

The Role 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 related to sustainability, authenticity, and visitor engagement, which necessitate competitive, innovative approaches. This paper explores the role of stakeholder collaboration in driving innovation in Zimbabwean cultural heritage tourism. The manuscript explores innovative cultural tourism using theoretical frameworks such as the Stakeholder Theory, Collaboration Theory, Innovation Theory, Sustainable Tourism Theory, and Institutional Theory. The study highlights how multi-stakeholder engagement may 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. The paper examines the role of each stakeholder in the value chain of cultural tourism innovation. The review prioritized studies that focus on cultural heritage tourism, stakeholder collaboration, and innovation, with a geographic bias toward developing countries, for example, Zimbabwe. The study excludes non-peer-reviewed articles, non-English publications, and outdated studies. Case studies from Zimbabwe, such as Community-Based Tourism initiatives at the Great Zimbabwe and Matobo Hills, illustrate the benefits of participatory governance when cultural heritage tourism integrates with Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). The study emphasizes the transformative potential of digital technologies, such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), in overcoming infrastructural deficits that enhance visitor engagement. The findings underscore the importance of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP's) and inclusive policy frameworks in mobilizing resources and ensuring equitable benefits for local communities. The paper

concludes with recommendations for future research, including adaptive governance models, comparative studies across regions, and the impact of digital technologies on cultural preservation and commercialization. Operational insights into the Zimbabwean context make this study contribute to the broader cultural heritage tourism discourse on practical strategies for sustainable and inclusive tourism development.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage Tourism, Authenticity, Stakeholder Collaboration, Innovation

Introduction

Cultural heritage tourism is a rapidly expanding sector that offers travellers opportunities to engage with historical, cultural, and natural landmarks. This type of tourism not only fosters appreciation of cultural identity but also contributes significantly to socio-economic development by generating employment, promoting local crafts, and encouraging infrastructure investment (Ramadhan *et al.*, 2024). It can be argued that the significance of cultural heritage tourism goes beyond economic benefits. Cultural heritage tourism serves as a mechanism for cultural preservation and intercultural exchange, fostering understanding of diverse histories and traditions (Ismail *et al.*, 2024). However, as the tourism industry evolves, cultural heritage sites face increasing challenges related to sustainability, authenticity, and visitor engagement, making innovation crucial for maintaining their relevance and appeal (Basyar *et al.*, 2025). In an era when tourists seek engaging, educational, and long-lasting, memorable experiences, cultural heritage destinations must embrace innovative strategies that showcase service packages that preserve intrinsic value (Peter *et al.*, 2024).

Zimbabwe's cultural heritage tourism plays a vital role in projecting the nation's identity, given the country's rich historical and archaeological assets, such as the Great Zimbabwe, the Khami Ruins, and the Matobo Hills (Tapera *et al.*, 2024). These sites are not only recognized for their historical significance but also contribute to Zimbabwe's national pride and international tourism appeal (Tapera *et al.*, 2024). Despite the country's domestic and global appeal for cultural heritage tourism, the sector faces challenges, including inadequate funding, outdated infrastructure, and limited local community engagement (Ramadhani *et al.*, 2024). Addressing the aforementioned challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach that involves government agencies, local communities, private-sector actors, and international organizations. Macherera *et al.* (2023) stress that innovative models of cultural heritage tourism management should be aligned with economic development and environmental sustainability, while preserving the cultural heritage of the respective local communities. The observation aligns with Zimbabwe,

where many heritage sites are rural, with possibilities of these monuments being economically disadvantaged.

The key linchpin of innovation in cultural heritage tourism is stakeholder collaboration. This involves the cooperation and active participation of various stakeholders, such as government entities, local communities, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions, in partnership with the private sector. Collaborative efforts create solutions that upgrade site management skills, visitor experiences, and sustainable development (Ismail *et al.*, 2024). In Zimbabwe, the use of indigenous knowledge systems in tourism development has been identified as a sustainable strategy that ensures the authenticity of local traditional practices. (Nhambura, 2024). The literature supports the view that participatory management approaches, for example those in which local communities are active participants in decision-making, result in cultural integrity characterised by downstream social and economic benefits. (James *et al.*, 2025). Furthermore, public-private partnerships (PPP's) have been identified as critical agencies that improve policy frameworks and resource mobilization meant to innovate heritage tourism (Basyar *et al.*, 2025).

