

Article

The Influence of Negative Political Environment on Sustainable Tourism: A Study of Aksu-Jabagly World Heritage Site, Kazakhstan

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Abstract: The political environment of a tourism destination is the most important element in planning, implementing, and controlling sustainable tourism development. The political environment refers to the coordination and cooperation among many participants to formulate and apply tourism policies. In our study the term political environment refers to political power, leadership, structures, mechanisms, and strategies, or policies for the implementation of sustainable tourism development. The main purpose of this article is to, through the example of Aksu-Jabagly natural heritage site in Kazakhstan, study how the negative political environment (NPE) of a tourism destination inhibits the implementation of sustainable tourism development in Kazakhstan. This study draws on in-depth interviews with local residents who are considered as one of the key stakeholders in the tourism industry. In our research, we conducted a questionnaire survey of 222 representative households from the neighboring village of Aksu-Jabagly, a natural world heritage site. Results show that because of negative political environments, the residents highly perceive the negative economic and environmental impacts of tourism development. Although the residents highly evaluated tourism's positive sociocultural impacts, its relevance to other indicators was relatively weak. The residents are dissatisfied with tourism development, and their participation level in tourism was low. The results also reveal that highly perceived negative economic and negative environmental impacts of tourism are the main cause of residents' dissatisfaction with tourism development and residents' lack of participation in tourism.

Keywords: political environment; sustainable tourism; impact; world heritage; Aksu-Jabagly nature reserve; Kazakhstan

1. Introduction

Political environment is the government actions which affect the operations of a company or business. These actions may be on the local, regional, national, or international levels. Business owners and managers pay close attention to the political environment to gauge how government actions will affect their company. Regarding the World Economic Forum's travel and tourism competitiveness index, it seems that some new models are emerging [1]. The "enabling policy environment for tourism" indicator shows that countries with more favorable environmental conditions are more likely to develop management plans for each World Heritage site (either existing or out of date), and it is more likely that there is no plan or claim prepared by those states with unfavorable political environments [2]. The statement of the political environment has scarcely been recognized in previous studies [3,4], therefore,

it is not widely used in tourism research. The political environment (an older expression) overlaps with an emerging understanding of destination governance (a newer expression) [5,6]. Some authors have extended the concept of a political environment to further development of the three pillars of environmental sustainability, which has continued to generate more debates [4,7–9]. Dialogs on the management of tourist destinations have collected some elements of our perception of the political environment with a focus on how tourist destinations guide and govern the planning, implementation, and monitoring processes of tourism development [5,6]. Mihalič et al. (2016) elaborated on the issue by emphasizing the significance of the influence of the political environment and destination governance on sustainable tourism development. They addressed issues limited to understanding the importance of the political environment to sustainable tourism's implementation. Mihalič et al. (2016) argued that the political environment does not indicate political parties or systems (although both may be related to tourism development), but indicates political power, leadership, structure, mechanisms, and strategies, or policies as critical to the implementation of sustainable tourism development. In relation to the agreement with the three sustainable development environments (economic, environmental and sociocultural), the concept of the political environment has not been recognized with such force, and its designation as a missing element has not yet been achieved unanimously in the field of sustainable development [10].

The development of sustainable tourism destinations has attracted great attention from researchers over the years, especially the positive and negative tourism's influences on resources and destination communities [11]. Tourism can have a positive and negative impact on the community, but the development of tourism can also depend on how the locals of the destination feel about these effects [10]. As described by the social exchange theory, destination residents show their support for tourism development based on their satisfaction with the sustainable livedoid in the communities [12,13]. Destination resources are generally understood as economic, sociocultural, and environmental, which is similar to the so-called three-pillar sustainable tourism principle [14]. Apart from tourism's positive and negative impacts on the destination community, residents' perceptions of these impacts can affect sustainable tourism development. Tourism should properly consider its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts to meet the needs of tourists, industry, environment, and the host community.

In the above context, it is understood that the destination resources are economic, sociocultural, and natural (or environmental, in a narrow sense), which is consistent with the concept the so-called three pillars of sustainable tourism [15]. However, researchers should distinguish the practical implementations of three pillars of sustainability in tourism [10]. Though it is difficult to perform sustainable tourism in practice [16], Mihalič et al. (2016) argue that this problem can be minimized if the concept of three pillars of sustainability is extended to include some "pushing forces" to ensure the effective implementation of sustainability in business and tourism destinations. Many authors have discussed other requirements for implementing sustainability, such as political support, power, critical mass, consensus, environmental education, awareness, and ethics [4,9]. Ritchie and Crouch (2003) showed that the debate on sustainable tourism must be extended with political sustainability. Lately, some of these "forces" have been debated under the theme of destination governance, which is interested in how tourism destinations guide and manage the implementation (and planning and control) process of sustainable tourism development [5].

However, many previous studies have shown that there is little interest in studying sustainable tourism development in terms of residents' attitudes towards tourism and the political aspects of tourism governance [17]. This article discusses this issue and contributes to understanding the constricting role of the negative political environment in implementing sustainable tourism.

1.1. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

1.1.1. Residents' Perception of Tourism Impacts

Sustainability is often understood as the three-pillar concepts of economic, natural, and sociocultural environments. It involves providing opportunities to promote economic growth, protect the location, and improve the quality of life of residents while increasing future opportunities through the development of tourism and the quality of the environment [18]. However, not all environments are subject to the same research and practical concerns [10]. Many previous studies focused only on economic or environmental pillars, which may not fully reflect community concerns [19–21]. In this case, the three pillars of sustainability concepts provide a well-structured framework for studying the positive and negative tourism's economic, environmental and sociocultural impacts.

1.1.2. Residents' Satisfaction with Tourism

In the past, when studying the satisfaction of residents, scholars divided the perception of tourism impact into two factors, such as positive tourism impact perception and negative tourism impact perception [22–24], or divided it into three factors like cost-awareness, material benefit perception, and spiritual benefit perception [25], and then the relationship between tourism impact and satisfaction could be comprehended. In the context of applying social exchange theory to residents' attitudes towards tourism, most studies involve the impacts of tourism and support for tourism, while some studies also include satisfaction with the quality of life in the tourist destinations or tourism development. Recent tourism studies indicate that tourism impacts the quality of life [26–28]. Moreover, previous studies on the impact of tourism on residents' well-being simulated the overall satisfaction of individuals with life, which stems from satisfaction with several areas of life [10]. Satisfaction with community, material, emotional, health, and safety are sources of general satisfaction with life [29].

