

## Cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development: The role of community engagement, visitor's satisfaction and environmental awareness

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**Abstract:** This study examines the role of cultural tourism and place branding in fostering sustainable tourism development, focusing on community engagement, visitor satisfaction, and environmental awareness. Using Sustainable Development and Cultural Capital theories as the theoretical foundation, the research highlights the long-term benefits of tourism and the significance of local culture and heritage in achieving sustainable outcomes. A quantitative methodology was employed, utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze data collected from participants at a cultural festival in Takoradi, Ghana. The findings reveal that place branding significantly impacts sustainable development, both directly and indirectly, through visitor satisfaction. Additionally, cultural tourism promotes sustainable development via community engagement, with environmental awareness moderating the relationship between community engagement and sustainable development. This study offers valuable insights for policymakers and tourism practitioners, emphasizing the integration of cultural assets and community involvement in sustainable tourism strategies. By exploring the interplay between cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainability, the research adds a unique perspective to the field of sustainable tourism development.

**Keywords:** *Community engagement, Cultural tourism, Environmental awareness, Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), Place branding, Sustainable development, Visitor satisfaction.*

### 1. Introduction

Cultural tourism has increasingly been recognized as a significant driver of economic development, cultural preservation, and social cohesion (Cros & Mckercher, 2020). By attracting visitors interested in experiencing the cultural, historical, and artistic heritage of destinations, cultural tourism contributes to local economies and promotes intercultural understanding (Richards, 2018; Smith, 2009). Concurrently, place branding has emerged as a strategic tool for destinations to create unique identities, enhance their appeal, and differentiate themselves in a competitive tourism market (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). When integrated effectively, cultural tourism and place branding can significantly contribute to sustainable development, which aims to balance economic growth with social equity and environmental protection (UNWTO, 2017; Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Although the interconnections between cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development have been acknowledged in the literature, several gaps remain. First, there is limited empirical research examining the mediating roles of community engagement and visitor satisfaction in this relationship. Most existing studies focus on the direct impacts of cultural tourism on economic and social outcomes, without considering how these mediating factors influence the overall sustainability of tourism practices (Higgins – Desbiolles, 2018; Budeanu et al, 2016).

Furthermore, while environmental awareness is widely recognized as a crucial component of sustainable tourism, its moderating role in the relationship between cultural tourism and sustainable development has not been thoroughly investigated. Previous studies have primarily addressed environmental awareness as an isolated factor rather than examining how it interacts with other elements of tourism and place branding (Weaver & Lawton, 2007; Miller et al., 2010). Therefore, a need to ascertain the interplay between environmental awareness, cultural tourism, and sustainable development (Sharma & Sarkar, 2024; Lee & Hsieh, 2016).

Environmental awareness serves as a critical moderating variable in this dynamic. High levels of environmental awareness among both tourists and local communities can amplify the positive effects of cultural tourism by promoting responsible travel behaviors and sustainable tourism practices (Weaver & Lawton, 2007; Miller et al., 2010). Therefore, understanding how environmental awareness moderates the relationship between cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development is essential for developing effective tourism policies and practices.

The relationship between cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development is complex and multifaceted. Community engagement and visitor satisfaction are pivotal mediators that can enhance the positive impacts of cultural tourism and place branding on sustainable development. Community engagement ensures that local stakeholders actively participate in and benefit from tourism activities, fostering cultural preservation and social equity (Timothy, 2011; Duxbury & Campbell, 2011). Visitor satisfaction, on the other hand, influences repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth, contributing to the long-term viability and sustainability of tourism destinations (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Jensen et al, 2017; Purnami & Suryawardani, 2018).

This study contributes to extant literature by examining the mediating roles of community engagement and visitor satisfaction and the moderating role of environmental awareness in the relationship between cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development. By integrating these variables into the analysis, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which cultural tourism and place branding can drive sustainable development. The findings will offer valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners, enabling them to design and implement more effective strategies for promoting sustainable tourism that benefits both tourists and local communities.

The remainder of the study is arranged as follows, section 2 presents a literature review, theoretical framework, and hypotheses; section 3 discusses the research methodology; section 4 present empirical analysis, discussion, and implication and finally section 5 focuses on the conclusion and future direction of the study.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Cultural Tourism and Place Branding

In response to the heightened competition within the global tourism industry and the proliferation of destinations offering high-quality experiences, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) have increasingly turned to branding as a strategic tool. Effective branding is crucial for positioning a destination uniquely in the minds of consumers and potential visitors (Pike & Page, 2014). Destination branding entails the development and communication of a distinctive and appealing perception or image of the location, making it an indispensable instrument for destination cultivation (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017; Rather et al., 2021; Utama, 2023).

Destination branding serves multifaceted purposes, including cost reduction, visitor demographics alteration, behavioral modification of visitors, and enhancement of tourism offerings (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017). A comprehensive understanding of the branding and management processes is imperative for ensuring success in the tourism sector (Rather et al., 2021). Successful destination branding in the contemporary, globalized context hinges on collaborative efforts among various destination stakeholders, encompassing both public and private sectors (Pike & Page, 2014). Leveraging online content, community engagement, and strategic partnerships with brands that share similar values is essential in this endeavour, creating a synergistic effect that amplifies the impact of individual contributions.

Events play a pivotal role in destination branding efforts, serving as vehicles for brand marketing and enabling targeted marketing initiatives aimed at specific demographics or market segments. A destination may be perceived as a brand offering a diverse array of urban experiences, with significant events forming integral components of brand marketing strategies (Morgan et al., 2011). Beyond visual elements, the process of identity creation for a destination should aim to establish emotional connections with potential tourists. Strategic events that actively promote and attract visitors to the destination are instrumental in achieving this objective.

Cultural events, in particular, have witnessed significant growth in their role in tourism development as tourists increasingly seek authentic and unique experiences. Egypt, renowned for its rich historical and cultural heritage, is actively leveraging its assets to enhance its reputation and appeal as a travel destination (Morgan et al., 2011). This outcome underscores the importance of cultural encounters in attracting a segment of the market seeking enriching experiences, positioning cultural tourism as a cornerstone of Egypt's branding strategy.

In the contemporary context, cultural events, including festivals, are increasingly viewed as commodities with tangible economic benefits. These events, influenced by local culture and identity, play a significant role in attracting visitors and contributing to the branding of destinations (Hawkins, 2013). Cultural events, incorporating historic rites and traditional forms, serve as primary attractions for tourists, showcasing the unique heritage and authenticity of a destination (McCartney & Osti, 2007).

## *2.2. Impact of Cultural Tourism (Events) on Host Destination*

The tourist industry, which assists with events, creates job opportunities and promotes economic diversification. Cultural events have the potential to draw both tourists and investments to places. Events have a good influence in three interconnected domains: stimulating tourism, enhancing the reputation of the location, and providing assistance to the local community. Although the destination remains constantly accessible, the presence of a time-limited event serves as an incentive for people to seize the opportunity and visit the location during the event. For instance, while Brazil attracts a lot of attention from tourists, the renowned funfair in Rio de Janeiro generates a sense of exclusive opportunity, compelling prospective visitors to fully capitalize on the available attractions.

At events, visitors are afforded a distinct opportunity to engage with the local population, so enhancing their understanding of the atmosphere, traditions, and indigenous culture. In addition to tourists, events also draw journalists and other influential individuals. For these audiences, events serve as a 'media-event', enhancing the reputation of the venue and providing an opportunity for favourable media exposure. During events, places find it more convenient to showcase their positive aspects, directing the media's attention towards favourable incidents. Events provide an exceptional opportunity for the local population of the location to commemorate the local culture and engage with the community. The Oktoberfest in Munich is a well-established tradition for the city's people. It provides an opportunity for them to socialise with friends, celebrate Bavarian culture, and indulge in local cuisine (Avraham, E & Ketter, E, 2010).