The theoretical foundation of stakeholder collaboration in tourism has been well established in the literature. Ramadhani *et al.* (2024) emphasize that stakeholder networks facilitate knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and collaborative planning, which are essential ingredients for achieving sustainable tourism development. Similarly, Nhambura (2024) argues that collaboration fosters problem-solving and adaptive strategies, particularly in dynamic and complex domains characterised by innovative cultural heritage tourism. These collaborative approaches are relevant to Zimbabwe, where heritage sites require sustainable management practices that address socio-economic challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and infrastructure limitations (Nhambura, 2024). The integration of community-based tourism models, in which local residents directly benefit from tourism activities, has been identified as a successful strategy for enhancing heritage site sustainability and innovation (Peter *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, the role of digital technologies in stakeholder collaboration and innovation on cultural heritage tourism is essential. The adoption of digital tools such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), mobile applications, among other real-time technologies, has transformed the provision of heritage tourism services and experiences globally, making them more interactive, accessible, and educational (James *et al.*, 2025). In Zimbabwe, technological

innovations can help mitigate some of the infrastructure deficits in the tourism sector by offering alternative, modern ways for tourists to experience cultural heritage sites remotely rather than through on-site visits (Tapera et al., 2024). Digital platforms facilitate honest time communication and coordination among stakeholders which improves collaboration in tourism management (Peter *et al.*, 2024). Government-led initiatives, such as the Zimbabwe Tourism Growth Strategy (2023), underscore the importance of leveraging technology and fostering multi-stakeholder engagement to enhance the sector's resilience and competitiveness.

This paper explores the role of stakeholder collaboration in fostering innovation in cultural heritage tourism, emphasizing its significance in transforming the sector. By examining case studies from Zimbabwe and drawing from broader theoretical perspectives, this study aims to highlight how collaborative efforts among various stakeholders contribute to sustainable and innovative heritage tourism development. Furthermore, this paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on stakeholder collaboration in innovative cultural tourism in Zimbabwe, which remains relatively underexplored in scholarly discourse. By identifying best practices and potential areas for improvement, this research aims to inform policy decision-makers and tourism practitioners with practical strategies to enhance the effectiveness of stakeholder-driven innovation in cultural heritage tourism.

Literature Review

Cultural heritage tourism represents a dynamic intersection of preservation, innovation, and economic development, serving as a bridge from past tourism practices to a digitally informed future. Rooted in the celebration of tangible and intangible cultural assets, this form of tourism not only sustains local identities but also encompasses global cultural exchange. (Ramadhani *et al.*, 2024; Ismail *et al.*, 2024). In Zimbabwe, cultural heritage tourism is inseparable from the nation's rich history, for example, the ancient ruins of Great Zimbabwe and traditions as practiced by the Shona and Ndebele. (Tapera *et al.* 2024). However, as the global tourism landscape evolves, innovation has become a critical linchpin for the sustainability and competitiveness of cultural heritage tourism (Ezenwa *et al.*, 2025). Emerging technologies, such as virtual reality and digital storytelling, are transforming how visitors engage with heritage sites (Wang, 2025), while stakeholder collaboration is increasingly recognized as essential for balancing preservation with development (Atsakpo *et al.*, 2024; Pattiyagedara *et al.*, 2024). This literature review explores the multifaceted relationship between cultural heritage tourism and innovation, examining opportunities, challenges, and collaborative strategies that shape this evolving field. By drawing on global examples and focusing on

Zimbabwe’s unique context, this review highlights the importance of integrating technological advancements, sustainable practices, and inclusive governance to ensure the long-term viability of cultural heritage tourism (Wang, 2025).

Cultural Heritage Tourism and Innovation

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, among others. (Ramadhani *et al.*, 2024). This form of tourism plays a crucial role in sustaining local identities and promoting cultural exchange, which significantly contribute to economic development (Ismail *et al.*, 2024). In Zimbabwe, cultural heritage tourism is deeply embedded in the country’s rich history, which includes the ancient civilization of Great Zimbabwe, the rock art of the Matobo Hills, and the cultural practices of the Shona and Ndebele peoples (Nhambura, 2024). These sites serve not only as national symbols but also as key sources of foreign-currency revenue. They attract domestic and international visitors.

