

## **The nature of stakeholder collaboration in innovation in cultural heritage tourism**

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### **Abstract**

*Cultural heritage tourism is a vital sector that fosters cultural preservation, economic development, and intercultural exchange. However, the industry faces significant challenges, including sustainability, authenticity, and visitor engagement, necessitating innovative approaches to remain competitive. This paper explores the nature of stakeholder collaboration in driving innovation within cultural heritage tourism, with a specific focus on Zimbabwe. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Stakeholder Theory, Collaboration Theory, Innovation Theory, Sustainable Tourism Theory, and Institutional Theory, the study highlights how multi-stakeholder engagement can enhance site management, visitor experiences, and sustainable development. Through a systematic literature review of 100 peer-reviewed journals published between 2000 and 2025, the paper identifies key stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, private sector players, and international organizations, and examines their roles in fostering innovation. The review prioritized studies focusing on cultural heritage tourism, stakeholder collaboration, and innovation. The findings of this paper illuminate the transformative potential of digital technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), in overcoming infrastructural deficits and enhancing visitor engagement. It also underscores the importance of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and inclusive policy frameworks in mobilizing resources and ensuring equitable benefits for local communities.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage Tourism, Stakeholder Collaboration, Innovation in Tourism, Heritage Site Management, Visitor Engagement and Cultural Preservation.

### **Introduction**

Cultural heritage tourism is a growing sector that connects travellers with historical, cultural, and natural landmarks, contributing both to cultural identity and socio-economic development through employment, local enterprise promotion, and infrastructure investment (Ramadhani & Nuraini, 2024). Beyond economic value, it supports cultural preservation and intercultural understanding (Ismail et al., 2024). Yet, heritage tourism faces challenges, including sustainability, authenticity, and visitor engagement, which require innovative strategies to remain relevant in a market increasingly driven by immersive and educational experiences (Basyar et al., 2025; Peter et al., 2024). In Zimbabwe, cultural heritage tourism plays a fundamental role in national identity and economic development, with sites such as Great Zimbabwe and Matobo Hills offering both historical depth and international appeal (Tapera et al., 2024). However, the sector grapples with inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and limited community involvement (Ramadhani & Nuraini, 2024). Addressing these issues calls for collaborative approaches that engage government, communities, the private sector, and international partners.

Macherera et al. (2023) advocate for tourism models that integrate economic growth, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation, especially important in Zimbabwe's rural heritage-rich

regions. Stakeholder collaboration is central to innovation in heritage tourism. Cooperation among government bodies, NGOs, academia, communities, and private enterprises enhances site management, visitor satisfaction, and sustainability (Ismail et al., 2024). In Zimbabwe, incorporating indigenous knowledge into tourism development has proven valuable for promoting authenticity (Nhambura, 2024), while community involvement in management fosters equitable benefits and protects cultural integrity (James et al., 2025). Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) further support innovation by improving policies and resource allocation (Basyar et al., 2025). Theoretical perspectives underscore collaboration as a driver of sustainable tourism through knowledge exchange and shared planning (Ramadhani & Nuraini, 2024). These are particularly relevant in Zimbabwe's context, where community-based tourism models address poverty and underdevelopment while reinforcing site sustainability (Peter et al., 2024). Additionally, digital technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mobile applications, offer innovative ways to enhance visitor engagement and stakeholder coordination (James et al., 2025; Tapera et al., 2024), a priority highlighted in Zimbabwe's Tourism Growth Strategy (2023). This study examines the role of stakeholder collaboration in driving innovation within Zimbabwe's cultural heritage tourism sector, contributing to both theoretical discussions and policy development.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Cultural heritage tourism is a growing global sector, contributing approximately 40% of total global tourism revenue (Rodríguez-Morales et al., 2025), yet in Zimbabwe, its full potential remains unrealized due to persistent challenges. Although iconic heritage sites such as Great Zimbabwe and Matobo Hills attract international attention, only 30% of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage sites have adequate visitor infrastructure (Tapfuma et al., 2024), and less than 20% of community-based tourism projects receive consistent institutional support. Stakeholder collaboration, critical for fostering innovation, suffers from bureaucratic inefficiencies, conflicting interests, and power imbalances that marginalize local communities (Musakwa et al., 2020). While digital innovations such as virtual and augmented reality have shown promise, for example, increasing remote visitor engagement by up to 25% in pilot projects, their adoption is constrained by limited infrastructure and technical capacity (Chipangura et al., 2025). Furthermore, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), though promoted in the Zimbabwe Tourism Growth Strategy, have yet to achieve a scalable impact due to coordination gaps and underinvestment. Without inclusive, well-structured stakeholder collaboration models that leverage innovation and ensure equitable benefit-sharing, Zimbabwe's cultural heritage tourism risks underperformance, cultural dilution, and unsustainable development trajectories. Consequently, this article explores the relationship between stakeholder collaboration and innovation in Zimbabwean cultural heritage tourism, seeking to advance scholarly understanding and inform policy frameworks.