Within the tourism sector, festivals have the potential to enhance the local community in two significant ways. Initially, individuals belonging to the indigenous culture are being complimented by the global fascination with their cultural heritage. This fosters a sense of pride among the population and encourages the conservation and nurturing of the local culture. Furthermore, the tourists and visitors are actively contributing to the local economy by spending money on various services and establishments such as restaurants, hotels, and other companies associated with tourism.

The societal marketing approach, as described by Kotler et al. (2008), highlights the significance of promoting the well-being of society while also meeting the requirements and desires of event or festival markets. Events play a crucial role in improving the reputation of communities and attracting tourists. Events facilitate the optimization and rationalisation of certain venues. Conserving these areas can lead to economic advantages and the spread of creative and cultural legacies. Events can serve as compelling attractions that incentivize both local and nonlocal travel, perhaps leading to a boost in tourism expenditure and duration of visit. Additionally, it can help in retaining residents and their financial resources inside the local area, rather having their choosing to travel elsewhere.

Additionally, events can serve as catalysts by organising specialised programmes in pre-existing establishments, such as theme parks, museums, and resorts, to maximise their utilisation. This offers the benefit of attracting those who might otherwise not visit the establishment and can also motivate them to make multiple trips. Significant events have the ability to shape the perception of a place by creating a distinct image, often influenced by the media coverage and publicity that it garners. Prior to undertaking efforts and investments to construct these events, it is imperative to evaluate the potential impact they may have. These evaluations are vital for the process of planning (Williams and Bowdin, 2007).

### *2.3. Cultural Tourism, Place Branding and Sustainable Development*

Cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development constitute integral components of modern destination management strategies, each exerting significant influence on the others. Cultural tourism involves travelers actively seeking immersive experiences that delve into the culture, heritage, and traditions of a destination (Richards, 2018). It represents a growing segment of the tourism industry, driven by the desire for authentic encounters and meaningful connections with local communities. Concurrently, effective place branding endeavors to craft a unique identity and image for a destination, harnessing its cultural assets to attract visitors (Sousa & Rocha, 2019; Vuignier, 2017). This branding process often entails collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, businesses, and local communities, to convey a coherent brand message and position the destination competitively in the global tourism market.

Furthermore, sustainable development principles underpin both cultural tourism and place branding initiatives, guiding them towards responsible and ethical practices that minimize negative impacts on the environment and maximize benefits for local communities (Streimikiene et al, 2021; Amerta et al, 2018). Sustainable tourism practices advocate for the conservation of natural resources, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the equitable distribution of economic benefits (Budeanu et al, 2016; UNWTO, 2017). By integrating sustainability considerations into destination management strategies, destinations can mitigate the adverse effects of tourism while capitalizing on its potential to drive economic growth and cultural exchange.

Understanding the intricate interplay between cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development is essential for effective destination management. By aligning these concepts synergistically, destinations can enhance their competitiveness, preserve their cultural and natural assets, and contribute to broader sustainable development goals (Pike & Page, 2014). Collaboration among stakeholders is paramount in this endeavor, facilitating the implementation of holistic strategies that prioritize sustainability and cultural authenticity (Dinnie, 2011). As destinations navigate the complexities of the tourism landscape, a comprehensive approach that integrates cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development principles will be instrumental in shaping their long-term success and resilience.

## **3. Theoretical Background**

### *3.1. Sustainable Development and Cultural Capital Theory*

The Study adopts the integration of Sustainable Development Theory and Cultural Capital Theory to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of destination management. Sustainable development theory, rooted in principles of environmental conservation, social equity, and economic viability, emphasizes the importance of balancing economic growth with environmental protection and social well-being (Shi et al, 2019; Enders & Remig, 2014). This theory guides destination stakeholders in adopting strategies that minimize negative impacts on natural resources, preserve cultural heritage, and promote community engagement.

Cultural capital theory, on the other hand, focuses on the significance of cultural assets and heritage in driving economic and social development (Davies & Rizk, 2018; Tan, 2017). According to this theory, cultural resources, such as historical sites, traditions, and artistic expressions, contribute to the identity and attractiveness of a destination, thereby enhancing its competitive advantage in the tourism market.

Cultural Capital Theory underscores the intrinsic value of cultural heritage and emphasizes the need for its preservation and promotion to sustain tourism development.

The rationale for adopting these theories lies in their complementary nature and their applicability to the multifaceted nature of destination management. Sustainable Development Theory provides a framework for addressing the environmental and social dimensions of tourism development, ensuring that tourism activities contribute to long-term environmental sustainability and community well-being. By integrating Cultural Capital Theory into this framework, destination stakeholders can leverage cultural assets to enhance destination branding, attract tourists seeking authentic experiences, and foster cultural exchange and understanding.

Moreover, the integration of these theories aligns with contemporary trends in destination management, which emphasize the importance of sustainable tourism practices and cultural authenticity. As destinations strive to differentiate themselves in the competitive tourism market, understanding the interplay between sustainable development and cultural capital becomes essential for developing effective strategies that promote destination competitiveness while preserving cultural and natural heritage.

### *3.2. Hypotheses Development*

#### *3.2.1. Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Development*

Cultural tourism, characterized by travelers seeking immersive experiences that delve into the culture, heritage, and traditions of a destination, is hypothesized to have a positive impact on sustainable development. Drawing upon sustainable development theory, which emphasizes the need to balance economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection, this hypothesis posits that cultural tourism can contribute to the achievement of sustainability goals in destination management.

Cultural tourism generates economic benefits for destination communities by stimulating local businesses, creating employment opportunities, and generating revenue through tourism-related activities (Richards, 2013). These economic benefits, when managed responsibly, can contribute to the socioeconomic development of communities, thereby enhancing their resilience and well-being (Mousavi et al, 2016). Moreover, cultural tourism fosters cultural exchange and understanding, promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual respect among visitors and host communities (Richards, 2018).

Furthermore, cultural tourism has the potential to support environmental conservation efforts by raising awareness about the importance of preserving natural and cultural heritage (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Through responsible tourism practices, such as minimizing carbon footprint, conserving natural resources, and supporting ecotourism initiatives, cultural tourism can contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). Additionally, cultural tourism often involves visits to historical sites, museums, and cultural events, which serve as platforms for educating visitors about environmental conservation and sustainable living practices.

Based on the theory above, Hypothesis 1 posits that cultural tourism, when managed sustainably, can have a positive impact on destination development by fostering economic growth, promoting cultural exchange, and supporting environmental conservation efforts. This hypothesis underscores the potential of cultural tourism as a driver of sustainable development, aligning with contemporary trends in destination management that prioritize sustainability and cultural authenticity.

*H<sub>1</sub>: Cultural tourism has a positive impact on the sustainable development of the host destination*

#### *3.3. Place Branding and Sustainable Development*

Place branding, which involves the strategic creation of a unique identity and image for a destination, is theorized to contribute to sustainable development goals by fostering economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship. Place branding plays a crucial role in attracting tourists, investors, and residents to a destination, thereby stimulating economic development (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). By highlighting a destination's unique cultural heritage, natural attractions, and quality of life, place branding efforts can enhance its competitiveness in the global marketplace, attracting visitors and investment opportunities (Pike & Page, 2014). This economic

growth, when managed responsibly, can generate revenue for local businesses, create job opportunities, and improve living standards for residents, contributing to the overall prosperity of the destination.

Moreover, place branding can foster social cohesion and community pride by promoting a sense of belonging and identity among residents (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014; Richards, 2017). By showcasing a destination's cultural assets and heritage, place branding initiatives can strengthen social ties, celebrate diversity, and preserve local traditions, thereby enhancing social well-being and cultural vibrancy (Wynn & Yetis-Bayraktar, 2016). Additionally, place branding can empower local communities by involving them in the destination's branding process, fostering collaboration and collective action towards common goals (Pike & Page, 2014).