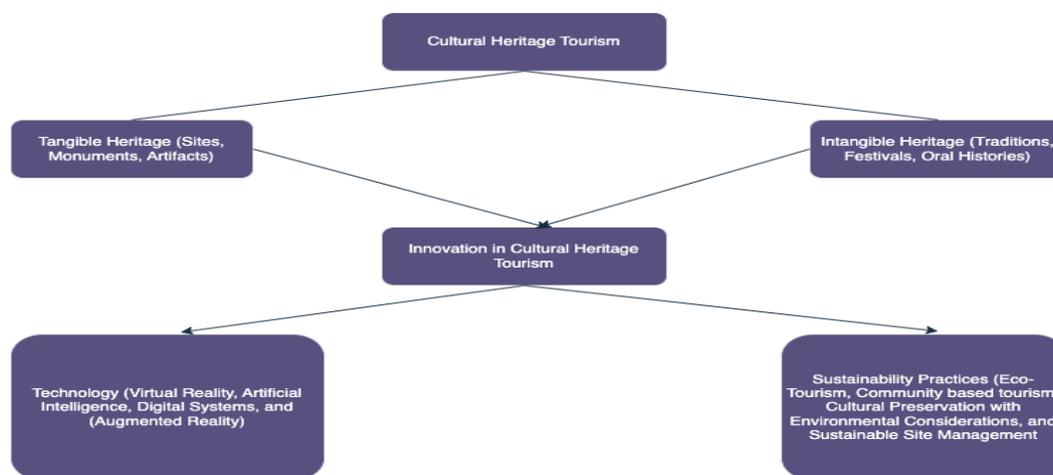


Figure 1: Cultural Heritage Tourism and Innovation

Source: Researchers’ conception (2025), derived from literature review

Innovation in cultural heritage tourism is essential for its sustainability and competitiveness. It involves the adoption of new technologies, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) for site interpretation, the development of sustainable tourism practices, and the creation of unique cultural experiences for visitors (Shakya *et al.*, 2024). Technological advancements enable visitor engagement, improve accessibility, and facilitate the digitization of cultural assets (Castanho *et al.*, 2025). Furthermore, the implementation of innovative tourism

strategies, such as mobile applications and AI-driven heritage interpretation, enhances tourists' experiences that support conservation efforts (Castanho *et al.*, 2025; Shakya *et al.*, 2024). This is shown in Figure 1. Digital storytelling, gamification, and interactive museum displays have emerged as innovative approaches to making heritage sites more engaging, entertaining, and educational (Castanho *et al.*, 2025).

However, innovation in cultural heritage tourism presents several challenges. One significant challenge is the commodification of culture. Cultural traditions and artifacts are commercialized in ways that may distort and dilute the intended people's original meaning. (Shakya *et al.* 2024). Additionally, innovation requires significant investment in infrastructure, training, and technology, which can be costly for developing countries such as Zimbabwe (Shakya *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, local communities may resist tourism innovation efforts due to fears of cultural erosion amid myths about venerated gods' revenge, which may lead locals to opt for exclusion from cultural tourism decision-making processes (Castanho *et al.*, 2025). Addressing the cited challenges requires a multi-sectorial approach that integrates technological advancements that respect and honour the preservation of the local inhabitants' cultural ways of doing things (Ramadhani *et al.*, 2024).

Stakeholder Collaboration and Innovation

Stakeholder collaboration refers to the process by which different parties, including government agencies, private-sector actors, local communities, and non-governmental organizations, work together toward common cultural tourism objectives (Shakya *et al.*, 2024). In cultural heritage tourism, collaboration is essential for fostering innovation, as it brings together diverse perspectives, resources, and expertise that develop sustainable and competitive tourism initiatives (Castanho *et al.*, 2025).

The key stakeholders in cultural heritage tourism include local communities, tourists, tourism operators, government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international institutions such as UNESCO and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (Basyar *et al.*, 2025). Each stakeholder plays a crucial role in shaping tourism development and innovation (Peter *et al.*, 2024). Local communities contribute with indigenous knowledge systems, and government agencies provide policy and regulatory frameworks. Private-sector operators invest in infrastructure and marketing strategies (Peter *et al.*, 2024). Figure 2 is an effort to simplify the procedure for the reader's ease of appreciation. Effective collaboration ensures that

tourism benefits are equitably distributed and that cultural heritage sites are managed sustainably (Basyar *et al.*, 2025).

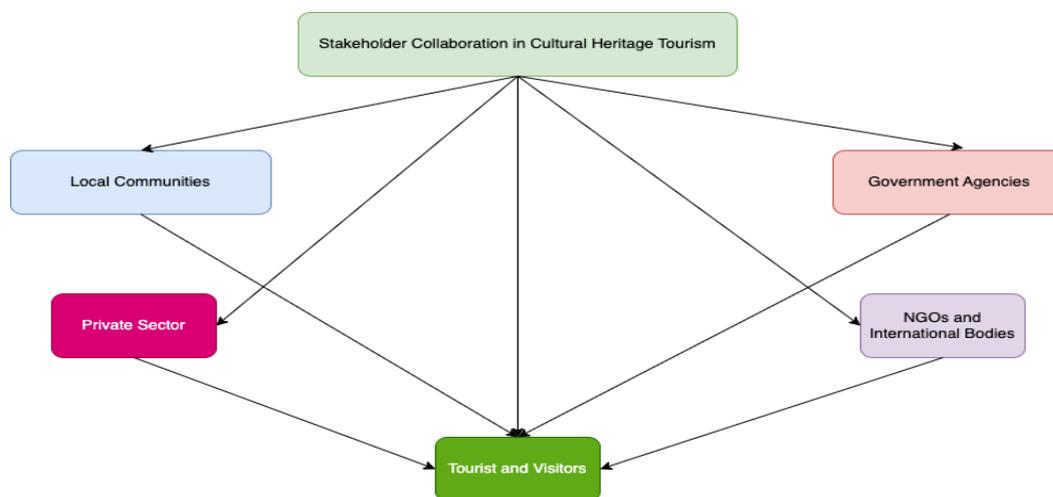


Figure 2: Stakeholder Collaboration in Cultural Heritage Tourism

Source: Researchers' conception (2025), derived from literature review.