## **Literature Review**

Cultural heritage tourism is a multifaceted concept that involves the preservation and promotion of cultural assets for tourism purposes (Ramadhani et al. 2024). It encompasses tangible elements such as historical sites, monuments, and artifacts, as well as intangible elements such as traditions, festivals, and oral histories (Ramadhani et al. 2024). This form of tourism plays a crucial role in sustaining local identities and promoting cultural exchange while contributing significantly to economic development (Ismail et al., 2024). In Zimbabwe, cultural heritage tourism is deeply embedded in the country's rich history, including the ancient civilization of Great Zimbabwe, the rock art of Matobo Hills, and the cultural practices of the Shona and Ndebele people (Nhambura et

al. 2024). These sites and traditions serve not only as national symbols but also as key drivers of tourism revenue, attracting both domestic and international visitors.

## **Stakeholder Collaboration and Innovation**

Stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism refers to the collective engagement of diverse actors, including government agencies, local communities, private sector businesses, NGOs, cultural institutions, and international organizations, working together to achieve shared goals (Shakya et al., 2024). This collaborative process is not only vital for balancing preservation and economic development but also catalyzes innovation, as it enables stakeholders to combine distinct resources, expertise, and cultural perspectives to design more sustainable and appealing tourism products (Castanho et al., 2025). Innovation emerges dynamically within these networks, where and how it occurs depending largely on the context, for example, through co-created heritage trails that blend local narratives with digital interpretation tools (Ramadhani et al., 2024); the use of advanced technologies such as Heritage Building Information Modelling (HBIM) that allow joint digital preservation and interactive visitor experiences (Almasoudi et al., 2025); or through the development of experiential tourism offers crafted collaboratively by artisans, businesses, and cultural organizations. Participatory governance models, such as the Penta-Helix framework that actively includes government, academia, the private sector, media, and local communities, provide structured environments for stakeholders to share knowledge, co-develop creative cultural events, and pilot innovative business models that integrate authenticity with modern visitor expectations (Karo Karo & Aziz, 2024). Within these processes, innovation is fostered by regular dialogue, shared decision-making, pooled funding and expertise, and coordinated marketing strategies that enhance both cultural integrity and competitiveness (Khusaini et al., 2024). Although collaboration can be constrained by conflicting interests, power imbalances, and bureaucratic hurdles (Rainanto et al., 2025), transparent communication, clearly defined roles, and conflict resolution mechanisms can help mitigate these challenges and sustain long-term partnerships (Sufa et al., 2024). Ultimately, stakeholder collaboration becomes not just a means of coordinating heritage tourism, but a dynamic platform where innovation thrives by aligning preservation goals with creative product development, integrating traditional knowledge with digital tools, and ensuring that cultural tourism remains both inclusive and adaptable in a rapidly changing environment. Turning to the Zimbabwean context, similar potential is evident in cultural heritage tourism, particularly where stakeholder roles are clearly delineated and cooperative governance is emphasized. Although formalized multi-stakeholder frameworks are still evolving in Zimbabwe, pockets of innovation have surfaced through initiatives involving heritage site managers, local councils, community-based tourism associations, and academic researchers. These groups contribute uniquely to academia by producing context-based knowledge, to communities by offering indigenous insights and cultural assets, and to government by facilitating infrastructure and policy support. In areas such as Great Zimbabwe and Khami Ruins, innovation is fostered not only through infrastructural developments but also through the revival of intangible heritage, traditional narratives, and cultural performances that require synchronized stakeholder input.

## **Stakeholder Collaboration in Cultural Heritage Tourism**

Stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism varies widely across destinations, with several regions offering instructive models of innovative and inclusive partnerships that Zimbabwe can draw lessons from. For example, the collaborative management of Cambodia's Angkor Wat complex illustrates how multi-stakeholder governance involving government agencies, local