Furthermore, place branding can support environmental sustainability efforts by promoting responsible tourism practices and environmental stewardship (Garanti et al, 2024). By emphasizing a destination's commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable living, place branding initiatives can raise awareness about environmental issues and encourage visitors to engage in eco-friendly behaviors (Golestaneh et al, 2022). Additionally, place branding can attract environmentally conscious tourists and investors who prioritize destinations that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability, thereby incentivizing sustainable development practices.

Effective place branding initiatives have the potential to contribute to sustainable development by fostering economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship in destination management. This hypothesis underscores the importance of place branding as a strategic tool for achieving sustainability goals and enhancing the long-term viability of destinations.

*H<sub>2</sub>: Place branding has a positive impact on the sustainable development of the host destination*

### *3.4. The Mediating Effect of Community Engagement on Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Development*

Hypothesis 3 proposes that community engagement mediates the relationship between cultural tourism and sustainable development in destination management. Community engagement refers to the active involvement of residents, businesses, and organizations in decision-making processes and development initiatives that affect their lives and livelihoods (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). In the context of cultural tourism, community engagement plays a crucial role in shaping the impact of tourism activities on local communities and the broader destination.

Cultural tourism, characterized by visitors seeking authentic cultural experiences, often relies on the participation and support of local communities to provide unique insights, hospitality, and cultural exchanges (Richards, 2018). As tourists interact with residents, businesses, and cultural practitioners, they contribute to the local economy, promote cultural preservation, and foster cross-cultural understanding (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). However, the extent to which cultural tourism benefits local communities depends on the level of community engagement and empowerment in destination management processes.

Community engagement acts as a mediator in the relationship between cultural tourism and sustainable development by facilitating dialogue, collaboration, and shared decision-making among stakeholders (Richards, 2018). Engaged communities are more likely to actively participate in tourism planning, advocate for their interests, and ensure that tourism development aligns with local values, needs, and aspirations (Moric et al, 2021; Rahman & Baddam, 2021). Through community engagement, residents can voice their concerns, negotiate benefits, and influence tourism policies and practices to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative impacts on their communities and the environment.

Moreover, community engagement fosters a sense of ownership and stewardship among residents, encouraging them to take pride in their cultural heritage, protect natural resources, and support sustainable tourism initiatives. Engaged communities are more likely to develop sustainable tourism products and experiences that showcase their unique cultural identity and promote responsible tourism practices (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Salazar, 2017). By mediating the relationship between cultural tourism and sustainable development, community engagement enhances the resilience, inclusivity, and long-term viability of destinations.

*H<sub>3</sub>: Community engagement positively mediates the relationship between cultural tourism and sustainable development in the host destination.*

### 3.5. *The Mediating Effect of Visitor Satisfaction on Place Branding and Sustainable Development*

Visitor satisfaction refers to the degree to which tourists' expectations are met or exceeded during their visit to a destination (Oh, Fiore, & Jeong, 2007). It serves as a crucial indicator of the effectiveness of place branding efforts in shaping tourists' perceptions and experiences. Place branding initiatives aim to create a distinctive identity and image for a destination, highlighting its unique cultural heritage, natural attractions, and quality of life (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). By shaping tourists' expectations and influencing their perceptions, place branding can enhance visitor satisfaction and loyalty, thereby driving positive outcomes for sustainable development.

Visitor satisfaction acts as a mediator in the relationship between place branding and sustainable development by influencing tourists' behaviors, attitudes, and intentions (Oh, Fiore, & Jeong, 2007). Satisfied visitors are more likely to recommend the destination to others, return for future visits, and engage in positive word-of-mouth communication, thereby contributing to destination reputation and brand equity (Kim, Vogt, & Knutson, 2015). Moreover, satisfied visitors are more likely to support sustainable tourism practices, such as responsible behavior, conservation efforts, and local community engagement, as they feel a sense of attachment and commitment to the destination (Garanti et al, 2024; Zenker et al, 2017).

Furthermore, visitor satisfaction enhances destination competitiveness and attractiveness, leading to increased tourism revenues, investment opportunities, and economic growth. Satisfied visitors are more likely to spend more, stay longer, and patronize local businesses, thereby contributing to the local economy and livelihoods of residents. Additionally, visitor satisfaction fosters positive relationships between tourists and local communities, leading to mutual understanding, cultural exchange, and social cohesion, which are essential for sustainable development.

*H<sub>4</sub>: Visitor satisfaction mediates the relationship between place branding and sustainable development in destination management.*

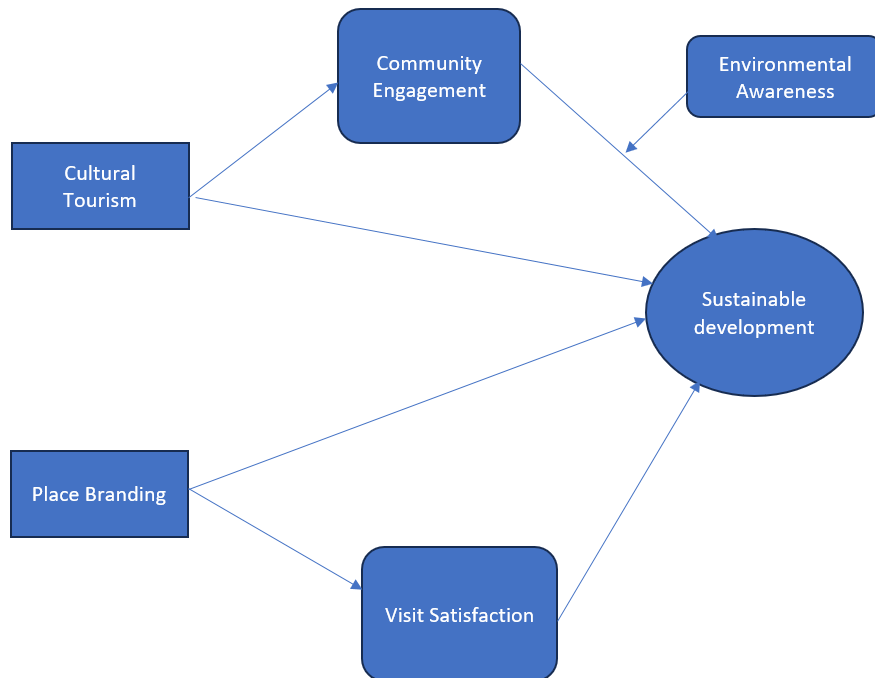
### 3.6. *Moderating Effect of Environmental Awareness*

Environmental awareness refers to individuals' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding environmental issues and conservation efforts (Schultz, 2001). Community engagement involves the active involvement of residents, businesses, and organizations in decision-making processes and development initiatives that affect their lives and livelihoods (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). Sustainable development encompasses economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection, aiming to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The moderating effect of environmental awareness suggests that individuals' level of environmental consciousness influences the strength and direction of the relationship between community engagement and sustainable development. Highly environmentally aware communities are more likely to prioritize environmental protection, conservation efforts, and sustainable living practices in their decision-making processes and development initiatives (Schultz, 2001). Therefore, the positive impact of community engagement on sustainable development may be amplified in communities with higher levels of environmental awareness.

Conversely, communities with lower levels of environmental awareness may be less inclined to prioritize environmental concerns in their development strategies, potentially limiting the effectiveness of community engagement initiatives in driving sustainable development outcomes. The moderating effect of environmental awareness highlights the importance of considering communities' environmental attitudes and behaviors in destination management strategies.

*H<sub>5</sub>: Environmental awareness moderates the association between community engagement and sustainable development in the host destination.*



**Figure 1:**  
Conceptual model.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research approach, which is suitable for examining relationships between variables in a structured and statistically measurable manner. The research seeks to understand how community engagement, visitor satisfaction, and environmental awareness influence the broader context of cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development. A quantitative method allows for the use of numerical data, which can be analyzed to uncover trends, correlations, and the strength of associations between these key constructs (Mehrad & Zangeneh, 2019).