The role of stakeholder collaboration in innovation is multifaceted (Sufa *et al.*, 2024). Collaboration encourages knowledge sharing and enhances legitimacy and trust in tourism initiatives that leverage diverse resources to innovate (Rainanto *et al.*, 2025). Of interest are participatory governance models that ensure the voices of local communities and the marginalized are heard in decision-making processes (Khusaini *et al.*, 2024). Collaborative models, such as Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), have been successfully implemented in cultural heritage tourism to facilitate sustainable development and infrastructure investment (Rainanto *et al.*, 2025). However, stakeholder collaboration faces challenges, including conflicting interests, power imbalances, and bureaucratic constraints (Khusaini *et al.*, 2024; Rainanto *et al.*, 2025). Effective collaboration requires transparent communication that details who does what, when, and how, with clear roles, responsibilities, and mechanisms for conflict resolution documented as standard operating procedures. (Sufa *et al.*, 2024).

Stakeholder Collaboration in Cultural Heritage Tourism

The current state of stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism varies across regions (Rainanto *et al.*, 2025). In Zimbabwe, collaborative initiatives in cultural heritage tourism are evolving with notable successes in community-based tourism projects such as those at the Great Zimbabwe ruins (Tapera *et al.*, 2024). These initiatives have demonstrated the potential

benefits of collaboration, including improved site management, visitor excursions, and greater community involvement in tourism activities (Tapera *et al.*, 2024). However, challenges such as limited funding, lack of trust among stakeholders, and bureaucracy hinder effective collaboration (Nhambura, 2024). There is also a need for policy reforms to facilitate more inclusive and participatory governance in heritage tourism management (Nhambura, 2024; Tapera *et al.*, 2024).

Successful examples from other regions provide valuable insights into effective stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism. The collaborative management of the Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia highlights the importance of inclusive decision-making, capacity building, and technology use in fostering collaboration (Castanho *et al.*, 2025; Shakya *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, the community-driven heritage tourism model in Bhutan demonstrates how integrating local participation with national tourism strategies promotes sustainability and innovation (Khusaini *et al.*, 2024).

To enhance stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism, it is crucial to establish robust governance frameworks that facilitate cooperation among diverse stakeholders (Ramadhani *et al.*, 2024). Capacity-building programs that equip stakeholders with knowledge and skills in heritage management, digital innovation, and sustainable tourism practices enhance collaboration (Tapera *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, the use of digital platforms for stakeholder communication facilitates real-time collaborative resolution (Shakya *et al.*, 2024). Future research may explore adaptive governance frameworks that support the role of emerging technologies in enabling seamless stakeholder collaboration in heritage tourism (Shakya *et al.*, 2024).

Conceptual Framework for Stakeholder Collaboration in Innovation

The conceptual framework for stakeholder collaboration in innovation within cultural heritage tourism is built on the premise that effective collaboration among diverse stakeholders drives sustainable and innovative tourism development. The framework integrates key components, including stakeholder engagement, innovation processes, resource sharing, and sustainability outcomes. It emphasizes the interdependence of these components and their collective impact on the preservation, promotion, and economic viability of cultural heritage sites. This is showcased in Figure 3.

The framework is visualized as a cyclical process where stakeholder collaboration initiates innovation, which in turn enhances the sustainability and competitiveness of cultural heritage tourism. The key components of the framework include:

Stakeholder Identification and Engagement: Identifying and involving relevant stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, tourism operators, tourists, NGOs, and academic institutions.

Innovation Processes: Developing and implementing innovative strategies, such as the use of technology, creative marketing, and participatory management models.