1.1.3. Residents' Participation in Tourism at World Heritage Sites (WHS).

The variety of residents' perceptions of tourism development influences the level of residents' support and participation in tourism development [30]. Numerous studies have proven the importance of community involvement in heritage conservation and tourism development [31–34]. Local residents' involvement in WHS management can resolve conflicts between the economic and development benefits of the community and the need to preserve WHS destinations as valuable resources and can help clarify the concept of heritage among residents [33,35]. Several studies on heritage management have confirmed the importance of community participation in sustainable conservation programs [32,36]. Local residents' involvement in heritage management contributes to improving their quality of life, economic development of the local region, and sustainability of conservation programs [31,32,35].

Thus, with Aksu-Jabagly state nature reserve and the adjacent Jabagly village as a study area, this research examines the indirect impacts of the negative political environment of a tourism destination on local residents' lack of participation in tourism development through assessing the perceptions of the neighboring community from tourism in their hometown. Additionally, a number of determinants (residents' dissatisfaction with tourism and tourism's negative economic, negative environmental and positive sociocultural impacts) that influence this relationship should also be checked. The model proposed in this study assumes the relationship between the aforementioned indicators. Our structural model takes into consideration the indirect impacts of negative political environment on residents' lack of participation in tourism, which have been studied in the context of sustainable tourism development by very few scholars so far. Therefore, we incorporated both observations in our proposed model of the relationship between the three tourism pillars and residents' dissatisfaction with tourism development. Simultaneously, the following seven hypotheses (Figure 1) were developed and tested in the current study:

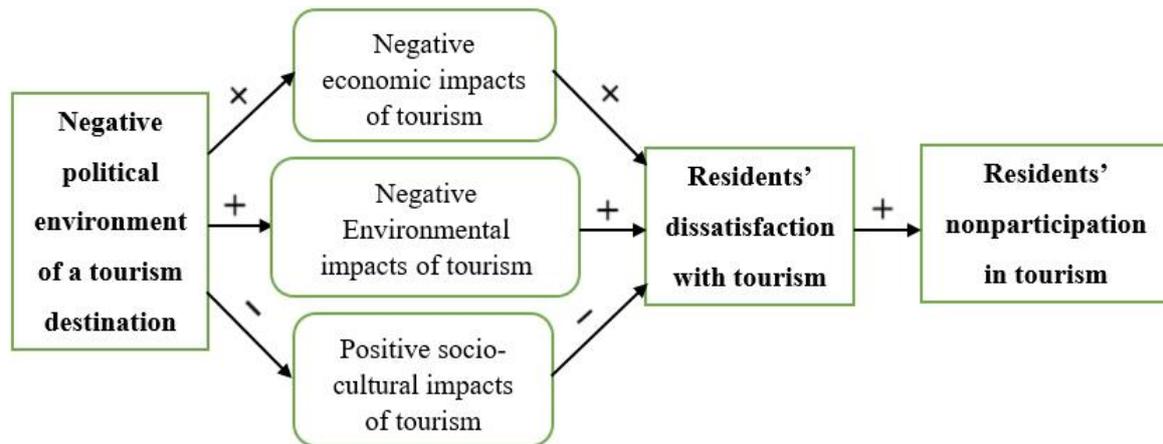


Figure 1. Theoretical model, direct paths.

Hypothesis 1. *The negative political environment has a direct positive effect on negative economic impacts of tourism;*

Hypothesis 2. *The negative political environment has a direct positive effect on negative environmental impacts of tourism;*

Hypothesis 3. *The negative political environment has a direct negative effect on positive sociocultural impacts of tourism;*

Hypothesis 4. *The negative economic impacts of tourism have a direct positive effect on residents' dissatisfaction with tourism development;*

Hypothesis 5. *The negative environmental impacts of tourism have a direct positive effect on residents' dissatisfaction with tourism development;*

Hypothesis 6. *The positive sociocultural impacts of tourism have a direct negative effect on residents' dissatisfaction with tourism development;*

Hypothesis 7. *Residents' dissatisfaction with tourism development has a direct positive effect on residents' not participation in tourism development;*

1.2. Aksu-Jabagly Natural World Heritage Site and Jabagly Village

Aksu-Jabagly Reserve is Kazakhstan's second natural world heritage site and it offers a stunningly diverse landscape from semi-deserts to snow-capped peaks. The Aksu-Jabagly, which was listed on UNESCO under the criteria of (vii) and (x) on 17 July 2016, is a unique wilderness experience where marmots, ibex, lynx, wolves, bears, argalis, and deer live [37]. The Aksu-Jabagly State Nature Reserve was established in 1926 and it is located in the north-west of Talas Alatau and the south of Karatau in the West Tien Shan. It is home to 48% of regional bird species, 72.5% of vertebrates, 221 out of 254 fungi species, 63 out of 80 moss species, 15 out of 64 vegetation types, and 114 out of 180 plant formations found in the West Tien Shan. Approximately 2500 insect species have been recorded in the reserve [38]. The wild tulips, the unique natural apples, and the snow leopards (which roam the high mountains of this area) in the Aksu-Jabagly reserve spread its name all over the world [39]. Aksu-Jabagly State Nature Reserve consists of three zones, it lies in Tulkibas district of Turkistan region and Jually district of Jambyl region of the Republic of Qazaqstan. The main part of the nature reserve (N42 16 34, E70 40 27) has 131,704 ha property zone and 25,800 ha buffer zone. The other two zones are Karabastau

paleontological area (N42 56 24, E69 54 54) and Aulie paleontological area (N42 54 18, E70 00 00) with only property zones, 100 and 130 ha, respectively [37]. The Aksu-Jabagly Biosphere Reserve is located in four districts of two oblasts in the most densely populated region of Kazakhstan (Figure 2), with a total population of about three million people. Approximately 150,000 people live in the transition area of the reserve. The main economic activities are agriculture, plant growing, and cattle breeding. In the last 10 years, ecological tourism has become highly popular in the reserve, mainly due to ornithological and botanical foreign tourism, and local recreational tourism [38].