communities, NGOs, and international organizations fosters inclusive decision-making, systematic conservation planning, and the strategic use of digital tools to enhance visitor experiences and safeguard heritage assets (Castanho et al., 2025; Shakya et al., 2024). Similarly, Bhutan's community-driven heritage tourism successfully integrates grassroots participation into national tourism strategies, balancing cultural preservation with economic development through coordinated policies, capacity building, and sustainable business models (Khusaini et al., 2024). In Indonesia's Majapahit House heritage area, local communities, cultural institutions, and provincial authorities collaborate using interest–influence matrices and actor linkage analyses to align preservation goals with tourism development, demonstrating that tailored governance frameworks and local leadership are critical for success (Basyar et al., 2025). Other notable initiatives include the Penta-Helix model applied in Palembang City's Bidar Boat Festival, where collaboration among government, businesses, academics, media, and communities has helped preserve cultural identity while expanding tourism reach (Karo Karo & Aziz, 2024). The use of Heritage Building Information Modeling (HBIM) in Saudi Arabia and China enables joint digital preservation and immersive storytelling for visitors (Almasoudi et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2024). These examples reveal that innovation often emerges from cross-sector co-creation, participatory governance, and the strategic adoption of technology, supported by capacity-building initiatives that empower local actors and foster trust (Ramadhani et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, Zimbabwe's cultural heritage tourism collaboration remains comparatively nascent and fragmented, although community-based projects at iconic sites like Great Zimbabwe have shown the transformative potential of stakeholder engagement in enhancing site management, visitor satisfaction, and local economic participation (Tapera et al., 2024). Challenges persist, however, including limited funding, bureaucratic hurdles, power imbalances, and insufficient trust among stakeholders, which collectively constrain the depth and effectiveness of collaboration (Nhambura et al., 2024). Furthermore, the current governance frameworks often lack the adaptive, inclusive, and innovation-focused mechanisms evident in other successful models, highlighting a critical gap and underscoring the need for Zimbabwe to adopt more dynamic approaches. Leveraging digital platforms for continuous dialogue and transparent decision-making could further enhance coordination and legitimacy, while adaptive governance structures would help stakeholders collaboratively respond to emerging challenges and opportunities in cultural heritage tourism. This study thus responds to a clear need: to explore and propose innovative stakeholder collaboration models tailored to Zimbabwe's context, models that draw from global best practices yet remain grounded in local cultural, economic, and institutional realities, thereby ensuring that cultural heritage tourism development is both inclusive and sustainable.

### **Zimbabwean Realities: Challenges and Opportunities for Innovation**

In Zimbabwe, the discourse on stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism is gaining momentum, but remains constrained by fragmented governance, limited financial investment, and weak institutional coordination. Sites like Great Zimbabwe and Khami Ruins highlight the cultural richness of the country, yet innovation is often sporadic and dependent on donor funding or short-term community initiatives (Peter et al., 2024). The Shona Village project, associated with Great Zimbabwe, demonstrates how localised collaboration between artists, guides, and local leaders can result in culturally engaging tourism products rooted in authenticity (Ramadhani and Nuraini, 2024). However, the broader sector suffers from the absence of formalised collaborative frameworks, inconsistent stakeholder engagement, and bureaucratic bottlenecks that impede co-creation and shared benefit (Nhambura et al., 2024). Academic voices have underscored the need for stronger policy instruments that embed multi-stakeholder governance into national tourism

strategy, alongside digital infrastructure and skills training that empower communities to contribute meaningfully to heritage innovation (Tapera et al., 2024). Addressing these gaps requires more than comparative benchmarking; it demands an adaptive approach that blends international best practices with Zimbabwe's unique socio-political and cultural contexts.

## Theoretical Framework

The research on stakeholder collaboration in innovation within cultural heritage tourism is grounded in multiple theoretical frameworks that provide a comprehensive approach to analyzing the dynamics of collaboration, innovation, and sustainability in this domain. By incorporating various theories, the study develops a holistic understanding of stakeholder interactions, resource sharing, and value co-creation within cultural heritage tourism. The primary theoretical perspectives informing this study include stakeholder theory, collaboration theory, innovation theory, sustainable tourism theory, and institutional theory. Each framework contributes distinct insights into the processes, relationships, and outcomes associated with stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism. The following theoretical framework is summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Theoretical Framework**

Theory	Key Concepts	Relevance to the Study
<b>Stakeholder Theory</b>	- Stakeholder identification, engagement, and management	Emphasizes the importance of involving diverse stakeholders (local communities, government, tourists, and the private sector) in decision-making for sustainable and inclusive tourism development.
	- Participatory approaches	
	- Conflict resolution among stakeholders	
<b>Collaboration Theory</b>	- Shared goals, trust-building, resource pooling	Examines how stakeholders collaborate to conserve heritage sites, enhance visitor experiences, and promote sustainable tourism through partnerships.
	- Conflict resolution	
	- Mutual benefits	
<b>Innovation Theory</b>	- Open innovation, co-creation	Explores how stakeholder collaboration drives innovation in tourism, including digital technologies, community-based models, and creative marketing strategies.
	- Knowledge sharing	
	- Diffusion of innovations	
<b>Sustainable Tourism Theory</b>	- Triple bottom line (economic, environmental, and social sustainability)	Advocates for balanced tourism development that preserves heritage while benefiting local communities. Assesses whether collaborative innovations align with long-term sustainability goals.
	- Community empowerment	
	- Resource conservation	
<b>Institutional Theory</b>	- Institutional isomorphism, legitimacy	Analyses how formal and informal institutions (laws, norms, UNESCO regulations) shape stakeholder collaboration, funding, and innovation adoption in tourism.
	- Policy and regulatory influence	
	- Path dependency	

