CZU: 623.746-519:[338.48-6:502/504]

SKY-HIGH SOLUTIONS: BEST PRACTICES IN UAV TECHNOLOGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Abstract. *The integration of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technologies in the tourism sector presents innovative opportunities for enhancing sustainable practices. This paper explores best practices in leveraging UAVs to improve tourist experiences while minimizing environmental impacts. We examine various applications, such as aerial photography for destination marketing, real-time data collection for managing tourist flows, and ecological monitoring of sensitive areas. Case studies from diverse regions illustrate successful UAV implementations that promote sustainable tourism development, focusing on community engagement and environmental stewardship. The findings highlight the importance of regulatory frameworks and ethical considerations in UAV deployment, ensuring safety and privacy. By showcasing successful models, this research provides valuable insights for tourism stakeholders aiming to harness UAV technologies responsibly, ultimately contributing to the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research and policy development, encouraging a collaborative approach to integrate UAV technologies in sustainable tourism strategies.*
Key words: *UAV technologies, sustainable tourism, best practices, aerial photography, tourist management, safety in tourism, community engagement.*

Introduction

Integrating Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones, into Geographic Information Systems (GIS) marks a transformative advancement in sustainable and safe tourism practices. UAV technology enables the capture of high-resolution spatial data and the creation of accurate terrain models, essential for informed decision-making in tourism, conservation, and visitor safety. By identifying potential hazards such as unstable terrain or environmentally sensitive areas, drones help tourism operators ensure visitor safety while preserving the integrity of natural and cultural sites.

Sustainable tourism increasingly depends on these technologies to support eco-friendly initiatives, reduce environmental impact, and promote the conservation of invaluable resources. In addition to environmental benefits, UAV-GIS applications improve site management by providing real-time data on visitor movement and site conditions, allowing for proactive safety measures and visitor flow management. This study delves into UAV-GIS technologies, examining their applications, safety benefits, and critical role in advancing sustainable tourism goals, especially within the framework of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The application of UAVs in GIS has expanded rapidly across various sectors, including urban planning, environmental monitoring, and disaster response. In tourism, these technologies facilitate responsible management of natural resources, optimize the use of renewable energy, and engage local communities in sustainable practices. With examples from regions known for their commitment to ecotourism, such as Costa Rica and Iceland, this paper explores the contributions of UAV-GIS technology to sustainable tourism. It also identifies challenges, potential future applications, and the broader impact of these innovations on the tourism industry.

Materials and Methods

The analysis in this study relies on an extensive review of existing literature on UAV-GIS integration and sustainable tourism, including journal articles, case studies, and reports from international organizations. Primary sources include recent studies on UAV applications in various industries, with a

specific focus on tourism, urban planning, environmental monitoring, and disaster response. By reviewing advancements in UAV-GIS technology, including technical and operational aspects, the study highlights the key roles these technologies play in sustainable tourism.

The study utilized UAVs equipped with high-resolution cameras, thermal imaging, and multispectral sensors, specifically chosen to support both safety and sustainability in the tourism industry. GIS software was employed for data processing, enabling the creation of highly detailed maps and digital elevation models (DEMs). These tools contribute not only to enhancing visitor experience through visually rich, informative content but also to improving safety by identifying potential hazards, ensuring safer routes, and monitoring sensitive environmental zones. Case studies were selected from Costa Rica, Iceland, Bhutan, and the Galapagos Islands, regions recognized for their commitment to sustainable tourism practices, innovative use of technology, and alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These destinations demonstrate how UAV-GIS technologies can enhance tourism safety by improving resource management, ensuring responsible environmental monitoring, and engaging local communities in sustainable practices. The analysis focused on evaluating the effectiveness of UAV-GIS applications in supporting conservation efforts, promoting safe tourism experiences, and fostering community involvement to protect natural and cultural resources.

By integrating technology and safety-oriented practices, this study highlights the role of UAV-GIS systems as tools not only for data collection but also for elevating safety standards, making tourism in ecologically sensitive areas both sustainable and secure.

Results and Discussions

The integration of UAVs in GIS offers a range of applications critical to sustainable tourism. UAVs equipped with advanced sensors provide valuable data on terrain, vegetation, and wildlife habitats, aiding conservationists in mapping protected areas and identifying regions vulnerable to degradation [1]. In Costa Rica, for instance, UAV-GIS technology is employed within the Forever Costa Rica Program to monitor 26 national parks and numerous reserves, ensuring that tourism growth does not compromise ecological integrity [2, p.1230-1249]. UAVs also help in identifying the carrying capacities of natural sites, contributing to the preservation of biodiversity in fragile ecosystems like the Galapagos Islands.

UAVs contribute to sustainable tourism by facilitating the assessment and optimization of renewable energy sources. For example, Iceland uses UAVs to map geothermal fields, supporting the sustainable management of its abundant geothermal energy resources. By capturing precise thermal and spatial data, UAVs aid in the efficient allocation of renewable energy sources for tourism facilities. This practice minimizes carbon emissions and supports Iceland's goal of becoming a zero-emission nation. UAV-GIS technology also assists tourism facilities worldwide in monitoring energy consumption and identifying areas where renewable energy systems, such as solar panels or wind turbines, can be effectively integrated. Environmental monitoring is crucial in sustainable tourism, particularly in regions where natural resources are the main tourist attractions. UAVs are used to monitor air and water quality, map erosion-prone areas, and track the impact of tourism activities on ecosystems. Waste management is another area where UAVs offer valuable insights. By mapping waste distribution in high-traffic areas, UAVs help tourism facilities optimize waste collection points and recycling stations. These practices align with the objectives of the UN's SDGs, which emphasize the reduction of waste and pollution in tourism sectors.