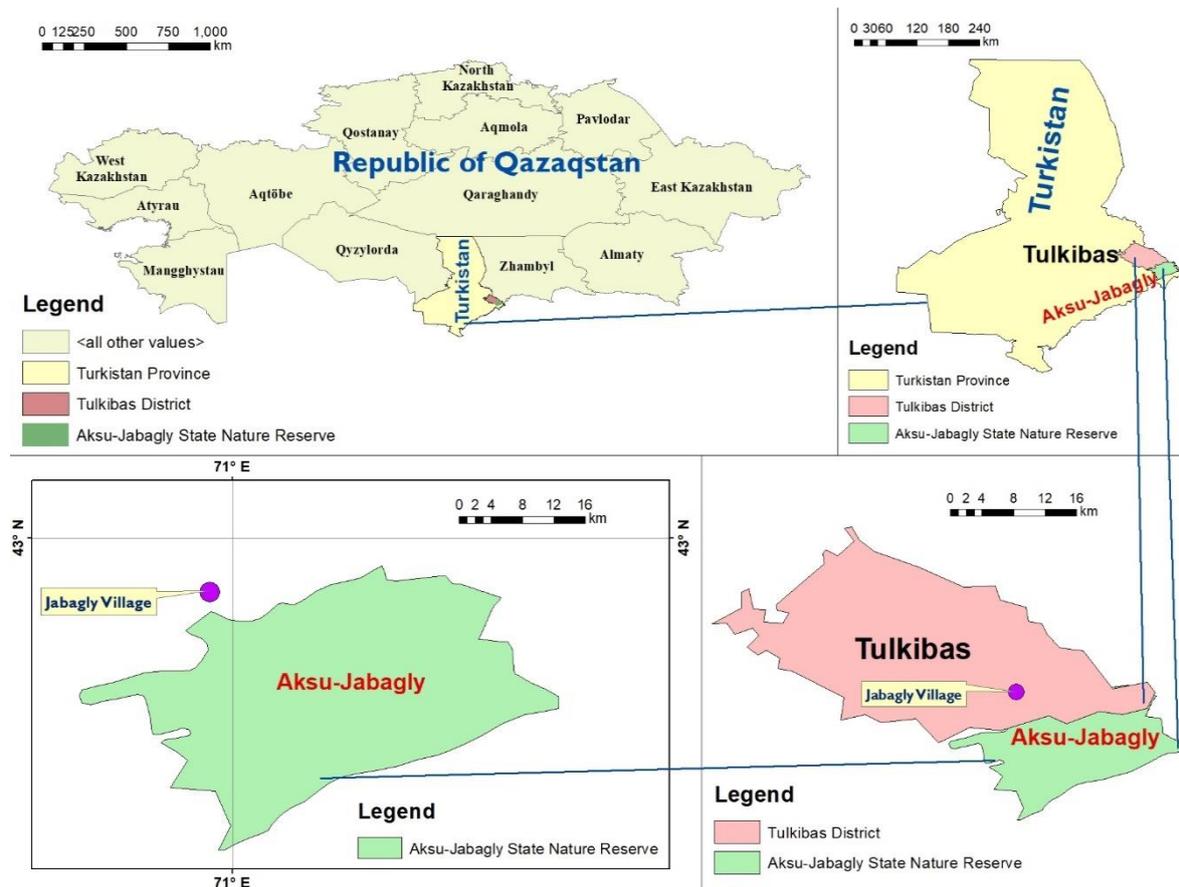


Figure 2. Aksu-Jabagly Natural World Heritage site and Jabagly village.

Jabagly village is an administrative unit of Tulkibas district. It includes the settlement of Jabagly, Abaiyl, and Russian Railway 115. The total population of the Jabagly village is 3048 people, including 2401 people of Jabagly settlement, 545 people of Abaiyl settlement, and 102 people of settlement Russian Railway 115. The center of the village is Jabagly settlement. And Jabagly settlement is 17 km southeast to the Turar Ryskulov town (former Vannovka), the administrative center of Tulkibas district. Jabagly settlement has a public transport connection with Turar Ryskulov town and Shymkent city (passport of Jabagly village, 2019). Lying adjacent to the West Tien Shan Mountains, Jabagly settlement is the gateway to Aksu-Jabagly State Natural Reserve (Figure 2). The main economic activities are agriculture, plant growing, and cattle breeding. The 59 km area of Tulkibas is located along Western Europe-Western China (WE-WC) Highway, and it provides convenience to travel to Jabagly village by car for visitors [39].

1.3. Tourism Development at Aksu-Jabagly Heritage Site

For a long time, tourism has been seen as an important means of achieving protection outcomes and as a potential source of negative impact. Decades of academic research and practical experience have indicated that the relationship between tourism and protected areas is complex. Part of the reason is that the economic priorities of tourism often conflict with each other, and the protection priorities of protected area stakeholders are also important [40]. Particularly, protection objectives may be compromised by the negative effects of visitors and commercial activities [41]. However, since the establishment of the earliest national parks, tourism and recreation have often become the main drivers of land protection [42]. Ecotourism, sustainable tourism, or “conscience tourism” is a less intrusive, more eco-friendly way to experience the world’s unique natural and cultural treasures. Today, tourism faces more challenges than ever to protect and promote cultural heritage and the environment, while helping to reduce poverty by creating jobs around the world [2]. The implementation of the world heritage structure, especially in rural areas, has achieved a global impact because it has become a venue characterized by a global vision and traditional rural elements. Moreover, construction always increases local and regional development possibilities since conservation measures tend to stimulate tourism [43]. Natural World Heritage Sites (WHS) are widely recognized as the world’s most important protected areas. Therefore, in order to develop tourism at a world heritage site it is necessary to consider its characteristics, for example, when developing tourism in ecologically sensitive protected areas the best strategy is to organize tourism activities at the buffer zone of the protected areas. In this respect, our research area, Aksu-Jabagly biodiversity conservation site, can be one of the best examples because, in accordance with the “Specially Protected Natural Territories” law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, areas that are not included in especially valuable ecological systems are allowed to organize ecological excursions under the control of authorities, as well as excursion paths and routes for regular tourism created by the licensed tourism sectors [38].

Without doubt, the most important indicator which shows the tourism development status of one tourist destination is the number of visitors and tourism revenue volume. Tulkibas district mayor Nurbol Turashbekov (2017) said “In 2016 more than 12 thousand tourists had visited Tulkibas district to see Aksu-Jabagly nature reserve and other places of interests, including 7% foreigners”. Apparently, the aforementioned numbers are very small considering its high potential for tourism development. Below, we analyze some statistics which indicate domestic and foreign visitors to Aksu-Jabagly state nature reserve in the last 10 years.