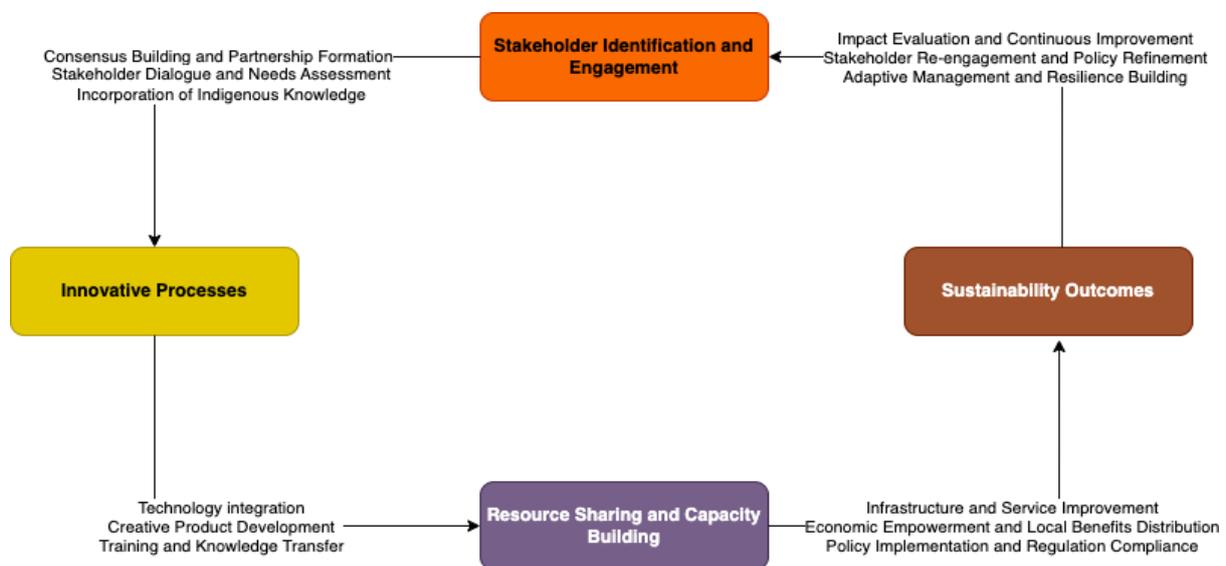


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher's conception (2025).

Resource Sharing and Capacity Building: Inclusive resources mobilization, knowledge, and expertise to address challenges and enhance the capabilities of stakeholders.

Sustainability Outcomes: Achieving balanced outcomes that ensure the preservation of cultural heritage with tangible, low-hanging economic benefits for local communities stimulates exciting visitor excursions that are characterised by memorable experiences.

By conceptualizing these components within a collaborative framework, this study provides a structured approach to understanding how stakeholder engagement is critical to innovation in cultural heritage tourism.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

Research on stakeholder collaboration in innovation within cultural heritage tourism is grounded in multiple theoretical frameworks that provide a comprehensive approach to analysing the dynamics of collaboration, innovation, and sustainability in this domain. By integrating multiple theories, the study develops a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder interactions, resource sharing, and value co-creation in 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 provides distinct insights into the processes, relationships, and outcomes of stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of identifying and engaging all relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes (Esposito *et al.*, 2025). It argues that organizations that include cultural heritage sites should accommodate diverse interests, including those of local communities, government agencies, tourists, and private-sector entities, among others, to achieve sustainable and inclusive, high-quality service delivery. (Ramadhani *et al.*, 2024). This theory is particularly relevant to this study, as it underscores the importance of participatory approaches in fostering equitable tourism development. Key components of the theory include stakeholder identification, engagement, participation, and management. In the context of Zimbabwean cultural heritage sites such as Great Zimbabwe, Stakeholder Theory provides a framework for understanding how collaborative participation among local communities, government bodies, and tourism operators addresses challenges such as underfunding, site maintenance, and infrastructure development. (Tapera *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, it informs strategies for negotiating conflicts among stakeholders with competing interests (Esposito *et al.*, 2025).

Collaboration Theory

The Collaboration Theory discusses the mechanisms that generate advantages of a multi-stakeholder collaboration approach. It emphasizes the role of shared cultural heritage tourism objectives in trust-building and resource mobilisation. (Xue *et al.*, 2025). This theory is instrumental in examining how stakeholders in the cultural heritage tourism network, by working together to conserve heritage sites, improve visitor experiences, and promote sustainable tourism development. The core tenets of the Collaboration Theory include shared goals, trust, resource sharing, and conflict resolution that sustain mutual benefits. In

Zimbabwe's tourism sector, the theory applies to partnerships such as community-led tourism initiatives, co-management models, and public-private partnerships, which help address challenges like site degradation, funding deficiencies, and real-time domestic cum global marketing (Tapera *et al.*, 2024).

Innovation Theory

The Innovation Theory explores how new ideas, technologies, and practices emerge and disseminate within specific tourism contexts (Grover *et al.*, 2025). Open and social innovation reinforce the significance of knowledge exchange. (Grover *et al.*, 2025). This theory applies to the study, as it elucidates how stakeholder collaboration fosters creativity and innovation in cultural heritage tourism. It further highlights initiatives such as the integration of digital technologies and the development of community-based tourism models with innovative marketing strategies. Key components of the theory include open innovation, co-creation, knowledge sharing, and the diffusion of innovations (Grover *et al.*, 2025). Practical applications in Zimbabwe include the adoption of virtual reality (VR) tours at the Great Zimbabwe, interactive mobile applications for site navigation, and community-driven storytelling initiatives at the Khami Ruins, which have long-lasting visitors' memorable excursion experiences. (Tapera *et al.*, 2024).