The study utilizes a cross-sectional survey design, a widely used approach in social research that involves collecting data from a sample population at a single point in time. This design is ideal for capturing a snapshot of the current attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of both tourists and local community members regarding cultural tourism and sustainable practices. The advantage of this design is that it allows the researcher to explore and analyze multiple variables concurrently (Bryman, 2016).

By conducting a cross-sectional survey, the study can assess how individuals perceive the role of cultural tourism in sustainable development. Furthermore, the design enables the identification of possible relationships between the independent variables (community engagement, visitor satisfaction, environmental awareness) and the dependent variable (sustainable development outcomes), without the need for longitudinal data collection. Given the time and resource constraints, a cross-sectional study provides a practical and efficient means to gather data and generate insights that can inform policy recommendations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

### 4.2. Sampling and Data Collection

The population for this study consists of individuals attending the Masquerade Festival (Ankos) in Takoradi, Ghana, a vibrant cultural event that attracts a diverse group of participants, including local residents, tourists, and event organizers. The festival provides an ideal context for examining the role of community engagement, visitor satisfaction, and environmental awareness in cultural tourism and sustainable development.



To ensure the sample was representative of the festival's diverse population, a random sampling technique was employed. Random sampling was chosen to reduce bias and provide a fair chance for all individuals attending the festival to be included in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A total of 258 individuals were sampled, with the sample size determined using Cochran's formula (Cochran, 1977), ensuring sufficient statistical power for generalizing the findings. The sample included both key informants, such as festival organizers, community leaders, and local vendors, as well as tourists and general attendees.

The data collection took place over a period of two months, coinciding with key moments of the festival to capture a wide range of participant experiences. The extended period allowed for data to be collected at various stages of the festival, ensuring that different segments of the population, including early and late attendees, were represented. This also gave the researchers ample time to follow up with respondents who were not immediately available during the festival period.

Data was collected using structured questionnaires, which were distributed both in-person and online. In-person data collection occurred during the festival, with trained research assistants approaching festival-goers at key locations, such as event entrances, performance areas, and local vendor stalls. This on-the-ground approach helped gather real-time insights from attendees and key informants, while ensuring high response rates.

The use of random sampling and a two-month data collection period helped ensure that the responses were varied and reflective of different perspectives, enhancing the reliability of the study's findings (Bryman, 2016). This approach provided a comprehensive snapshot of how the festival contributes to cultural tourism and sustainable development in the Takoradi area.

#### 4.3. Data Analysis

The data for this study were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), a multivariate analysis technique well-suited for examining complex relationships between latent constructs and observed variables. PLS-SEM was selected because it focuses on prediction and theory-building, enabling the exploration of how community engagement, visitor satisfaction, and environmental awareness influenced cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development (Hair et al., 2017). This method was particularly appropriate for this research, as it effectively handled the relatively small sample size of 258 respondents and the non-normal distribution of the data (Sarstedt et al., 2017).

The analysis proceeded in two stages: measurement model assessment and structural model assessment. The measurement model was evaluated for reliability and validity, using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha to check internal consistency. Convergent and discriminant validity were assessed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE); the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait Monotrait ratio (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2014). In the structural model assessment, path coefficients were calculated through bootstrapping to evaluate the strength and significance of the relationships. R-squared ( $R^2$ ) values were used to determine the variance explained by the independent variables, while effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) were measured to further assess the model's explanatory power (Cohen, 1988). By applying PLS-SEM, the study successfully tested its hypotheses and provided insights into how cultural tourism at the Masquerade Festival in Takoradi contributed to sustainable development.

#### 4.4. Measurement Items

The study examines the relationships between cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development, with a specific focus on community engagement, visitor satisfaction, and environmental awareness. The measurement items for each of these constructs were designed based on existing literature to ensure validity and reliability. Community engagement refers to the active involvement of local residents and stakeholders in tourism-related activities and decision-making. This construct will be measured using a series of items adapted from previous studies on tourism and community involvement (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2009). Respondents will rate their agreement with statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Example items include: "Local

communities are actively involved in the planning and development of tourism activities." "Community members benefit economically from the tourism industry in our area." "Tourism initiatives in the community reflect local culture and traditions."

Visitor satisfaction is a critical determinant of tourism success and long-term sustainability. It refers to the degree to which tourists' expectations and experiences are met. The measurement of visitor satisfaction will be adapted from established frameworks used in tourism research (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Respondents will evaluate their level of satisfaction with various aspects of their cultural tourism experience on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Dissatisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied). Example items include: "I am satisfied with the cultural experiences provided during the festival." "The hospitality of the local community met my expectations." "The facilities and amenities at the festival were adequate for visitors' needs."

Environmental awareness in tourism relates to the knowledge and attitudes of both tourists and community members regarding the impact of tourism on the environment. This construct will be measured using items adapted from research on sustainable tourism and environmental consciousness (Han et al., 2017). Respondents will rate their agreement with statements about the importance of sustainability on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Example items include: "The festival promotes environmentally friendly practices." "I am aware of the environmental impact of my participation in the festival." "Environmental protection is a priority in the cultural tourism activities I engage in."

Sustainable development refers to tourism practices that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The measurement of sustainable development will be adapted from previous work on the sustainability of tourism initiatives (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Respondents will evaluate sustainability practices in relation to the festival on a 5-point Likert scale. Example items include: "The festival contributes to the long-term economic development of the community." "Tourism activities at the festival support cultural preservation." "Environmental conservation is integrated into the festival's activities."

Place branding refers to the way in which a destination's image is communicated and perceived, particularly in the context of tourism. This construct will be measured using items adapted from research on place branding in tourism (Zenker & Martin, 2011). Respondents will be asked to rate their perceptions of the festival and the city's image on a 5-point Likert scale. Example items include: "The festival enhances the image of Takoradi as a cultural tourism destination." "I would recommend Takoradi as a cultural tourism destination to others." "Takoradi's cultural tourism offerings are well-promoted and attract international visitors."

#### 4.5. Research Context: Sekondi-Takoradi

Sekondi-Takoradi is a metropolis situated in the Western Region of Ghana. This is a constituent region among the 16 administrative divisions of the country, situated in the southwestern region adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean. The territory of the region spans 13,842 square kilometres. The 2021 population census conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service indicates that the city has a population of around two million individuals, accounting for around 6.7% of Ghana's total population. Sekondi-Takoradi functions as the administrative hub for the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly, which is Ghana's third most populous urban area, following Accra and Kumasi, with a population of 726,905 residents. Sekondi-Takoradi is mostly renowned for its fishing industry, which has been a longstanding cultural practice among the indigenous population in this area.

Takoradi Port, located in the city, is a substantial fishing harbour that functions as a landing point for fishing vessels and a marketplace for fishmongers and dealers. The port, which is the largest in Ghana, manages a significant proportion of the seafood caught in the Gulf of Guinea. Additionally, it serves as a gateway for both Ghana and the adjacent landlocked countries, functioning as a point of entry and departure. Aside from its fishing activities, this city serves as a prominent industrial and economic centre, hosting numerous oil and gas enterprises. Consequently, it plays a crucial role as a centre for Ghana's industrial sector. Sekondi-Takoradi is renowned for its historical and cultural

landmarks. The city is home to several landmarks dating back to the colonial era, most notably the Railway Museum and Sekondi-Takoradi Fort.

The city is also home to the Western Regional Museum, which showcases the historical and cultural heritage of the Western Region. Sekondi-Takoradi boasts a diversified population and a vibrant nightlife and entertainment scene, featuring numerous taverns, restaurants, and clubs. Benefiting from efficient rail and road networks, the city functions as a pivotal transportation centre for the Western Region of Ghana. Ghana's Western Region possesses significant tourism potential due to its natural features, cultural history, and historical sites.