We can easily see from Figure 3 that the number of total visitors and domestic tourists was higher in 2011 with 2890 and 2104 people, respectively. Additionally, in 2015, there were fewer visitors to the Aksu-Jabagly nature reserve, the total number of tourists decreased to 1471 people. The total and the domestic number of travelers has been increasing slowly in the last three years. As far as foreign visitors are concerned, there has been a fluctuation in the number. The year when there were fewer foreign tourists was 2013 with 666 people, while more foreign tourists visited the nature reserve than other times in 2017, the number reached 1098. It can be concluded from the above analysis that although there is a higher potential for planning tourism activities in Jabagly village, for instance, the quality of accommodation and convenience of accessibility are higher and even in line with international standards, the development of tourism in Aksu-Jabagly is still in the primary stage or even undeveloped. Therefore, we suppose one of the main factors which impede the development of tourism in our research area is the lack of favorable political environment for sustainable tourism development. Thus, the main content of this research is the impact of the negative political environment on implementing sustainable tourism development.

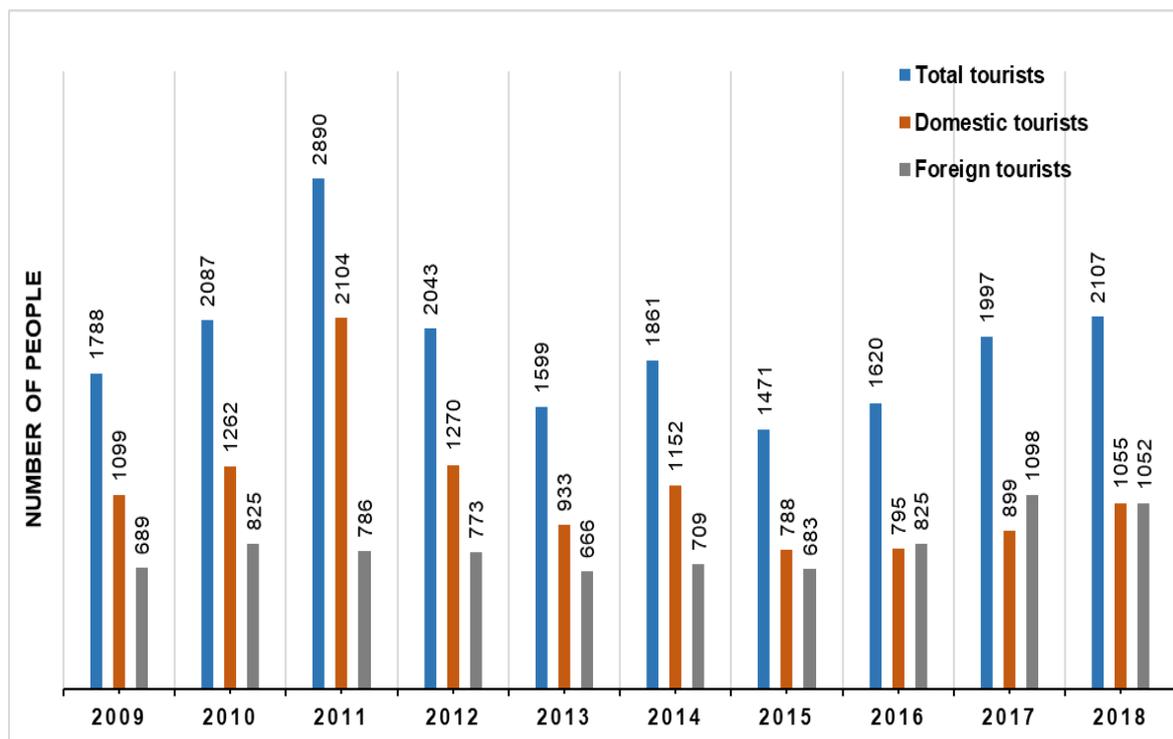


Figure 3. The number of tourists to Aksu-Jabagly heritage site from 2009 to 2018. Source of statistics: Tourism Department of Aksu-Jabagly State Nature Reserve Office.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Data Collection and Methodology

Data collection occurred over a 20-day period from 2 March to 22 March 2019. To develop our measurement instrument, we first created a list of sustainable tourism development indicators based on the literature review. Our list of questionnaires included over 30 indicators that were used in the subsequent survey. The self-administered questionnaire was distributed to Jabagly village's residents. To obtain more accurate opinions and perceptions, we conducted our survey by issuing the prepared questionnaire to each occupied household (328 households in total). Residents were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to the municipality or the central school in the village (if they have a child who goes to high school there). Overall, 229 questionnaires were returned, and among them, 222 were qualified.

In order to develop our measurement tools, we first created a list of sustainable tourism development indicators based on a literature review. The list initially includes more than 100 indicators. These indicators were evaluated by relevant experts in the tourism fields. The expert group consists of scholars and local tourism industry representatives. Those experts reduced the initial list of indicators to 30, which were used for follow-up investigations.

The questionnaire for all relevant respondents was designed with three major sections. Section one was designed by ticking "√" on the corresponding option to acquire basic information about their gender, age, ethnic and the education level. Section two was designed with some multiple-choice questions indicating annual household income, current engaging industry, the number of tourism-engaged people in their family, and tourism income rate in their annual household income to understand local residents' economic situation and participation level in tourism generally. Section three evaluates respondents' perceptions of statements regarding negative political environment at the Aksu-Jabagly tourism destination, three pillars of sustainable tourism (including the negative economic, negative environmental, and positive sociocultural impacts of tourism), residents' dissatisfaction with tourism and residents' participation in tourism development. All indicators were designed as statements in

section three to encourage respondents to rate on five-point Likert scale questions with 1 (completely disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree) and 5 (completely agree).

The collected data were analyzed with principal component analysis (PCA) to reduce the number of variables in the model. When we removed the problematic items, we deleted some indicators, which have bigger or smaller variances of errors, in Amos output. The correlation matrix was then checked to reveal any possibly problematic variables. After this data-reduction procedure, only 18 (out of 30) indicators were used in further analysis (see Table 1). Thus, a six-factor model was then inputted into the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and, finally, structural equation modeling was used to establish the connections between the factors. Before the factor analysis, Cronbach's Alpha and KMO test were needed. When we tested When reliabilities between measurements, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of all measurement dimensions was checked and the "KMO test" was done. As shown in Table 1, in order to examine the standard intrinsic fitness level of the model, composite reliability of the latent variables and the average variance extracted value were calculated with the formula of $CR = \frac{(\sum L)^2}{(\sum L)^2 + (\sum e)}$, $AVE = \frac{\sum L^2}{n}$, ($e = 1 - L^2$ and L is completely standardized loading). Using IBM SPSS Amos 25.0 software, we conducted the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). When we checked the overall model fit, the following equation model's fitness indices, such as CMIN/DF, NFI, TLI, CFI, RMSEA, PNFI, and PCFI, were checked. Finally, we tested the hypothesized relationships between the constructs, p value (indicating statistically significance) and critical ratio (CR) as substitute to t value and β (significant influence) were used.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and measurement model results ($n = 222$).