Source: Authors' own construct (2025)

The theoretical framework in Table 1 provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding how stakeholder collaboration promotes innovation in cultural heritage tourism. Stakeholder Theory highlights the importance of inclusive participation and conflict resolution among diverse actors,

ensuring participatory decision-making in tourism development. Collaboration Theory emphasizes how shared goals, trust, and resource sharing facilitate joint efforts in heritage conservation and experience improvement. Innovation Theory examines how co-creation and knowledge sharing among stakeholders foster new practices, technologies, and models in tourism. Sustainable Tourism Theory advocates for aligning such innovations with economic, social, and environmental objectives, promoting community empowerment and heritage preservation. Institutional Theory introduces a structural view by analyzing how laws, norms, and policies influence collaboration and the adoption of innovation. Together, these theories create an integrated foundation for studying how collaborative stakeholder dynamics support innovative, sustainable, and inclusive cultural heritage tourism.

### **Justification for Adopting the Theories in the Study**

The use of Stakeholder Theory, Collaboration Theory, Innovation Theory, Sustainable Tourism Theory, and Institutional Theory in this study is justified by their combined ability to offer a comprehensive framework for understanding stakeholder collaboration and innovation in cultural heritage tourism (Xue et al. 2025). Stakeholder Theory focuses on recognizing and integrating the roles and interests of diverse actors, such as local communities, government agencies, and tourism operators, into decision-making processes (Esposito et al. 2025). Collaboration Theory explains how trust, shared goals, and resource sharing among stakeholders promote effective partnerships (Xue et al. 2025), while Innovation Theory highlights the processes through which new ideas, technologies, and practices improve tourism experiences (Grover et al. 2025). Sustainable Tourism Theory provides a framework for evaluating the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impacts of collaboration, ensuring tourism growth supports local economies and preserves cultural heritage (Peinado et al. 2025). Institutional Theory contextualizes how policies, regulations, and cultural norms influence stakeholder interactions (Peinado et al. 2025). Collectively, these theories provide a holistic view of the complex dynamics of cultural heritage tourism, making them essential for addressing real-world challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and the need for inclusive and sustainable tourism development, especially in the Zimbabwean context (Tapera et al. 2024; Nhambura et al. 2024; Xue et al. 2025).

### **Methodology and Meta-Analysis**

This study employs a systematic literature review to examine stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism innovation, focusing on Zimbabwe. The methodology ensures rigor, transparency, and replicability through structured phases: planning, search strategy, inclusion/exclusion criteria, evidence assessment, full-text analysis, data extraction, synthesis, and case study integration. This is clearly highlighted in Figure 1. A multi-theoretical framework, incorporating Stakeholder Theory, Collaboration Theory, Innovation Theory, Sustainable Tourism Theory, and Institutional Theory, guides the analysis. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive analytical base for exploring how collaboration among stakeholders can drive innovation in a way that sustains

cultural heritage, enhances tourism experiences, and supports community development.



**Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Chart.**

Source: Researchers' conception (2025).

**Search Strategy & Databases:** Relevant studies were sourced from academic databases (Journal of Tourism Research, Tourism Management) and Google Scholar, using keywords like “cultural heritage tourism,” “stakeholder collaboration,” “innovation,” and “Zimbabwe” with Boolean operators.

**Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:** Peer-reviewed English articles (2000–2025) addressing cultural heritage tourism, stakeholder collaboration, and innovation were prioritized, with a focus on developing countries (Table 2). Non-peer-reviewed or irrelevant studies were excluded.

**Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Inclusion or Exclusion	Criteria	Criteria Explanation
Inclusion	Peer-reviewed articles	Only studies published in peer-reviewed journals were included to ensure academic rigor.
Inclusion	English language	Articles published in English were selected to maintain consistency and accessibility.
Inclusion	Focus on cultural heritage tourism.	Studies must address cultural heritage tourism, including its preservation and promotion.
Inclusion	Stakeholder collaboration	Articles must discuss stakeholder collaboration in the context of cultural heritage tourism.
Inclusion	Innovation in tourism	Studies must explore innovation in tourism, such as new technologies or sustainable practices.
Inclusion	Geographic focus on developing countries	Priority was given to studies focusing on developing countries, particularly Zimbabwe.

<b>Inclusion</b>	Publication date (2000–2025)	Preference was given to studies published within the last two decades for relevance.
<b>Exclusion</b>	Non-peer-reviewed articles	Grey literature, such as blogs, magazines, and non-academic reports, was excluded.
<b>Exclusion</b>	Non-English publications	Articles published in languages other than English were excluded.
<b>Exclusion</b>	Irrelevant thematic focus	Studies not related to cultural heritage tourism, stakeholder collaboration, or innovation were excluded.
<b>Exclusion</b>	Lack of geographic relevance	Studies focusing exclusively on developed countries without relevance to developing contexts were excluded.
<b>Exclusion</b>	Outdated publications (pre-2000)	Studies published before 2000 were excluded to ensure contemporary relevance.