#### 4.6. *The Masquerade Festival (Ankos)*

The masquerade culture has a crucial role in representing the historical and cultural essence of Sekondi-Takoradi. It represents the historical, artistic, and contextual visual identity. The masquerade culture embodies and represents specific aspects of their cultural identities and traditions. The citizens' visual awareness and appreciation for the arts manifested in meticulously produced performance costumes, accompanied by precisely planned dances and regimented performances. This fundamental cultural manifestation comprises the majority of the material culture of the population. The Sekondi-Takoradi masquerade, commonly referred to as Ankos, is a communal festivity that holds significant importance within the social structure. Oral history indicates that the Ankos tribe in Sekondi-Takoradi is considered one of the original groups. The guardians of the cultural heritage affirmed that the Sekondi-Takoradi masquerade had its origins in Saltpond, dating back to the year 1956. The masquerade is commonly referred to as Ankos, which is also the formal designation for the inaugural masquerade ensemble. Historical records suggest that individuals from Takoradi journeyed to Saltpond in order to procure and convey masquerade attire for Christmas festivities.

Oral history recounts that the masquerade tailors from Saltpond travelled to Takoradi in order to provide training to the Ankos groups on the art of crafting their own unique masquerade attire. Another perspective also proposes a potential impact from Winneba's masquerade culture. Nevertheless, a meticulous examination of costume components, fashion, and overall perspective indicates and confirms certain fundamental attributes akin to those of the Saltpond masquerade displays. The practice of masquerading in Sekondi-Takoradi involved the masquerades wearing stylish fabrics and embellishing them with vibrant motifs, inspired by the costume idea from Saltpond. The intricately patterned textiles are detached from the underlying fabric, which is subsequently utilised for everyday clothing. The formation of offshoot groups occurred when the first mother organisation, Ankos, grew in size, prompting the creation of additional groups (clubs) in other local neighbourhoods. Each of these clubs have distinct clothing designs that distinguished them from one another. Due to the sanctity associated with costume design and production, masquerade organisations faced significant challenges in obtaining information about the design concept of other groups that were unveiled annually on December 25th. The rationale for this was that each group had a skilled tailor who derived the design concept from geometric representations, natural elements such as flowers or animals, or other zoomorphic figures.

The culture highly values and preserves the tradition of keeping folklore secret. Should an individual be apprehended donning their attire sans a facial covering, they shall be subjected to public retribution at the hands of the group's leader. Any individual who publicly displays the outfit prior to the designated date will face expulsion from the group. It is mandatory to wear the uniform costume at the group meeting on the day of the performance. This measure ensures that the outfit's beauty and distinctiveness are protected from other rival masquerade groups.

The practice of Ankos (masquerade) is widely adopted by a significant number of residents in Sekondi-Takoradi, located in the Western region of Ghana. The Christmas festivities in the twin city of Sekondi-Takoradi are always accompanied by a vibrant masquerade procession that traverses the main streets, accompanied by brass band music and captivating dances that captivate the onlookers. The culture showcases distinctive choreographic abilities, vibrant attire crafted by various designers, and masks ranging from simplistic to menacing forms. The masquerade festivities in Sekondi-Takoradi involve more than just masqueraders dancing to brass band music. They also serve as a means of internalising the values of shared humanity, friendliness, and generosity. Supporters, spectators, and

admirers contribute to the actors' Christmas gratuity receptacles as a means of recognising their expertise in the art of masquerade.

## 5. Empirical Analysis

### 5.1. Profile of Respondents

#### Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Excess kurtosis	Skewness
Cultural tourism				
CT1	3.731	1.247	-0.305	-0.724
CT2	4.089	1.081	1.136	-1.221
CT4	4.051	1.073	0.086	-0.930
CT5	3.785	1.002	-0.666	-0.320
CT6	3.519	1.189	-0.535	-0.414
CT7	3.392	1.163	-0.457	-0.472
CT8	3.823	1.199	-0.441	-0.728
Place branding				
PB1	3.810	1.032	-0.189	-0.593
PB2	4.063	0.998	0.641	-0.986
PB3	3.861	1.016	-0.838	-0.305
PB4	4.038	0.987	0.505	-0.884
PB5	3.949	1.066	-0.570	-0.664
PB6	3.899	1.109	-0.427	-0.704
PB7	4.025	1.031	0.118	-0.829
PB8	3.987	0.961	-0.290	-0.585
Sustainable development				
SUD1	3.658	1.042	-0.527	-0.295
SUD2	3.570	1.166	-0.330	-0.465
SUD3	3.709	1.203	-0.228	-0.750
SUD4	3.316	1.228	-1.034	-0.046
SUD5	3.329	1.111	-0.680	-0.123
SUD6	3.658	0.953	0.008	-0.332
SUD7	3.506	0.979	-0.279	-0.265
SUD8	3.430	1.087	-0.438	-0.209
Community Engagement				
CE1	2.962	1.227	-0.910	0.032
CE2	3.380	1.023	-0.594	-0.029
CE3	3.544	1.053	-0.076	-0.451
CE4	3.291	1.149	-0.656	-0.239
CE5	3.329	1.088	-0.610	-0.211
CE6	3.747	1.141	-0.537	-0.577
CE7	3.772	1.055	-0.469	-0.451
Visitor's Satisfaction				

VS1	3.785	1.075	0.234	-0.739
VS2	3.962	0.999	0.404	-0.854
VS3	3.519	0.926	0.068	-0.154
VS4	4.025	0.795	1.082	-0.662
VS5	4.013	0.934	0.912	-0.880
VS6	4.165	0.947	0.701	-1.068
VS7	4.177	0.911	2.080	-1.286
Environmental Awareness				
EA1	4.038	0.974	-0.271	-0.665
EA2	4.152	0.969	1.222	-1.164
EA3	3.671	1.076	-0.402	-0.362
EA4	4.177	0.965	0.905	-1.057
EA5	3.671	1.111	-0.529	-0.443
EA6	4.013	1.025	0.290	-0.889

### 5.2. Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model assessment for this study was conducted to evaluate the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs used to measure community engagement, visitor satisfaction, environmental awareness, cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development. Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with all constructs showing high internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values ranged between 0.868 and 0.929, while CR values ranged from 0.898 to 0.942, well above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the measurement items were consistent and reliable across the data (Hair et al., 2019).

For convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were above 0.50, ranging from 0.562 to 0.669, signifying that the latent constructs explained a sufficient proportion of variance in their respective indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Discriminant validity was assessed using two methods: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The Fornell-Larcker analysis showed that the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs, suggesting that each construct was distinct from the others. Additionally, the HTMT ratios were all below the recommended cutoff of 0.90, further verifying that there was no issue of overlap between constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). These assessments confirmed that the constructs were both reliable and valid, making them suitable for testing the study's structural model and hypotheses.

**Table 1.**  
Reliability and validity.

	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>Composite reliability (rho_a)</b>	<b>Composite reliability (rho_c)</b>	<b>Average variance extracted (AVE)</b>
Community engagement	0.905	0.909	0.925	0.639
Cultural tourism	0.868	0.892	0.898	0.562
Environmental awareness	0.887	0.898	0.913	0.638
Place branding	0.929	0.931	0.942	0.669
Sustainable development	0.914	0.921	0.930	0.626
Visitors satisfaction	0.880	0.891	0.907	0.583

**Table 2.**  
Discriminant validity - Hetrotrait Monotrait ratio.

	<b>Community engagement</b>	<b>Cultural tourism</b>	<b>Environmental awareness</b>	<b>Place branding</b>	<b>Sustainable development</b>	<b>Visitors satisfaction</b>
Community engagement						
Cultural tourism	0.429					
Environmental awareness	0.544	0.723				
Place branding	0.570	0.704	0.751			
Sustainable development	0.789	0.474	0.646	0.703		
Visitors satisfaction	0.582	0.773	0.934	0.871	0.712	

**Table 3.**  
Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

	<b>Community engagement</b>	<b>Cultural tourism</b>	<b>Environmental awareness</b>	<b>Place branding</b>	<b>Sustainable development</b>	<b>Visitors satisfaction</b>
Community Engagement	0.799					
Cultural Tourism	0.389	0.750				
Environmental Awareness	0.488	0.647	0.799			
Place Branding	0.521	0.647	0.682	0.818		
Sustainable Development	0.726	0.442	0.607	0.657	0.791	
Visitors Satisfaction	0.528	0.695	0.817	0.796	0.662	0.763

### 5.3. Factor Loading

The outer loadings of the measurement model in this study reflect the strength of the relationships between the observed indicators and their corresponding latent constructs. For Community Engagement, the loadings range from 0.692 to 0.872, with most items exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70. Although CE7 has a loading of 0.692, which is slightly below the ideal threshold, it may still be retained if it contributes to the overall model's validity (Hair et al., 2019). Cultural Tourism has loadings ranging from 0.561 to 0.829. Most indicators are acceptable, but CT6 (0.561) falls below the recommended threshold, indicating it may be a weaker measure of the construct and could be

considered for removal (Henseler et al., 2015). For Environmental Awareness, all loadings range between 0.721 and 0.892, demonstrating strong measurement reliability.