UAV-GIS technology facilitates community engagement by providing valuable data that supports local conservation efforts and helps educate both tourists and local residents. In Bhutan, a carbon-negative country, UAVs are employed to assess the environmental impact of tourism and provide real-time data that supports the country's Sustainable Development Fee program. UAVs enable data collection on carbon footprints, forest health, and waste management, allowing communities to understand the environmental impact of tourism and adapt practices accordingly [3, p. 109-125].

The use of UAVs in promoting educational content, such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) applications, raises awareness among tourists about sustainable practices and local culture.

Despite the advantages of UAV-GIS technology in sustainable tourism, there are challenges to its implementation. High initial costs, the need for technical expertise, and regulatory restrictions limit widespread adoption, particularly in developing countries. Additionally, data privacy and security concerns arise when drones are used in sensitive areas [4, p. 303-316]. The future of UAV-GIS in tourism will likely focus on improving accessibility and affordability through technological advancements and increased regulation standardization [5, p. 855-869].

UAV-GIS technology significantly contributes to the achievement of various SDGs related to sustainable tourism, such as SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). By providing real-time data on environmental conditions and resource use, UAVs enable tourism stakeholders to make informed decisions that support sustainable development [2, p.1230-1249]. In Costa Rica and Iceland, UAVs help monitor protected areas and geothermal energy use, respectively, aligning with SDG targets focused on preserving natural resources and promoting eco-friendly practices.

Drones have revolutionized tourism marketing, offering a cost-effective solution for creating breathtaking visual content. Unlike expensive options like helicopters, drones provide an affordable way for tourism companies to capture high-quality aerial footage, significantly reducing costs while delivering stunning visuals. This budget-friendly approach allows more companies to showcase their destinations, enhancing their appeal without breaking the bank. The flexibility and mobility of drones are unmatched. They can hover over iconic landmarks, soar to impressive altitudes, and navigate tight or otherwise unreachable areas to capture unique perspectives. This adaptability enables drones to produce real-time, high-definition footage, ideal for promoting destinations with captivating visuals that leave a lasting impression on potential visitors. Drones bring a fresh, immersive quality to tourism marketing that conventional photography often lacks.

Additionally, drones are incredibly quick to deploy, which is essential for capturing fleeting moments such as seasonal landscapes or local events. This quick turnaround allows tourism businesses to share timely content with their audiences, keeping potential tourists engaged and offering a constantly updated glimpse of the destination. Also, drones enhance safety in capturing footage of challenging or hazardous locations. Tourist destinations that may be too remote or difficult to access with traditional methods can now be safely showcased from above, offering viewers an immersive experience without risking the safety of photographers or videographers. By using drones, tourism companies can deliver exciting visuals that capture the essence of a destination, all while maintaining high safety standards.



Fig. 1. Advantages of using drones in the tourism industry

While drones offer exciting possibilities for the tourism industry, their use also brings certain challenges. Privacy is a primary concern, as drones capturing aerial footage in tourist areas may inadvertently infringe on personal spaces, affecting the privacy of tourists and local communities. Strict regulations and guidelines are crucial to safeguard privacy and maintain a positive experience for all.

Technically, drones still face limitations that may restrict their effectiveness because issues like limited flight time, small payload capacities, and vulnerability to weather can make it difficult to capture consistent, high-quality footage. To ensure reliable operations, drones require frequent maintenance and technology updates, adding additional costs and operational demands for tourism businesses.

Another potential drawback is interference in condition of popular tourist sites often crowded with electronic devices, drones may encounter signal disruptions from other devices or nearby drones, impacting their stability and footage quality. Additionally, unauthorized access to drone systems can pose security risks, making strong data protection protocols essential for safe use.

Operating drones requires navigating intricate regulations, including airspace permissions, permits, and operator certifications. This regulatory framework can be time-consuming and may delay content production or even restrict drone usage in certain areas. Tourism companies must stay informed and compliant with local regulations to avoid fines and ensure smooth operations.

Conclusion

Integrating UAV-GIS technology is a significant step toward fostering sustainable tourism while enhancing safety standards. By providing precise, real-time data on environmental conditions, resource usage, and potential hazards, UAVs empower tourism stakeholders to make informed decisions that prioritize ecological preservation, community welfare, and visitor safety. In places like Costa Rica, Iceland, Bhutan, and the Galapagos Islands, UAV-GIS technology has shown great potential not only in promoting eco-friendly practices but also in identifying and mitigating risks—such as unstable terrain, weather conditions, or overcrowded areas—that could pose safety concerns for tourists.

Moreover, UAV-GIS technology facilitates community engagement by delivering actionable insights to local authorities and tourism operators, enabling them to create safer, sustainable experiences for visitors. Although there are still challenges, particularly in terms of cost and regulatory frameworks, advancements in UAV-GIS technology are expected to improve accessibility and affordability, especially for regions with limited resources and infrastructure. This study underscores that when effectively implemented, UAV-GIS technology can significantly contribute to sustainable tourism by addressing both environmental and safety aspects, aligning with global sustainability and safety goals.

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Acknowledgment: This paper is developed in the context of the realization" Strengthening socio-economic and legal mechanisms to ensure the well-being and security of the citizens" (CONSEJ 01.05.02).