Constructs and Indicators: $CR = \frac{(\sum L)^2}{(\sum L)^2 + (\sum e)}$ $AVE = \frac{\sum L^2}{n}$, ($e = 1 - L^2$)	Mean	St. dev.	Responses in %			Model Results		
			Agree Rate * %	Neutral Rate %	Disagree Rate ** %	CSL (L)	C R	AVE
Negative political environment	3.470					L	0.984	0.939
PE_1 Tourism development is less supported by relative organizations.	3.37	1.226	62.2	6.8	31.0	0.963		
PE_2 The local area has fewer benefits from tourism development.	3.41	1.183	63.1	7.6	29.3	0.991		
PE_3 Local residents are rarely informed about tourism development there.	3.58	1.192	68.9	6.3	24.8	0.963		
PE_4 Tourism businesses are monopolized by a few politically powerful people.	3.52	1.172	67.1	5.4	27.5	0.958		
Negative economic impacts of tourism	3.393						0.927	0.811
EI_1 Tourism has increased the gap between the rich and poor in this village.	3.39	1.163	62.1	9.5	28.4	0.908		
EI_2 Local prices and the necessary cost of living for residents has increased.	3.38	1.162	61.7	9.0	29.3	0.977		
EI_5 Most of the local money is earned by outsiders.	3.41	1.173	63.1	8.1	28.8	0.808		
Negative environmental impacts	3.375						0.829	0.708
EI_3 A large influx of tourists has a great impact on the normal life of the flora and fauna.	3.38	1.181	65.4	7.2	27.4	0.860		
NEI_4 Development of tourism contributes to pollution (throw rubbish and make noise, etc.).	3.37	1.255	63.5	6.3	30.2	0.823		
Positive sociocultural impacts of tourism	3.527						0.979	0.940
Scl_2 Tourism provides an incentive for the preservation of local culture in Jabagly village.	3.59	1.096	72.1	5.8	22.1	0.965		
Scl_3 Tourism grows the cultural exchanges between tourists and residents.	3.48	1.062	63.1	13.5	23.4	0.966		
Scl_4 I Infrastructure of this region has improved due to tourism development.	3.51	1.001	67.6	11.7	20.7	0.978		
Residents' dissatisfaction with tourism	3.275						0.986	0.960
Sat_2 I am dissatisfied with local's employment in the tourism industry here.	3.53	1.228	66.2	9.9	23.9	0.961		
Sat_3 I am dissatisfied with residents' involvement and influence in the planning and development of tourism in the Aksu-Jabagly heritage site.	3.39	1.143	61.2	11.7	27.1	0.990		
Sat_4 I am dissatisfied with the tourism generated benefits for ecological protection and regional development.	3.64	1.104	73.4	7.2	19.4	0.988		

Table 1. Cont.

Constructs and Indicators: $CR = \frac{(\sum L)^2}{(\sum L)^2 + (\sum e)}$ $AVE = \frac{\sum L^2}{n}, (e = 1 - L^2)$	Mean	St. dev.	Responses in %			Model Results		
			Agree Rate * %	Neutral Rate %	Disagree Rate ** %	CSL (L)	C R	AVE
Residents' not participation in tourism	3.450						0.952	0.870
Par_1 I do not participate in decision making about tourism development.	3.69	1.268	68.9	11.3	19.8	0.892		
Par_2 I do not participate in planning works of tourism development.	3.58	1.297	66.2	5.4	28.4	0.991		
Par_4 I do not participate in the ecological protection works of this tourism destination.	3.08	1.037	31.1	45.0	23.9	0.912		

Notes: * Agreement rate: Completely agree + agree, and ** Disagreement rate: Completely disagree + disagree.

2.2. Sample Characteristics

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents were male (66.67%), and most of them were Kazakhs (91.89%), while Russian and other ethnicities were only 4.50% and 3.60%, respectively. The highest proportion of respondents were aged 35–54 (51.80%), followed by 18–34 years old, accounting for 36.94% and the lowest proportion of respondents were the elder group, aged above 55 (11.26%). The proportion of people who have attended school or college (considered as middle-level education) was the largest (86.49%) and only 13.51% were those who have received higher education (including university or above). Table 2 also shows that nearly half of the respondents (50.45%) have an annual household income of 500,000–1 million KZ Tenge, followed by a family annual income of 1–1.5 million KZ Tenge, accounting for 34.68%. The populations with annual household income of below 500,000 and higher than 1.5 million KZ Tenge were the lowest and approximately the same proportion with 7.66% and 7.21%, respectively. As far as their current engaging industries are concerned, there were more residents (41.44%) engaged in animal husbandry, followed by farming (20.72%) and other industries (18.47%), the proportion of people engaged in business and tourism was the lowest and accounted for 10.81% and 8.56%, respectively, indicating that animal husbandry is the main industry and tourism is the least developed industry of community residents. Concerning the tourism income rate in household income, the population whose tourism income accounts for 0% of the annual household income was 91.44%, and other three tourism income ranges (of 1%–20%, 21%–60%, and 61%–100%) were 6.31%, 1.80%, and 0.45%, respectively. From the above statistical analysis, we can easily conclude that although they live adjacent to one of the most famous tourism destinations in Kazakhstan, residents of Jabagly village had a weak involvement in and they have nearly no tourism income (Table 2).

Table 2. Details of resident sample responses ($n = 222$).

