areas.
- **Digital transformation** offers opportunities for enhanced tourist experience, local market access, and destination management. The 2019 policy's ICT provisions represent important first steps, but keeping pace with technological change requires continuous innovation and investment.
- **Post-pandemic recovery** presents both challenges and opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic devastated tourism globally, including in Himachal Pradesh. Recovery strategies must balance immediate economic imperatives with long-term sustainability goals, avoiding the temptation to sacrifice environmental standards for rapid revival.

8. Synthesis and Conclusions

The evolution of tourism policy in Himachal Pradesh from 1991 to 2019 reveals a trajectory of increasing sophistication, sustainability orientation, and strategic clarity. This policy evolution reflects both learning from experience and responsiveness to changing global and national contexts. Several patterns characterize this evolutionary trajectory.

- **Policy scope has progressively expanded** from initial focus on registration and regulation to comprehensive coverage of product development, marketing, infrastructure, human resources, investment facilitation, and destination management. Each policy iteration has added new dimensions while retaining core concerns from earlier frameworks.
- **Sustainability has moved from the periphery to the center.** The 2005 policy mentioned sustainability as one objective among many; the 2013 policy organized its entire framework around sustainable development principles; the 2019 policy explicitly aligned with global Sustainable Development Goals. This mainstreaming of sustainability represents a fundamental paradigm shift in tourism policy thinking.
- **Implementation mechanisms have grown more detailed and sophisticated.** The progression from the 2005 policy's general strategic directions to the 2019 policy's time-bound action points, detailed incentive structures, and comprehensive institutional provisions demonstrates learning about what makes policies implementable.
- **Stakeholder engagement has deepened.** Early policies focused primarily on government and private sector roles; later policies increasingly emphasize community participation, panchayat involvement, and benefit distribution to host communities. This evolution reflects recognition that sustainable tourism requires broad-based support and inclusive benefit-sharing.
- **Global integration has increased.** The 2019 policy's explicit reference to SDGs and its incorporation of international best practices—Bhutan's high-value, low-impact tourism

model, global sustainable tourism criteria—demonstrate growing engagement with global policy frameworks.

The structural architecture that has emerged from this evolution comprises interconnected components: vision and mission providing strategic direction; thematic frameworks organizing product development; institutional arrangements enabling governance; incentive structures shaping investment; and implementation plans guiding action. This architecture, refined over three policy iterations, provides a robust foundation for tourism governance.

However, significant challenges remain. Implementation gaps persist due to resource constraints, coordination difficulties, and capacity limitations. Complexities between growth and sustainability, quality and quantity, private profit and community benefit require continuous negotiation. Emerging challenges—climate change, over tourism, digital transformation, pandemic recovery—demand policy responses that build upon while extending existing frameworks.

9. Recommendations for Future Policy Development

Building upon the analysis presented in this paper, several recommendations emerge for future tourism policy development in Himachal Pradesh and similar mountain tourism destinations.

- **Strengthen implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.** While policies increasingly propose monitoring mechanisms, systematic evaluation of implementation outcomes remains weak. Future policy frameworks should include clear indicators, regular reporting requirements, and evaluation mechanisms that enable evidence-based policy adjustment. Independent evaluations at policy mid-term and conclusion would provide valuable learning for subsequent policy iterations.
- **Enhance carrying capacity management.** The 2019 policy's carrying capacity provisions for pristine areas should be expanded to encompass all major destinations. This requires investment in carrying capacity studies, development of visitor management systems, and willingness to implement access restrictions when thresholds are approached. Carrying capacity should be understood dynamically, responsive to changing environmental conditions and management capabilities.
- **Deepen community engagement mechanisms.** While policies increasingly emphasize community benefit, mechanisms for community participation in planning and decision-making remain underdeveloped. Future policies should strengthen panchayat roles in destination planning, establish community tourism committees with meaningful authority, and create grievance redress mechanisms for communities affected by tourism development.
- **Accelerate climate adaptation planning.** Climate change impacts on Himalayan tourism demand urgent attention. Future policies should include climate risk assessments for major destinations, adaptation strategies for vulnerable attractions, and diversification plans that

reduce dependence on climate-sensitive products. Integration with state climate change action plans is essential.

- **Leverage technology for inclusive development.** The 2019 policy's ICT provisions should be expanded to ensure that digital transformation benefits reach marginalized communities. This includes support for digital literacy among tourism micro-entrepreneurs, development of platforms connecting local producers directly with tourists, and use of technology for destination monitoring and visitor management.
- **Strengthen multi-level governance.** Effective tourism governance requires alignment across state, district, and panchayat levels. Future policies should clarify roles and responsibilities at each level, ensure adequate capacity and resources for implementation at all levels, and establish coordination mechanisms that enable coherent action while respecting local autonomy.
- **Invest in policy learning and adaptation.** Policy development should be understood as an ongoing process rather than a periodic exercise. This requires mechanisms for continuous learning—stakeholder consultations, research partnerships, study tours—that inform policy adjustment between formal policy iterations. Documentation and sharing of implementation experiences would support learning across districts and destinations.

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