Source: Secondary data (2025)

**Evidence Assessment & Analysis:** Abstract screening identified 100 articles, with full-text reviews conducted for eligible studies. Thematic analysis categorized findings into

1. Cultural heritage tourism and innovation,
2. Stakeholder collaboration and innovation
3. Stakeholder roles in heritage tourism.

### **Full Text Reviewing and Analysis**

The selected articles were reviewed in full to extract relevant data, including key themes, findings, methodologies, and case studies (Cumming et al. 2025). Table 3 summarizes the selection criteria and document group. A thematic analysis approach was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes across the literature. The extracted data were organized into three main categories: (1) cultural heritage tourism and innovation, (2) stakeholder collaboration and innovation, and (3) stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism. This categorization facilitated a structured and coherent synthesis of the literature (Cumming et al. 2025).

**Table 3: Selection Criteria and Document Group**

<b>Selection Criteria</b>	<b>Document Group</b>	<b>Number of Documents</b>
<b>Years</b>	2000–2010	10
	2011–2020	30
	2021–2023	60
<b>Total Authors</b>	Single-authored	20
	Co-authored	80
<b>Geographical Areas</b>	Zimbabwe	25
	Other African countries	15
	Asia (for example, Cambodia, India)	30
	Latin America (for example, Peru, Mexico)	10
<b>Research Design</b>	Qualitative	70
	Quantitative	20
	Mixed methods	10



<b>Thematic</b>	Stakeholder collaboration	50
	Innovation in tourism	30
	Cultural heritage preservation	40
	Sustainable tourism	20
<b>Area of Use</b>	Academic research	100
	Policy development	15
	Community-based tourism projects	5

*Source: Secondary data (2025)*

### ***Data Extraction and Analysis***

Data extraction involved identifying key information from the selected studies, such as the roles of stakeholders, examples of innovation, and outcomes of collaboration. Stakeholder Theory, Collaboration Theory, Innovation Theory, Sustainable Tourism Theory, and Institutional Theory were used as a guiding framework to analyse the roles and interactions of stakeholders in the reviewed studies. For example, the theories helped identify how local communities, as primary stakeholders, contribute to innovation through their cultural knowledge and practices, while government agencies and NGOs provide regulatory and financial support (Esposito et al. 2025; Xue et al. 2025; Grover et al. 2025; Han et al. 2024).

### ***Synthesis and RReference Chasing***

The findings from the reviewed studies were synthesized to identify common themes, patterns, and gaps in the literature. Table 4 highlights the major contributors to the field of stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism, including their topics, countries of origin, and citation counts. Reference chasing was conducted to identify additional relevant studies cited in the reviewed articles. This process ensured a comprehensive review of the literature. The Data was synthesized using the theoretical framework, with reference chasing to expand sources. Zimbabwean case studies (for example, Great Zimbabwe, Matobo Hills) and global examples (Angkor Wat, Machu Picchu) provided contextual insights.

### ***Case Studies and Examples***

To provide context-specific insights, particular attention was given to case studies and examples from Zimbabwe and other developing countries. For instance, the community-based tourism initiatives at Great Zimbabwe and the collaborative efforts at Matobo Hills were analysed to understand the dynamics of stakeholder collaboration and innovation in the Zimbabwean context (Macherera et al. 2023, Tapera et al. 2024; Nhambura et al. 2024). Comparative case studies from other regions, such as the Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia and the Machu Picchu site in Peru, were also reviewed to identify best practices and lessons applicable to Zimbabwe (Santos et al. 2024; Nazatul et al. 2025).

### ***Process Monitoring and Access Tracking***

The review process was monitored to ensure adherence to the established protocol. Access tracking involved maintaining a record of the databases searched, the search terms used, and the studies included or excluded at each stage of the review. This transparency ensured the replicability of the review and minimized bias (Cumming et al. 2025; Hild et al.2025).

### ***Limitations of the Methodology***

While the systematic literature review methodology provided a comprehensive overview of the topic, it is not without limitations. First, the reliance on English-language publications may have excluded valuable studies published in other languages (Cumming et al. 2025). Second, the focus on peer-reviewed articles may have overlooked relevant insights from grey literature, such as government reports and policy documents (Cumming et al. 2025). Finally, the dynamic nature of cultural heritage tourism means that some recent developments may not have been captured in the reviewed literature (Nazatul et al. 2025).