Sustainable Tourism Theory

The Sustainable Tourism Theory is rooted in the broader concept of sustainable development (Tran *et al.*, 2025). This theory advocates a balanced approach that integrates economic, environmental, and socio-cultural sustainability into tourism practices (Huang *et al.*, 2024). It emphasizes the importance of responsible tourism that conserves cultural and natural heritage and benefits local communities. (Huang *et al.*, 2024). This theory provides a framework for assessing the long-term effects of stakeholder collaboration and innovation in cultural heritage tourism when evaluating tourism initiatives that align with sustainability goals (Tran *et al.*, 2025). Key concepts within this theory include the triple bottom line, that is, economic, environmental, and social sustainability with respect to community empowerment and resource conservation (Tran *et al.*, 2025). In Zimbabwe, sustainable tourism initiatives encompass conservation programs at Victoria Falls, eco-tourism projects in the Matobo Hills, and community-led tourism enterprises that ensure that local communities become financial beneficiaries in exchange for their labour, theatre, and the sale of artifacts (Tapera *et al.*, 2024). Sustainable Tourism Theory helps analyse how collaborative governance models contribute to balancing heritage preservation with economic growth (Tran *et al.*, 2025).

Institutional Theory

The Institutional Theory examines how structures, norms, and regulations shape stakeholder interactions and decision-making (Peinado *et al.* 2025). It examines the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping the operational environment of cultural heritage tourism (Lin *et al.*, 2023). This theory provides insight into how policies, regulatory policies, and cultural norms affect stakeholder collaboration and innovation (Peinado *et al.*, 2025). It further identifies institutional barriers to effective tourism governance (Peinado *et al.*, 2025). Its key concepts include institutional isomorphism, legitimacy, institutional change, and path dependency (Lin *et al.*, 2023). In Zimbabwe, government policies such as the Zimbabwe Tourism Growth Strategy dictate tourism development priorities (Tapera *et al.*, 2024). The Institutional Theory helps us to analyse how these policies influence stakeholder engagement, funding structures, and the adoption of innovations in cultural heritage tourism (Peinado *et al.*, 2025). For instance, UNESCO's regulations on heritage site management are complemented by the role of local governance structures in tourism. (Basyar *et al.*, 2025).

The study is grounded in five key theoretical frameworks, each contributing unique insights into stakeholder collaboration and innovation in cultural heritage tourism:

Stakeholder Theory (Esposito *et al.*, 2025): This theory emphasizes the importance of identifying and engaging all relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes. It provides a framework for understanding how collaborative efforts among local communities, government agencies, and tourism operators address challenges such as insufficient funding, site maintenance, and infrastructure development, for example, at the Great Zimbabwe ruins. (Tapera *et al.*, 2024).

Collaboration Theory (Xue *et al.*, 2025): This theory examines the mechanisms and benefits of multi-stakeholder collaboration, including shared objectives, trust-building, and resource pooling. It is instrumental in examining partnerships such as community-led tourism initiatives and public-private collaborations in Zimbabwe (Tapera *et al.*, 2024; Nhambura *et al.*, 2024).

Innovation Theory (Grover *et al.*, 2025): This theory explores how new ideas, technologies, and practices emerge and disseminate within specific contexts. It highlights initiatives in Zimbabwe, such as the integration of digital technologies and community-based tourism models, including virtual reality (VR) tours at Great Zimbabwe and interactive mobile applications for site navigation (Nhambura *et al.*, 2024).

Sustainable Tourism Theory (Han *et al.*, 2024): Rooted in the concept of sustainable development, this theory advocates a balanced approach that integrates economic, environmental, and socio-cultural dimensions of sustainability into tourism practices. It provides a framework for assessing the long-term effects of stakeholder collaboration and innovation on Zimbabwean cultural heritage tourism, including conservation programs at Victoria Falls and eco-tourism projects in the Matobo Hills (Nhambura *et al.*, 2024).

Institutional Theory (Rudko *et al.*, 2025): This theory examines how structures, norms, and regulations shape stakeholder interactions and decision-making. It provides insight into how policies, regulatory frameworks, and cultural norms affect stakeholder collaboration and innovation in Zimbabwe, as well as the role of government policies, for example, the Zimbabwe Tourism Growth Strategy and UNESCO regulations on heritage site management (Tapera *et al.*, 2024; Nhambura *et al.*, 2024).

Justification for Adopting the Theories in the Study

The adoption of Stakeholder Theory, Collaboration Theory, Innovation Theory, Sustainable Tourism Theory, and Institutional Theory in this study is justified by their complementary ability to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding stakeholder collaboration and innovation in cultural heritage tourism (Xue *et al.*, 2025). Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the recognition and integration of the roles and interests of diverse tourism stakeholders, such as local communities, government agencies, and tourism operators, into decision-making processes (Esposito *et al.*, 2025). The Collaboration Theory explains how trust, shared goals, and resource sharing among stakeholders relate to effective partnerships (Xue *et al.*, 2025). The Innovation Theory highlights the processes through which new ideas, technologies, and practices improve on the tourism deliverables vis-à-vis visitors' expectations and ultimate experiences (Grover *et al.*, 2025). The Sustainable Tourism Theory provides a framework for assessing the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impacts of collaboration, ensuring that tourism development supports local economies while preserving cultural heritage. (Peinado *et al.*, 2025). The Institutional Theory contextualizes the impact of policies, regulations, and cultural norms on stakeholder interactions (Peinado *et al.*, 2025). Together, these theories offer a holistic perspective on the complex dynamics of cultural heritage tourism, making each theory necessary when tourism professionals address real-world challenges such as inadequate budgets and outdated infrastructure. (Tapera *et al.*, 2024; Nhambura *et al.*, 2024; Xue *et al.*, 2025).