Similarly, Place Branding loadings are all above 0.70, ranging from 0.735 to 0.860, showing that the indicators effectively measure this construct. For Sustainable Development, most loadings are acceptable, though SUD2 (0.640) falls below the threshold, indicating a weaker relationship with the construct. Finally, Visitor Satisfaction loadings, ranging from 0.742 to 0.826, show strong relationships with their respective indicators. Overall, the majority of indicators across the constructs exhibit strong outer loadings, suggesting that the measurement model is reliable. While a few items, like CT6 and SUD2, fall slightly below the preferred loading values, they can still be retained depending on their impact on the model's overall performance. Table 4 presents outcome of factor loadings for the study.

**Table 4.**  
Outer loadings.

	<b>Community engagement</b>	<b>Cultural tourism</b>	<b>Environmental awareness</b>	<b>Place branding</b>	<b>Sustainable development</b>	<b>Visitors satisfaction</b>
CE2	0.791					
CE3	0.809					
CE4	0.825					
CE5	0.872					
CE6	0.851					
CE7	0.792					
CE8	0.742					
CT1		0.731				
CT2		0.819				
CT4		0.829				
CT5		0.814				
CT6		0.861				
CT7		0.760				
CT8		0.790				
EA1			0.729			
EA2			0.813			
EA3			0.776			
EA4			0.892			
EA5			0.721			
EA6			0.849			
PB1				0.811		
PB2				0.860		
PB3				0.833		
PB4				0.855		
PB5				0.782		
PB6				0.735		
PB7				0.826		
PB8				0.834		
SUD1					0.753	
SUD2					0.840	
SUD3					0.744	
SUD4					0.813	
SUD5					0.809	
SUD6					0.852	

SUD7					0.868	
SUD8					0.828	
VS1						0.755
VS2						0.746
VS3						0.817
VS4						0.742
VS5						0.826
VS6						0.763
VS7						0.783

#### 5.4. Correlation Analysis

Community Engagement is positively associated with Cultural Tourism ( $r = 0.389$ ), indicating that higher community involvement is linked to an increased focus on cultural tourism activities, though the relationship is moderate (Putnam, 2000). Community Engagement also shows a moderate positive association with Environmental Awareness ( $r = 0.488$ ), suggesting that communities that are more engaged in local development initiatives tend to show higher levels of environmental consciousness (Eugenio – Vela et al, 2020). Additionally, Community Engagement has a moderate positive relationship with Place Branding ( $r = 0.521$ ), meaning that engaged communities are more likely to contribute to the branding of their local areas (Anholt, 2007). A strong positive association exists between Community Engagement and Sustainable Development ( $r = 0.726$ ), highlighting that communities involved in tourism are more likely to embrace practices that promote long-term sustainability (Mba, 2019). Moreover, Community Engagement has a moderate positive association with Visitors Satisfaction ( $r = 0.528$ ), implying that engaged communities are more successful in meeting the expectations of tourists (McKercher & Lew, 2003).

Cultural Tourism is strongly associated with Environmental Awareness ( $r = 0.647$ ), indicating that cultural tourism activities often promote environmental awareness, particularly in destinations where local traditions are tied to environmental sustainability (Hall & Gössling, 2013). It also has a strong positive association with Place Branding ( $r = 0.647$ ), suggesting that cultural tourism plays a significant role in enhancing the reputation and branding of a destination (Pritchard & Morgan, 2001). The relationship between Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Development is moderate ( $r = 0.442$ ), reflecting that while cultural tourism contributes to sustainability, it needs complementary factors to achieve full sustainability (Lane, 2009). The relationship between Cultural Tourism and Visitors Satisfaction is also strong ( $r = 0.695$ ), emphasizing that well-executed cultural tourism initiatives contribute significantly to a positive visitor experience (Richards, 2011).

In terms of Environmental Awareness, the positive association with Place Branding ( $r = 0.682$ ) underscores the role of environmental awareness in the promotion of a destination's image (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Environmental Awareness also has a moderate positive association with Sustainable Development ( $r = 0.607$ ), indicating that environmentally conscious communities are more likely to engage in sustainable tourism practices (Gössling, 2018). Furthermore, Environmental Awareness strongly influences Visitors Satisfaction ( $r = 0.817$ ), suggesting that visitors who experience a destination that values environmental sustainability are more likely to be satisfied.

Place Branding is strongly associated with Sustainable Development ( $r = 0.657$ ), indicating that effective place branding strategies can promote sustainable tourism by enhancing the destination's image (Vuignier, 2017). Additionally, Place Branding and Visitors Satisfaction are strongly related ( $r = 0.796$ ), showing that well-branded destinations tend to offer more satisfying experiences for visitors (Garanti et al, 2024; Hussein, 2020). Finally, Sustainable Development is positively associated with Visitors Satisfaction ( $r = 0.662$ ), suggesting that sustainability efforts in tourism enhance the overall satisfaction of visitors. Table 5 presents the outcome of the correlation analysis.