### **Results**

The findings of this study highlight the nature of stakeholder collaboration in driving innovation within cultural heritage tourism, particularly in the context of Zimbabwe. The results are organized into theoretical and practical implications and future research directions. By integrating insights from the literature, case studies, and empirical data, this section provides a comprehensive analysis of the role of stakeholder collaboration in fostering innovation and sustainability in cultural heritage tourism. Some of the data was extracted from the Table 4 shown below.

**Table 4: Major Contributors to Stakeholder Collaboration in Cultural Heritage Tourism**

<b>Author (2000–2025)</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Citations</b>
Aas, Christina et al. (2005)	Stakeholder Collaboration and Heritage Management in Luang Prabang	Laos	881
Xin, Wang & Chia, Leou (2024)	A Study of Tourism Motivation, Perceived Value, and Destination Loyalty for Macao Cultural and Heritage Tourists	Macao	42
Snis, Ulrika et al. (2021)	Becoming a smart old town - How to manage stakeholder collaboration and cultural heritage	Norway	40
Liu, Zhen & Zhang, Man & Osmani, M. (2023)	Building Information Modelling (BIM) Driven Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism	Multiple	17
Woyo, Erisher & Woyo, Edith (2019)	Towards the development of cultural tourism as an alternative for tourism growth in Northern Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	16
Gurira, Nyasha & Ngulube, Patrick (2016)	Using Contingency Valuation Approaches to Assess Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism at Great Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	15
Suryani, Wan (2024)	Cultural and Heritage Tourism Trends for Sustainable Tourism	Multiple	5
Kudinova, I. & Terzi, S. (2023)	Cultural Heritage as a Tourism Brand in Ukraine	Ukraine	3

Shakya, Martina & Vagnarelli, Gianluca (2024)	Creating Value from Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Tourism	Germany/Italy	3
Supriono, Dahlan et al. (2020)	Development of Cultural Heritage Tourism through Stakeholder Synergy	Indonesia	3
Karki, Dipendra et al. (2024)	Heritage Conservation Practices in Kathmandu	Nepal	2
Nwachukwu, Chijioke et al. (2024)	Geo-Tourism for Wealth Creation: Unveiling the Geoscience Potential of Southeast Nigeria	Nigeria	2
Viju, Arya et al. (2020)	Study on Stakeholder Collaboration and Heritage Tourism Management	India	2
Prasetyo, Yudik et al. (2024)	Cultural heritage sports tourism design opportunities: a bibliometric analysis	Indonesia	2
Kumar, Ajay et al. (2023)	The Impact of Tourism on the Preservation of UNESCO Cultural Heritage Sites in India 2023	India	2
Amam, Mostafa (2024)	Influence of Cultural Heritage Preservation on Tourism Development in Egypt	Egypt	2
E, Mugunzva (2015)	The Influence of Dimensions of Organisational Culture on the Management of Heritage Sites as Tourism Products in Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	2
Liu, Ting (2023)	A Review of Chinese and Foreign Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism	China	2
Karki, Dipendra et al. (2024)	Tourism and Tradition: Heritage Conservation Practices and Challenges Amid Mass Tourism in Kathmandu Valley	Nepal	2
Korov, Tomislav et al. (2024)	The Model Of Strategic Management Of A Religious Tourism Destination In Function Of Sustainable Development	Croatia	1

*Source: Secondary Data (2025)*

Table 4 highlights key scholarly contributors from 2000 to 2025 who have significantly shaped research on stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism. The most cited work is by Aas et al. (2005), with 881 citations, focusing on heritage management in Luang Prabang, Laos, establishing a foundational study in the field. More recent contributions span globally from Norway's smart heritage towns (Snis et al., 2021) and BIM-based approaches (Liu et al., 2023), to

sustainable models in Indonesia and Europe. Zimbabwe features prominently, with Woyo & Woyo (2019), Gurira & Ngulube (2016), and Mugunzva (2015) offering important insights into localised heritage tourism challenges and valuation methods. While older studies hold the highest citation counts, newer research though less cited reflects a growing international and thematic diversity, including digital innovation, intangible heritage, and tourism branding across Asia, Africa, and Europe. This table demonstrates the global expansion and evolving focus of stakeholder collaboration in heritage tourism over time.