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	148	66.67
Female	74	33.33
Age (years):		
Young (18–34)	82	36.94
Middle age (35–54)	115	51.8
Elder (≥ 55)	25	11.26
Ethnicity:		
Kazakh	204	91.9
Russian	10	4.5
Other	8	3.6

Table 2. Cont.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Education:		
Middle (school or college)	192	86.49
High (university or above)	30	13.51
Annual household income: (KZ Tenge, 1\$ = 375 tenge)		
Below 500,000	17	7.66
500,000–1 million	112	50.45
1–1.5 million	77	34.68
1.5 million and above	16	7.21
Current engaging industry:		
Tourism	19	8.56
Animal husbandry	92	41.44
Farming	46	20.72
Business	24	10.81
Other industry	41	18.47
Tourism income rate in your annual household income:		
0%	203	91.44
1%–20%	14	6.31
21%–60%	4	1.8
61%–100%	1	0.45

3. Results

3.1. Reliability and Validity Test

When testing reliability, Cronbach's Alpha is needed. Reliability analysis is used to evaluate the stability or reliability of the questionnaire. It examines the degree of consistency of the results obtained by repeated measurements of the same thing using questionnaires [44]. It is generally believed that when the reliability coefficient value reaches 0.8–0.9, the reliability of the scale is very good. When the reliability coefficient reaches 0.7–0.8, the scale has considerable reliability. Using the reliability analysis function in SPSS, the reliability test of the measurement items in the questionnaire scale was carried out, as a result, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of all measurement dimensions is greater than 0.8. It indicates that the reliability of all the scales is very good, and the scales have considerable reliability, and the reliability test is passed.

Validity refers to the degree of effectiveness of the measurement. It refers to the extent to which the measurement tool or means can accurately measure the things that need to be measured. The validity of the questionnaire is tested from two aspects: Content validity and structural validity. Content validity is mainly investigated by logic analysis. The structural validity of the questionnaire is usually measured by factor analysis [45]. Before the factor analysis, the KMO test is needed. When the KMO value is greater than 0.9, the effect is best, 0.7 or more is acceptable, and 0.5 or less is not suitable for factor analysis [44]. Using the factor analysis function in SPSS, the validity of all measurement items above were tested. The calculated KMO values of all items in this model are greater than 0.8, and $p < 0.001$, reaching a very significant level, indicating that the scale is more effective.

The standard intrinsic fitness level of the model requires that the composite reliability of the latent variables is greater than 0.60, and the average variance extracted value is greater than 0.50 [46]. All of the composite reliabilities of the model in this study are greater than 0.8, and the average variance extracted values are between 0.708 and 0.960 (Table 1), it indicates that the model meets the criteria for fitness very well.

3.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Based on the reliability and validity test, the model was tested for confirmatory factors using AMOS 25.0 software (IBM, New York, United States). The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) includes three aspects: The basic fitness level of the model, the overall model fitness level, and the intrinsic fitness level of the model. The basic fitness level of the model for confirmatory factor analysis requires that the factor loadings (or completely standardized loading) must be between 0.5 and 0.95 [46]. The factor loads of all indicators in this model are above 0.5, all of them are between 0.8 and 1. This means that the basic fitness level of this model is very good.

The researchers recommended some indices to evaluate the overall model fit, including CMIN/DF (Chi-square/df), RMSEA, NFI [47], IFI, TLI, CFI, PNFI, PCFI, CN [48]. Among them, when the CMIN/DF value is between 1 and 3, the model has a simple adaptation degree. The standard of IFI value, TLI value and CFI value is above 0.9, and the standard of RMSEA value is lower than 0.05 (good fit) and less than 0.08 (suitable), PNFI and PCFI values are above 0.5, and CN should be greater than 200 [46]. When the variance for the whole model was checked, 12 variables (two from negative economic impacts of tourism, two from negative environmental impacts, three from positive sociocultural impacts of tourism, three from residents' dissatisfaction and two from the residents' not participation in tourism) were excluded from further analysis due to the higher p -value ($p > 0.05$) and 18 indicators remained in our proposed model. After deleting those 12 indicators, nearly all p -values were smaller than 0.05. After the modification, the indexes of the overall model fitness were: CMIN/DF = 2.699, NFI = 0.931, TLI = 0.941, CFI = 0.955, RMSEA = 0.062, PNFI = 0.710, PCFI = 0.729, CN > 200. From the results, it can be easily seen that the corrected model fits well.

Finally, structural equation modelling was undertaken to test the hypothesized relationships between the factors. The resulting structural model provides evidence for the proposed relationships between the constructs and their indicators. All measures tested above provide evidence of a good model fit.

SEM confirms the connections among the negative political environment, the perceived negative economic, negative environmental and positive sociocultural impacts of tourism, residents' dissatisfaction and residents' nonparticipation in tourism development. Not all constructs are relatively well explained by their predictors, as suggested by the explained variance, which ranges from 0.01 to 0.70. However, most of the path coefficients (6 out of 7) between the two constructs are still significant (Table 3).

Table 3. The path coefficients between the two constructs.

Constructs			C.R. (t)	p Value
Negative_Environmental_Impacts	<—	Negative_Political_Environment	16.207	***
Positive_Sociocultural_Impacts	<—	Negative_Political_Environment	−0.440	0.660
Negative_Economic_Impacts	<—	Negative_Political_Environment	2.573	0.010
Residents_Dissatisfaction	<—	Negative_Economic_Impacts	4.932	***
Residents_Dissatisfaction	<—	Negative_Environmental_Impacts	2.008	0.045
Residents_Dissatisfaction	<—	Positive_Sociocultural_Impacts	−2.033	0.042
Residents_Nonparticipation	<—	Residents_Dissatisfaction	6.075	***

Notes: *** Statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

Further analysis of the structural part of the model reveals that the negative political environment has a significant positive effect on negative environmental impacts of tourism, negative economic influences of tourism have a significant positive effect on residents' dissatisfaction with tourism development and residents' dissatisfaction has a significant positive effect on residents' nonparticipation in tourism development ($\beta = 0.83$, $t = 16.207$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.32$, $t = 4.932$, $p < 0.001$ and $\beta = 0.39$, $t = 6.075$, $p < 0.001$, respectively), indicating a significant and strong positive relationship between negative political environment and negative environmental impacts of tourism, tourism's negative

economic impacts and residents’ dissatisfaction with tourism, residents’ dissatisfaction and residents’ not participation in tourism. It means that the higher perception of residents on the negative political environment, negative impacts of tourism and dissatisfaction of residents, the higher perception of residents on negative environmental impacts of tourism, residents’ dissatisfaction with tourism and residents’ not participation in tourism.

Similarly, the path coefficient between negative political environment and negative economic impacts of tourism is 0.18 ($t = 2.573, p < 0.05$) and the path coefficient between negative environmental impacts of tourism and residents’ dissatisfaction with tourism is 0.14 ($t = 2.573, p < 0.05$). It indicates that the negative political environment has a positive significant influence on tourism’s negative economic impacts, at the same time tourism’s negative environmental impacts have a positive significant influence on residents’ dissatisfaction with tourism. Therefore, H1, H2, H4, H5, and H7 were all proven.