Methodology and Meta-Analysis

This paper employs a systematic literature review to examine the role of stakeholder collaboration in the innovation of cultural heritage tourism. It focuses on Zimbabwean tourism. The methodology ensures a rigorous, transparent, and replicable process for identifying and synthesizing existing literature on Zimbabwe.

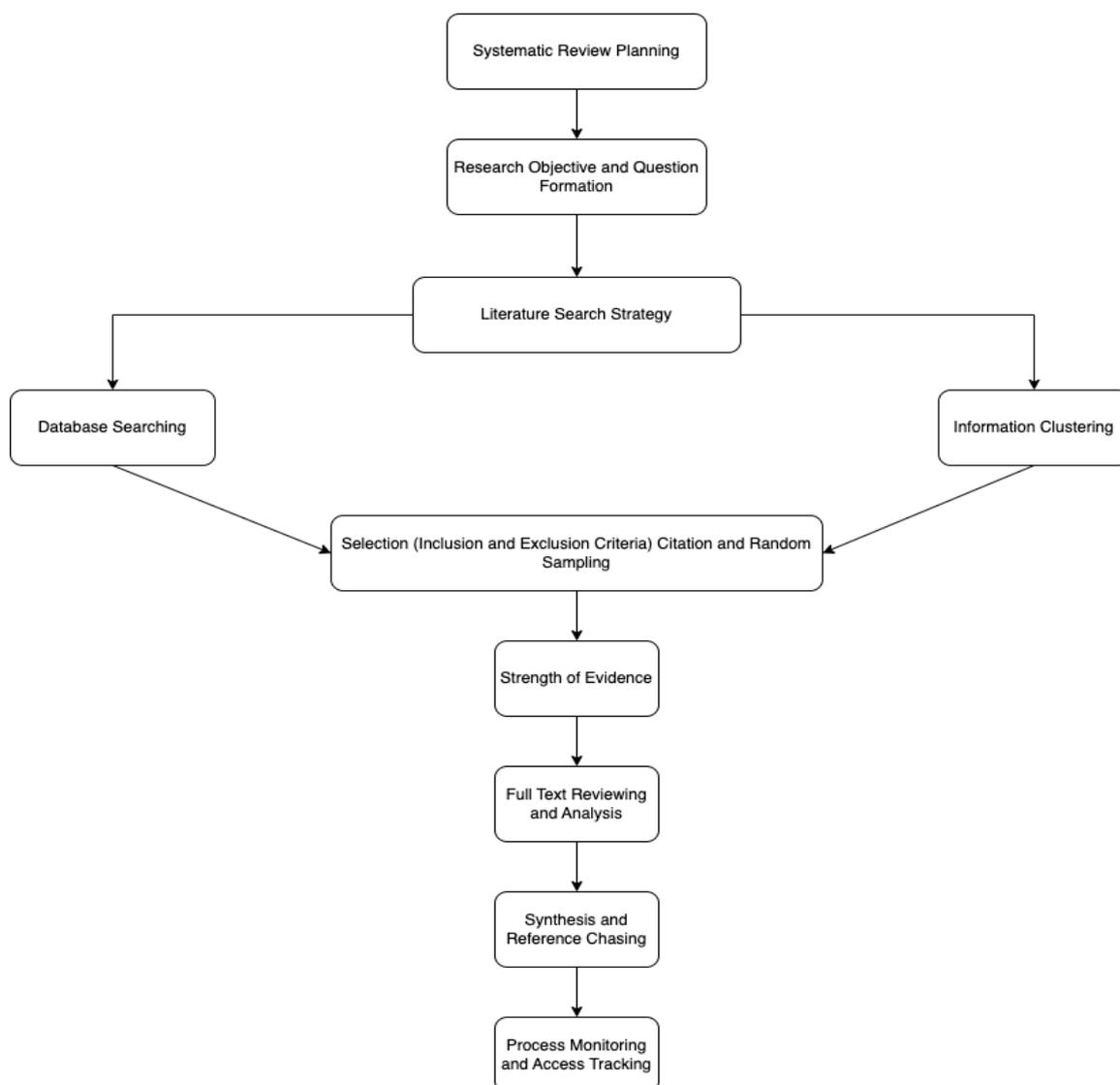


Figure 4: PRISMA Flow Chart.