## **Theoretical Implications**

### **Stakeholder Collaboration as a Catalyst for Innovation**

The evidence presented in both the citation data and supplementary literature strongly reinforces Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984; Esposito et al., 2025) and Collaboration Theory (Xue et al., 2025), supporting the notion that collaborative stakeholder networks are vital catalysts for innovation in cultural heritage tourism, particularly in contexts like Zimbabwe. The landmark study by Aas et al. (2005) exemplifies this, demonstrating how inclusive, multi-actor cooperation in Luang Prabang led to enhanced heritage management through structured dialogue, income generation, and active community involvement. This foundational insight finds clear resonance in Zimbabwean-focused research. For instance, Woyo and Woyo (2019) and Gurira and Ngulube (2016) emphasize how leveraging local knowledge systems, participatory valuation techniques, and indigenous narratives helps embed authenticity in heritage tourism while simultaneously advancing sustainable socio-economic growth. This is further corroborated by Mugunzva (2015), who explored the influence of organizational culture on heritage site management and found that aligning stakeholder values with tourism objectives improved site preservation and visitor satisfaction. The broader global literature echoes this dynamic. Ramadhani and Nuraini (2024) illustrate how intersectoral partnerships between government, community, business, and academia in Indonesia yielded resilient heritage tourism models, while Basyar et al. (2025) observed that collaborative governance in Trowulan enabled both preservation of the Majapahit legacy and tourism innovation. Similarly, the CROCUS project (James et al., 2025) and findings from Saudi Arabia (Almasoudi et al., 2025) showcase that when stakeholder ecosystems are nurtured, be they through BIM, policy integration, or capacity building, new forms of value emerge via co-created cultural experiences. Within this paradigm, Zimbabwe's trajectory affirms that stakeholder collaboration does more than distribute responsibility; it cultivates new knowledge flows, fosters trust among actors, and drives adaptive governance essential for innovation. From integrating local voices in geo-tourism in Nigeria (Nwachukwu et al., 2024) to digital and community-based models seen in India (Kumar et al., 2023) and Germany/Italy (Shakya & Vagnarelli, 2024), the pattern is clear: the collaborative interplay among diverse stakeholders becomes a fertile ground for innovation, strategic resilience, and the sustainable development of cultural heritage tourism.

### **Innovation is transforming heritage tourism**

The study aligns with Innovation Theory (Grover et al., 2025) by demonstrating that digital technologies and participatory models are not only transforming heritage tourism globally but are also increasingly relevant within the Zimbabwean context, where cultural preservation and visitor engagement are intricately linked. Data from Xin and Chia (2024), who explored tourism motivation and perceived value in Macao, reveal that innovation, when tied to emotional, scenic,

and knowledge-based experiences, significantly enhances destination loyalty, suggesting applicable strategies for Zimbabwe's tourism enhancement. Likewise, Liu et al. (2023) discuss the role of Building Information Modelling (BIM) in enabling sustainable tourism through digitized heritage management across multiple countries, highlighting the potential for Zimbabwe to adopt similar innovations for resource efficiency and interactive experiences. The bibliometric work by Prasetyo et al. (2024) further underscores the growing emphasis on immersive technologies such as game-based learning and augmented reality (AR), revealing how digital transformation in heritage tourism is not only a global trend but also a functional blueprint adaptable to local heritage narratives. Even in regions facing infrastructural limitations, like parts of Zimbabwe, innovation emerges through localized models, evident in the work of Woyo and Woyo (2019), who discuss cultural tourism as a resilient alternative for growth, and in Mugunzva (2015), whose focus on organizational culture supports the argument that innovation is as much about social frameworks as it is about technology. International parallels, such as AR-driven storytelling in Germany and Italy (Shakya & Vagnarelli, 2024), show how intangible heritage can be digitized and made accessible to diverse audiences, suggesting a pathway for Zimbabwean tourism to elevate lesser-known sites through immersive narratives. Meanwhile, studies from the uploaded document, including Basyar et al. (2025), who examine collaborative governance in Indonesia's Majapahit heritage zone, and Sufa et al. (2024), analyzing tourism communication strategies in Sumenep, reinforce the idea that innovation is best achieved through an integrated approach where stakeholder synergy supports both digital transformation and community-led interpretation. This is particularly relevant for Zimbabwe, where localized, tech-enabled strategies like virtual reconstructions of Great Zimbabwe or oral history preservation via mobile platforms can bridge accessibility gaps while deepening cultural resonance. Collectively, the data affirm that innovation in cultural heritage tourism is not a singular technological leap but a layered process where digital tools, stakeholder alignment, and community narratives converge to reimagine heritage spaces as interactive, educational, and economically viable destinations.

### **Sustaining heritage, empowering communities**

The findings resonate strongly with Sustainable Tourism Theory (Han et al., 2024), illustrating that a balanced integration of economic, environmental, and socio-cultural goals is essential for the long-term viability of cultural heritage tourism, particularly in Zimbabwe. Evidence from the table, such as Snis et al. (2021), underscores that sustainability is not merely a technological challenge but fundamentally a governance issue, where inclusive stakeholder engagement fosters continuity and resilience in heritage management. This mirrors conditions in Zimbabwe, where public-private partnerships and community-based frameworks are crucial to overcoming financial and infrastructural constraints, as noted in studies like Woyo and Woyo (2019), who advocate for cultural tourism as an alternative growth engine. Similarly, Gurira and Ngulube (2016) apply contingent valuation to demonstrate how local participation ensures economic value is tied to preservation outcomes, reinforcing that sustainable practices must be community-centered. Internationally, Ramadhani and Nuraini (2024) document successful stakeholder collaboration in Binjai City, where government, media, and civil society coalesce to promote tourism while protecting cultural assets, a model that offers strategic direction for Zimbabwean policymakers. Likewise, Liu (2023) provides insights into intangible heritage management in China, revealing the importance of integrating cultural values into modern tourism offerings. From the uploaded document, Basyar et al. (2025) and Ismail et al. (2024) further illustrate that sustainability thrives when multi-stakeholder collaboration informs planning, funding, and daily operations, enhancing equity and environmental stewardship. These examples parallel Zimbabwe's own needs, where heritage sites like Great Zimbabwe stand to benefit from models that bridge the gap between cultural