There was no significant relationship between the negative political environment and positive sociocultural impacts of tourism but the negative relationship between positive sociocultural impacts of tourism and residents’ dissatisfaction with tourism development was relatively significant. The negative political environment has a very weak negative influence on the positive sociocultural impacts of tourism ($\beta = -0.03, t = -0.440, p > 0.05$), and positive environmental impacts of tourism have a significant negative effect on residents’ dissatisfaction ($\beta = -0.13, t = -2.033, p < 0.05$), so H6 was proven, but H3 was not proven, indicating that negative political environment is not a function of positive sociocultural impacts of tourism development at the Aksu-Jabagly tourism destination.

In the seven relationship hypotheses in the proposed model, six were true but one was not. H3 is not valid because the path analysis results are contrary to the proposed assumption (Figure 4).

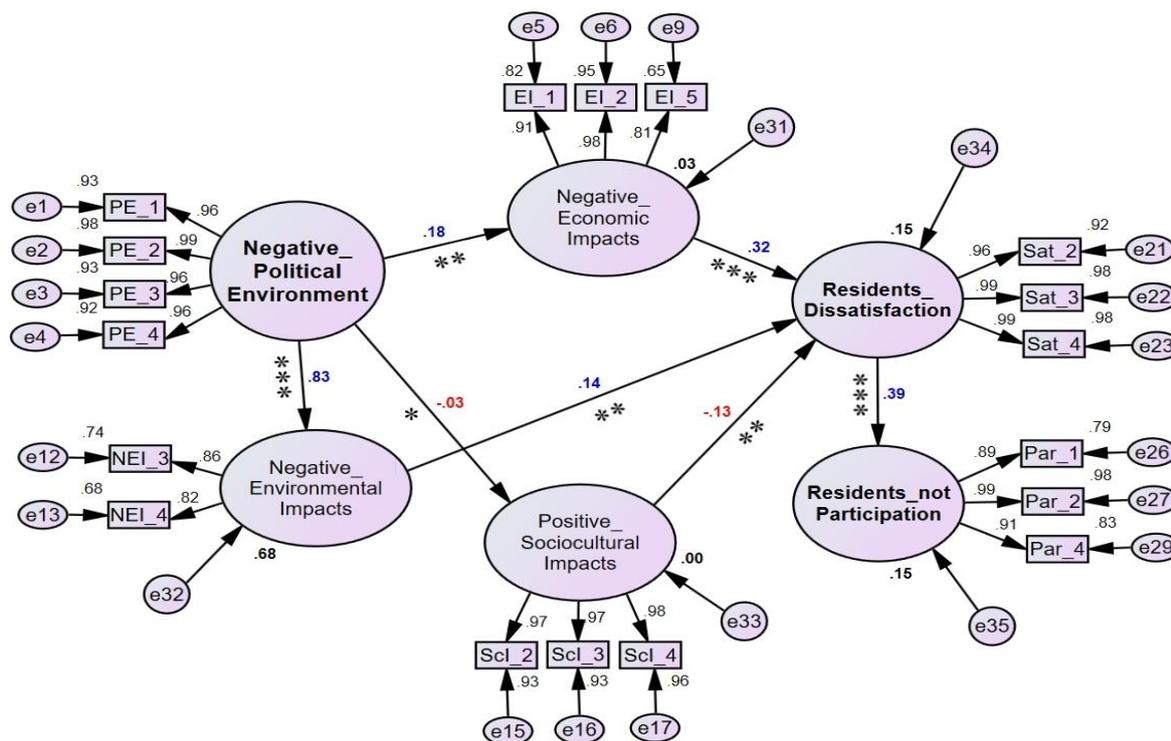


Figure 4. The model of residents’ participation in tourism. *** Statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, ** Statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, and * Statistically insignificant.

4. Discussion

Our proposed model in this study was developed based on the six-factor model constructed by Mihalič et al. (2016), which includes factors such as the political environment, the three pillars of sustainable tourism development (economic, sociocultural and natural), residents’ satisfaction and residents’ support for tourism. In their model, Mihalič et al. (2016) explore the direct impacts of the

political environment on three dimensions of sustainable tourism development, direct impacts of the three pillars of sustainable tourism development on residents' satisfaction with tourism, indirect impacts of the political environment on residents' satisfaction with tourism and direct impacts of residents' satisfaction with tourism on residents' support for tourism. And in our model, only seven direct connections were originally hypothesized. Instead of residents' support for tourism, we used residents' participation in tourism. Our study confirmed a total of 18 indicators that created a six-factor model in line with our theoretical model construct (Table 1). More specifically, these factors were the negative political environment of tourism destination, negative economic, positive sociocultural and negative environmental impacts of tourism, residents' dissatisfaction with tourism development, residents' nonparticipation in tourism. Each of these represents a self-standing construct in our model.

This paper contributes to the tourism knowledge base by integrating the dimensions of the political environment into sustainable models that could survey community participation in tourism. Therefore, our proposed model and discussion begin with the negative political environment which was measured by four indicators: Insufficient support from relative tourism organizations for locals, fewer benefits from tourism development for the local residents, less information about tourism development for local residents, and monopolization of tourism businesses by a few people in the village. Then, our model analyzed the direct impacts of the six factors.

It was concluded that the residents of Jabagly highly perceive the negative political environment because they agree with statements about describing negative political environment elements, the four indicators of negative political environments were evaluated with the mean value of 3.470. According to the respondents, "tourism development is less supported by relevant organizations" (mean = 3.37), "the local residents have fewer benefits from tourism development" (mean = 3.41), "local residents are rarely informed about tourism development" (mean = 3.58), and "tourism businesses are monopolized by a few politically powerful people" (mean = 3.52), which can be significantly improved. The negative political environment factors had a relatively high composite reliability (CR = 0.984), revealing the construct's high level of internal consistency. Furthermore, residents' dissatisfaction with tourism development also received higher mean values (3.275). Finally, it can be seen from the respondents' evaluation that residents not participating in tourism similarly received higher mean values (3.540). One can easily imagine that further improvement of the (at present) relatively negative political environment would result in even higher residents' satisfaction with tourism development and increase active participation of locals in the tourism industry.