**Table 5.**  
Outcome correlation analysis.

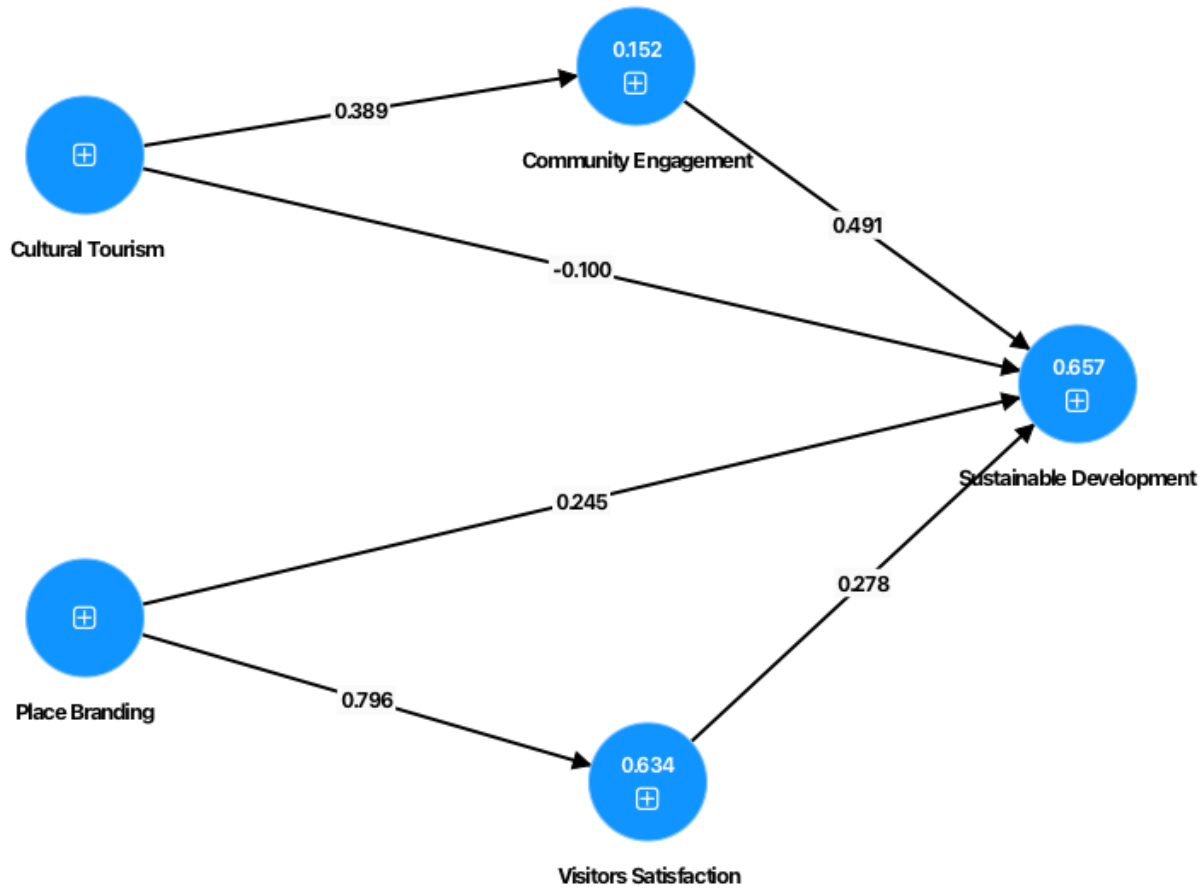
	<b>Community engagement</b>	<b>Cultural tourism</b>	<b>Environmental awareness</b>	<b>Place branding</b>	<b>Sustainable development</b>	<b>Visitors satisfaction</b>
Community Engagement	1.000					
Cultural Tourism	0.389	1.000				
Environmental Awareness	0.488	0.647	1.000			
Place Branding	0.521	0.647	0.682	1.000		
Sustainable Development	0.726	0.442	0.607	0.657	1.000	
Visitors Satisfaction	0.528	0.695	0.817	0.796	0.662	1.000

### 5.5. Path Analysis

The PLS-SEM path analysis provides valuable insights into the relationships between the key constructs of the study, specifically the direct and indirect effects of Cultural Tourism, Place Branding, and their impact on Sustainable Development. The direct effect of Cultural Tourism on Sustainable Development is found to be -0.100, indicating a weak and negative relationship. This suggests that, in this study, Cultural Tourism alone may not significantly contribute to sustainable development. This could be due to the potential conflicts between cultural tourism activities and sustainability goals, such as environmental degradation or the commercialization of local cultures (Coccosis, 2016; Kumar, 2017). In contrast, Place Branding shows a moderate positive direct effect on Sustainable Development with a path coefficient of 0.245. This finding suggests that Place Branding, when effectively implemented, can positively influence sustainable development by promoting environmental practices and aligning the destination's image with sustainability values (Therkelsen et al, 2021; Gulisova et al, 2021).

The indirect effects provide a more nuanced view of how these constructs influence Sustainable Development. The Place Branding -> Visitors Satisfaction -> Sustainable Development pathway has an indirect effect of 0.221. This suggests that Place Branding enhances Visitors Satisfaction, which in turn positively affects Sustainable Development. Therefore, a well-managed place brand not only improves the visitor experience but also fosters sustainable practices. Similarly, the indirect effect of community engagement on sustainable development is 0.191, demonstrating that while cultural tourism has a negative direct effect, it positively influences community engagement, which in turn contributes to sustainable development. This highlights the importance of community involvement in sustainable tourism practices, driven by cultural tourism.

The R-square values indicate the explanatory power of the model. The R-square for community engagement is 0.152 (adjusted 0.141), suggesting that the model explains only a small portion of the variance in community engagement, meaning other factors likely influence this construct. In contrast, the R-square for sustainable development is 0.657 (adjusted 0.638), indicating that a substantial proportion of the variance in sustainable development is explained by the model. This highlights the significant influence of place branding, cultural tourism, and visitors' satisfaction on sustainable development. The R-square for visitor's satisfaction is 0.634 (adjusted 0.629), demonstrating that place branding and related factors significantly contribute to visitor satisfaction. Figure 1 presents the outcome of the path analysis.



**Figure 1.**  
Outcome of path model.

*5.6. Moderating Effect*

The moderation effect between community engagement and environmental awareness reveals a significant and positive relationship, with a path coefficient of 0.431. This indicates that environmental awareness strengthens the impact of community engagement on the outcome variable, suggesting that the effect of community participation is more pronounced when individuals are highly environmentally aware. The t-statistic of 9.094 far exceeds the critical value of 1.96, confirming that this moderation effect is statistically significant. Additionally, the p-value of 0.000 reinforces the conclusion that the interaction between community engagement and environmental awareness is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance. This finding highlights the importance of environmental awareness in enhancing the effectiveness of community engagement, particularly in the context of sustainable development. As environmental awareness increases, the positive impact of community involvement on sustainability and related outcomes is likely to be stronger. Therefore, promoting environmental awareness can amplify the benefits of community engagement, making it a crucial factor for sustainable development initiatives. Table 6 presents outcome of moderating effect of environmental awareness.

**Table 6.**  
Outcome of moderation analysis.

Variable	Path coefficient	t-statistics	p-value
Community engagement × environmental awareness	0.431	9.094	0.000

### 5.7. Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing outcomes offer significant insights into the relationships between the study's constructs. First, H1, which examines the direct effect of cultural tourism on sustainable development, shows that the t-statistic is 0.504 and the p-value is 0.614, both of which indicate that the relationship is not statistically significant. Thus, this hypothesis is not supported, suggesting that cultural tourism alone does not significantly contribute to sustainable development.

On the other hand, H2, which explores the direct effect of place branding on sustainable development, shows a t-statistic of 2.876 and a p-value of 0.004. Since the t-statistic is well above the critical value and the p-value is below 0.05, this hypothesis is supported. It indicates a significant positive relationship between place branding and sustainable development, highlighting the importance of effective place branding in promoting sustainability.

In the context of mediating effects, H3 and H4 reveal significant pathways through which certain variables influence sustainable development. Specifically, H3 examines the mediating role of community engagement in the relationship between cultural tourism and sustainable development. The t-statistic of 2.349 and p-value of 0.019 indicate a statistically significant mediation effect. This means that community engagement acts as a mediator, showing that cultural tourism influences sustainable development indirectly by fostering greater community involvement. The presence of community engagement strengthens the positive impact of cultural tourism on sustainable development, underscoring the importance of active community participation in promoting sustainability.

Similarly, H4 explores the mediating effect of visitors satisfaction in the relationship between place branding and sustainable development. With a very high t-statistic of 13.913 and a p-value of 0.000, this mediating effect is strongly supported. The results indicate that place branding influences sustainable development indirectly through enhancing visitors satisfaction, which in turn drives sustainable behaviors and practices. Therefore, visitors satisfaction serves as a critical mediator, suggesting that successful place branding not only attracts visitors but also influences their satisfaction, leading to a more sustainable outcome in tourism development.

Finally, H5, which tests the moderation effect of Environmental Awareness on the relationship between Community Engagement and Sustainable Development, also finds significant support. The t-statistic of 9.602 and p-value of 0.001 indicate that environmental awareness significantly strengthens the positive effect of community engagement on sustainable development. Thus, this hypothesis is supported, suggesting that environmental awareness plays a critical role in reinforcing the impact of community engagement on sustainability. Table 7 present summary outcome of hypotheses testing.