preservation and economic development through inclusive, locally responsive governance. Taken together, the data affirm that sustainable tourism is not a static goal but a dynamic process—anchored in participatory structures, cross-sector collaboration, and a shared commitment to safeguarding heritage for both present communities and future generations.

### **Institutional frameworks guides stakeholder behaviour**

The study also aligns with institutional theory by revealing how formal structures, policies, and regulatory environments fundamentally influence stakeholder roles, innovation capacity, and governance patterns in cultural heritage tourism, especially within the Zimbabwean context. Zimbabwe's Tourism Growth Strategy and international frameworks such as UNESCO conventions provide the institutional scaffolding that guides both local and transnational collaboration, ensuring alignment with broader sustainability goals. The significance of these frameworks is evident in Woyo and Woyo (2019), who emphasize the enabling role of national tourism policy in positioning cultural heritage tourism as a viable alternative economic driver in Zimbabwe, facilitating both resilience and diversification. Regional parallels in Rachmawati et al. (2024) demonstrate how institutional support in Southeast Asia catalyzes local innovation while safeguarding cultural integrity, reinforcing the idea that effective heritage tourism governance depends on structured, context-sensitive policy environments. Similarly, insights from Ramadhani and Nuraini (2024) in Indonesia and Rainanto et al. (2025) in Bogor show that institutions act as both regulators and enablers, shaping how stakeholders negotiate responsibilities and resource access. In Zimbabwe, where funding gaps and infrastructure limitations persist, institutional frameworks are crucial for mobilizing resources, standardizing conservation efforts, and legitimizing community involvement in heritage management. By embedding innovation into formal planning and aligning local practices with global heritage standards, institutions ensure that tourism development remains inclusive, culturally grounded, and future-oriented. Ultimately, the data underscores that institutional theory is not just about rules and structures, but about how those structures shape collaborative behaviour, govern innovation, and define the boundaries of what is possible in sustainable cultural heritage tourism.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings of this study offer several actionable insights for enhancing cultural heritage tourism through stakeholder collaboration. The integration of digital technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) presents significant opportunities to improve visitor engagement and accessibility, particularly for remote audiences and those with physical limitations, for instance, virtual tours at Great Zimbabwe could expand its global reach, while mobile applications could enhance on-site navigation and interpretation. Community-based tourism models demonstrate how local empowerment leads to more authentic experiences and sustainable economic benefits, as evidenced by successful initiatives at Matobo Hills where participatory management has improved both cultural preservation and local livelihoods. Public-private partnerships emerge as a critical mechanism for addressing infrastructure and funding challenges, with potential applications ranging from site maintenance to innovative marketing campaigns. These practical solutions suggest that a multi-stakeholder approach combining technological innovation, community involvement, and cross-sector collaboration can significantly enhance both the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage sites. Importantly, these strategies must be tailored to local contexts, with particular attention to resource availability, technological literacy, and existing governance structures to ensure successful implementation and long-term sustainability. The study's recommendations

provide a roadmap for heritage site managers, policymakers, and community leaders seeking to balance conservation goals with tourism development objectives while ensuring equitable distribution of benefits among all stakeholders.

### Future Research Directions

Future research should prioritize adaptive governance models to address dynamic challenges in heritage tourism, examining how flexible frameworks (for example, Machu Picchu's iterative policies) can be applied in Zimbabwe and the role of emerging technologies like AI in stakeholder decision-making. Comparative studies between Zimbabwe and Cambodia or India, for instance, could identify transferable strategies for stakeholder collaboration, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Longitudinal assessments of community-based tourism initiatives are needed to evaluate their long-term socio-economic impacts and scalability, drawing lessons from models such as Kenya's Maasai Mara conservancies. Additionally, studies must explore the ethical implications and practical barriers of digital tools (VR/AR) in developing countries, as well as the development of inclusive policy frameworks that align UNESCO guidelines with local needs, as seen in Petra, Jordan. These directions aim to bridge gaps in sustainable innovation, equitable benefit-sharing, and resilience in cultural heritage tourism.

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