With respect to the impact of Aksu-Jabagly's political environment, based on the other factors, seven direct connections were originally hypothesized. The first group of hypotheses assumes the role of the negative political environment on the three pillars of sustainable tourism (negative economic, negative environmental, and positive sociocultural impacts of tourism) and how they are perceived by the community (H1, H2, and H3). The results confirm that the impact of the negative political environment on negative economic (H1: $\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$) and negative environmental (H2: $\beta = 0.83, p < 0.001$) impacts of tourism at the Aksu-Jabagly heritage site were significant and positive, while the impact of the negative political environment on positive sociocultural impacts of tourism (H3: $\beta = -0.03, p > 0.05$) was not statistically significant, indicating that a negative political environment impact increased the residents' evaluation of negative economic and environmental impacts of tourism. By forming different factors with CFA, this study affirmed that, in reality, the impacts of tourism on the destination could be divided into the sociocultural, natural, and economic impacts [49–51]. The respondents also gave a relatively high score to negative economic and environmental impacts of tourism development in their hometown. The three indicators of negative economic impacts of tourism were evaluated with the mean value of 3.393, meanwhile, the two indicators of negative environmental impacts of tourism were evaluated with the mean value of 3.375.

Figure 4 shows that negative economic and environmental impacts of tourism had a significant positive effect on residents' dissatisfaction with tourism (H4, $\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$ and H5: $\beta = 0.14, p < 0.05$, respectively). It can be observed that residents largely agree that tourism caused negative

economic and environmental impacts, such as the widened gap between the rich and poor (mean = 3.39), risen local prices, and the necessary cost of living for residents (mean = 3.38), the leakage of local money (mean = 3.41), the high numbers of tourists who disturb the normal life of the flora and fauna in the reserve (mean = 3.38), and the tourism-generated pollution (throwing rubbish and making noise, etc.) in the tourism destination (mean = 3.37). Based on residents' assessment in Jabagly village, they also gave relatively high scores to the effects of tourism's positive sociocultural impacts (with an average of 3.527) on residents' dissatisfaction with tourism, however, the higher perception had a weaker negative influence on residents' dissatisfaction with tourism ($H6, \beta = -0.13, p < 0.05$), more research is needed in this area.

Therefore, it is assumed that the more positive political environment for tourism development is seen to be benefiting the positive economic development and environmental protection in Aksu-Jabagly, given that more residents are satisfied with tourism and embrace tourism development in their communities.

The seventh hypothesis ($H7$), which proposed residents' dissatisfaction with tourism development positively affects residents' nonparticipation in tourism, was proved ($H3: \beta = 0.39, p < 0.001$). It was found that in Aksu-Jabagly natural heritage tourism destination, higher dissatisfaction of local residents resulted in residents' weak participation in tourism development in their village. The high rate of dissatisfaction and low participation is noteworthy. From the investigation, a conclusion can be drawn that although the direct reason for residents' low involvement in the tourism sector was due to the dissatisfaction of local community with tourism development, one of the most primary indirect reasons for passive participation in the tourism industry was the negative political environment in the Aksu-Jabagly tourism destination. If local residents believe that authorities and government officials are interested in hearing their voices and providing them with an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, it will be a big encouragement for their participation. In the end, residents will participate in conservation programs and tourism development within the scope of what they believe the local government allows [52–54]. However, in underdeveloped and rural destinations, especially in developing countries, residents believe that the political structure of centralization and the tendency of local policymakers to evade power sharing will be detrimental to them [52,55,56]. Therefore, for rural residents in many developing countries, negative political environments, such as hiding preferential policies, unequal participation opportunities, and unequal benefit sharing, will limit their enthusiasm for participating in the tourism industry.

To sum up, the participation of local residents in the World Heritage tourism development in their hometown is one of the main prerequisites for sustainable tourism. If the political environment for implementing tourism development is beneficial for local residents, they will actively participate in the measures of protecting the world heritage sites within their communities. When implementing effective measures of sustainable tourism development, the local people play a very important role because they are more familiar with those antiquities and know well what it takes to protect and promote them.

5. Conclusions

This study highlights the importance of the political environment for sustainable tourism development. Residents' support for tourism may be affected by a well-developed political environment and destination governance [10]. Our results confirm that the negative political environment of a tourism destination can determine residents' negative assessment of the three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental, and sociocultural) These negative assessments of the three pillars of sustainability can increase residents' dissatisfaction with the pace of tourism development. Therefore, residents' participation in tourism may be affected by the badly-developed political environment in the tourism destination.

Based on the above findings, the study also helps local communities and the government to realize the importance of the positive political environment of the tourist destination in developing

sustainable tourism. Based on the identified connections and impacts, the Aksu-Jabagly community has the potential to increase residents' participation level in tourism development by improving the dimensions of the political environment. In this regard, in order to improve the current situation in Aksu-Jabagly world natural heritage tourism destination, the following measures are recommended: The relevant organizations should provide adequate support for tourism development, the tourism development generates more benefit to the development of the local area, relevant authorities provide local residents with comprehensive information about tourism development, opportunities of engaging in the tourism sector should be equally given everyone in the local area. Additionally, in order to achieve sustainable tourism, tourism development should recognize and encourage a higher level of local community satisfaction because local residents are one of the key stakeholders in tourism destinations. This requires a modification of the destination governance system to effectively develop and implement tourism policies based on the coordination and cooperation of all stakeholders. To ensure a higher level of coordination in the tourism industry itself, governance must overcome barriers of incoherent industries that do not adequately represent vulnerable interest groups [57], which are usually composed of local community residents. In short, in the case of Kazakhstan, reducing the influence of the negative political system and power structure on the tourism industry is one of the key ways to achieve sustainability in the most vulnerable heritage tourism destinations, specifically heritage sites like Aksu-Jabagly Biodiversity Reserve. Therefore, it is important to have a clear understanding of political issues, the interests of key political actors and how to mitigate personal interests in order to promote and maintain sustainable tourism development in this developing country.

Those aforementioned effective measures will increase local residents' satisfaction with tourism and active participation in tourism development, as a result, sustainable tourism development can be realized at this vulnerable biodiversity heritage site. The proposed model can also serve as a pioneer in further research to determine whether the model can be adapted and applied to other destinations to improve the political environment of a tourism destination and implementation of sustainable tourism development.

This study was not without its limitations that can affect the applicability of the results. This study surveyed a small sample size of local residents but did not investigate the perceptions of other stakeholder groups, such as tourists, government/local authorities, or tourism industry/the private sector. Therefore, a broad view of all tourism relevant stakeholders may not have been captured. In this regard, future research may be required to test the above-mentioned indicators, especially the poorly-developed political environment indicator. Furthermore, respondents can be selected from the various stakeholders in the tourism sector in further studies.

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