**Table 7.**  
Outcome of hypotheses testing.

Hypotheses		Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV )	P values	Decision
H1	Cultural tourism -> Sustainable development	0.180	0.504	0.614	Not supported
H2	Place branding -> Sustainable development	0.162	2.876	0.004	Supported
H3	Cultural tourism -> community Engagement -> Sustainable development	0.081	2.349	0.019	Supported
H4	Place branding -> Visitors satisfaction -> Sustainable development	0.057	13.913	0.000	Supported
H5	Community engagement × Environmental awareness → Sustainable development	0.138	9.602	0.001	Supported

## 6. Discussion

The findings from the study offer important insights into the relationships between cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development. These results contribute to the broader understanding of sustainable tourism by highlighting the critical roles played by community engagement, visitor satisfaction, and environmental awareness. The study emphasizes the complexity and interconnectedness of these factors, suggesting that the paths to achieving sustainable development in tourism are multifaceted and involve various mediating and moderating influences.

The findings reveal that place branding has a significant direct positive effect on sustainable development (H2), with a t-statistic of 2.876 and a p-value of 0.004. This result is consistent with previous research that emphasizes the importance of place branding as a key driver of sustainable tourism outcomes. Place branding effectively enhances the destination's image, attracting visitors and fostering an environment conducive to sustainable tourism (Therjeksen et al, 2021; Mitropoulou & Spilanis, 2020). A strong and positive brand image not only increases tourist numbers but also cultivates environmentally and socially responsible behaviors, contributing to sustainable development. This is especially relevant in the context of tourism, where the reputation of a destination can have long-term effects on its sustainability.

In contrast, the direct effect of cultural tourism on sustainable Development (H1) was not supported, with a t-statistic of 0.504 and a p-value of 0.614. This finding suggests that while cultural tourism can play a role in attracting tourists and boosting economic activity, its direct impact on sustainability may be limited. This outcome indicates that the benefits of cultural tourism for sustainable development may not be realized unless it is mediated by other factors, such as community engagement or visitor satisfaction. The direct connection between cultural tourism and sustainable outcomes seems less evident without the additional influence of other variables, suggesting that cultural tourism needs to be carefully managed and integrated into sustainable development strategies (Gretzel et al., 2006).

The study also revealed significant mediating effects through community engagement and visitors' satisfaction, which help explain the pathways through which cultural tourism and place branding influence sustainable development. The mediation of community engagement in the relationship between cultural tourism and sustainable development (H3) was supported with a t-statistic of 2.349 and a p-value of 0.019. This aligns with prior studies that highlight the importance of community involvement in promoting sustainable tourism outcomes. Community engagement enhances local capacity for sustainability by involving residents in the tourism process, allowing them to benefit from the sector economically, socially, and environmentally. When communities actively participate in and benefit from tourism, they are more likely to support and engage in sustainable practices, leading to more favourable sustainable development outcomes.

Similarly, visitors' satisfaction was found to be a significant mediator in the relationship between place branding and sustainable development (H4), with a t-statistic of 13.913 and a p-value of 0.000. This finding reinforces the idea that a well-executed place branding strategy not only improves the destination's image but also enhances visitor satisfaction. Satisfied visitors are more likely to exhibit environmentally responsible behaviors and engage in activities that support sustainable development, which highlights the importance of aligning place branding with sustainable tourism objectives. The impact of visitor satisfaction is crucial for sustaining the positive effects of tourism, as the experience of tourists directly influences their willingness to adopt sustainable behaviors during and after their visit.

The moderation effect of environmental Awareness on the relationship between community engagement and sustainable development (H5) was strongly supported, with a t-statistic of 9.602 and a p-value of 0.001. This result suggests that the positive impact of community engagement on sustainable development is enhanced by higher levels of environmental awareness. This finding emphasizes the need for education and awareness programs that foster a deep understanding of environmental issues among both local communities and tourists. When people are more aware of the environmental consequences of their actions, they are more likely to engage in sustainable practices, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and supporting eco-friendly initiatives. This result supports the notion that environmental consciousness is essential for the success of sustainable tourism. In

destinations where environmental awareness is high, community engagement is likely to be more effective in driving sustainable development.

The role of environmental awareness in moderating the effects of community engagement on sustainable development highlights the importance of integrating environmental education into tourism experiences. Tourism practitioners and policymakers should focus on strategies that increase environmental awareness, such as promoting eco-tourism, conducting workshops, and providing informative materials to both tourists and local residents. By raising awareness about environmental issues, tourism stakeholders can encourage behaviors that support long-term sustainability and reduce negative environmental impacts.

## 7. Implication for Policy and Practice

These findings have several significant implications for policymakers and tourism practitioners, providing a roadmap for fostering sustainable tourism development. First, the strategic use of place branding emerges as a critical tool in promoting sustainability. Effective place branding goes beyond just showcasing a destination's attractions; it should communicate a strong commitment to sustainability, highlighting eco-friendly practices, conservation efforts, and local culture. Destinations that clearly integrate sustainability into their brand identity can appeal to a growing demographic of conscious travelers who prioritize environmental and social responsibility. Tourism boards and local governments should therefore prioritize embedding sustainability messages into their branding strategies, ensuring that these messages resonate with the values of both visitors and local stakeholders. By doing so, they not only attract tourists who are more likely to engage in sustainable behaviors but also help create a positive reputation that contributes to long-term tourism growth.

Second, the study emphasizes the vital role of community engagement in achieving sustainable tourism outcomes. Policies and strategies that actively involve local communities in tourism planning and decision-making are essential. When local residents feel a sense of ownership and agency over tourism development, they are more likely to embrace it and participate in practices that support sustainability. This engagement can be fostered through collaborative planning processes, where local communities, government bodies, and private sector stakeholders work together to develop tourism initiatives that align with local needs and values. Capacity-building programs, such as training for local entrepreneurs or education on sustainable tourism practices, are also crucial in enabling communities to fully participate in and benefit from tourism. Ensuring that the benefits of tourism are shared equitably and that the local culture and environment are respected is key to building long-term community support for sustainable tourism practices.

Finally, environmental awareness should be integrated into the core of sustainable tourism initiatives. Raising awareness about environmental issues, both among tourists and local communities, is an effective way to promote more sustainable behaviors. Educational campaigns that highlight the impact of tourism on local ecosystems, natural resources, and wildlife can encourage responsible behavior, such as reducing waste, conserving water, and supporting local conservation efforts. This can also be achieved through eco-friendly tourism practices, such as promoting low-impact travel, using sustainable infrastructure, and partnering with environmental organizations that can offer expertise in conservation efforts. Ultimately, fostering a culture of environmental consciousness can have a lasting impact on the sustainability of a destination, as both tourists and locals become more mindful of their environmental footprint. Sustainable tourism is not just about protecting the environment but also about ensuring that tourism contributes to the long-term health and well-being of both the destination and its residents.

## 8. Conclusion and Future Research

This study offers valuable insights into the interrelationships between cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development. It highlights the crucial roles of place branding, community engagement, visitor satisfaction, and environmental awareness in promoting sustainable tourism outcomes. The findings underscore that while place branding significantly influences sustainable development, community engagement and visitor satisfaction act as important mediators in this process.

Furthermore, environmental awareness plays a moderating role, enhancing the positive impact of community engagement on sustainable tourism practices. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism and development, offering a comprehensive understanding of how these dynamics can be harnessed to promote long-term sustainability in tourism destinations.

The study provides a useful framework for policymakers and tourism practitioners, suggesting that sustainable tourism development requires a multifaceted approach. By integrating sustainability into place branding, fostering community involvement, enhancing visitor satisfaction, and raising environmental awareness, destinations can ensure that tourism contributes to both economic and environmental well-being. Ultimately, these efforts will help create more responsible, sustainable tourism practices that benefit not only tourists but also local communities and the environment.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The study's primary limitation is its cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inferences. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to explore how the relationships between cultural tourism, place branding, and sustainable development evolve over time. Additionally, the study's focus on a specific cultural festival in Takoradi, Ghana, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should extend the research to other regions or cultural festivals to validate the results. Lastly, future research could examine the role of different stakeholders and investigate the use of digital technologies and social media in enhancing sustainable tourism practices.

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