Source: Researcher’s conception

The review is guided by a multi-theoretical framework that integrates Stakeholder Theory, Collaboration Theory, Innovation Theory, Sustainable Tourism Theory, and Institutional Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of stakeholder collaboration and innovation in cultural heritage tourism. Below, the methodology is detailed in the following sections: Systematic Review Planning, Theoretical Framework, Search Strategy and

Databases, Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria, Research Objectives and Questions, Strength of Evidence and Abstract Reading, Full Text Reviewing and Analysis, Data Extraction and Analysis, Synthesis and Reference Chasing, Case Studies and Examples, Process Monitoring and Access Tracking, Limitations of the Methodology, and Conclusion of Methodology. This is clearly shown in Figure 4.

Systematic Review Planning

The systematic review was planned to ensure a structured and comprehensive approach to the literature review. The planning phase involved defining the evaluation scope, identifying key research questions, and establishing a protocol for conducting the review. This is clearly summarised in Figure 4. The protocol outlines the steps for database searches, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data extraction, and analysis. This structured approach ensures transparency and minimizes bias in the selection and interpretation of literature studies (Ismail *et al.*, 2024; Basyar *et al.*, 2025).

Search Strategy and Databases

A systematic search strategy was employed to identify relevant studies across multiple academic databases, including the *Journal of Tourism Research*, *Tourism Management*, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, and *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*. These databases were selected due to their relevance to tourism studies and their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed articles on cultural heritage tourism and stakeholder collaboration. Additionally, Google Scholar was used to access grey literature, such as conference papers and reports on Zimbabwean tourism (Tapera *et al.*, 2024; Nhambura *et al.*, 2024)

The search terms used included combinations of the following keywords: “cultural heritage tourism,” “stakeholder collaboration,” “innovation,” “Zimbabwe,” “developing countries,” “tourism development,” “sustainable tourism,” and “community participation.” Boolean logic operators (AND, OR) were employed to refine the search and ensure the inclusion of relevant studies. For example, searches included phrases such as “cultural heritage tourism AND stakeholder collaboration” and “innovation AND cultural heritage tourism AND Zimbabwe” (Macherera *et al.*, 2023; Tapera *et al.*, 2024; Nhambura *et al.*, 2024).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the studies reviewed, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

Peer-reviewed articles: Only studies published in peer-reviewed journals were included to ensure academic rigor and credibility (Lemaire et al. 2025).

Language: Articles published in English were selected to maintain consistency and accessibility.

Geographic focus: Studies focusing on cultural heritage tourism in developing countries, particularly Zimbabwe, were prioritized. However, relevant studies from other regions were also included to provide comparative insights (Kandil et al., 2024; Suryani, 2024).

Thematic focus: Articles addressing stakeholder collaboration, innovation, and cultural heritage tourism were included (Lemaire et al., 2025).

Publication date: While no strict time frame was applied, preference was given to studies published within the last two decades (2000–2025) to ensure the inclusion of contemporary perspectives and developments.

This is summarised clearly in Table 1

Table 1: 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 examine innovation in tourism, including new technologies and sustainable practices.
Inclusion			Geographic focus on developing countries	Priority was given to studies focusing on developing countries, particularly Zimbabwe.
Inclusion			Publication date (2000–2025)	Preference was given to studies published within the last two decades for relevance.

Exclusion	Non-peer-reviewed articles	Grey literature, such as blogs, magazines, and non-academic reports, was excluded.
Exclusion	Non-English publications	Articles published in languages other than English were excluded.
Exclusion	Irrelevant thematic focus	Studies not related to cultural heritage tourism, stakeholder collaboration, or innovation were excluded.
Exclusion	Lack of geographic relevance	Studies focusing exclusively on developed countries and not relevant to developing contexts were excluded.
Exclusion	Outdated publications (pre-2000)	Studies published before 2000 were excluded to ensure contemporary relevance.

Source: Secondary data

Exclusion criteria included non-peer-reviewed articles, studies not related to cultural heritage tourism or stakeholder collaboration, and articles published in languages other than English (Lemaire *et al.*, 2025). The search method produced a total of one hundred (100) items.

Research Objectives and Questions

The following research objectives and questions guided the review:

Research Objectives:

- To explore the role of stakeholder collaboration in driving innovation in cultural heritage tourism.
- To identify the key stakeholders involved in cultural heritage tourism and their roles in fostering innovation.
- To analyse the benefits and challenges of stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism, with a focus on Zimbabwe.

Research Questions:

- How does stakeholder collaboration contribute to innovation in cultural heritage tourism?
- What are the key challenges and opportunities for stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism in Zimbabwe?

- What lessons can be learned from successful case studies of stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism?

Strength of Evidence and Abstract Reading

The strength of evidence was assessed based on the quality and relevance of the studies. Initial screening involved reading article abstracts to determine their alignment with the research objectives and inclusion criteria. Articles that met the criteria were selected for full-text review, while those that did not were excluded (Cumming et al. 2025). This process ensured that only high-quality and relevant studies were included in the review (Hild *et al.*, 2025; Cumming *et al.*, 2025).

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 2 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 2: Selection Criteria and Document Group

Selection Criteria	Document Group	Number of Documents
Years	2000–2010	10
	2011–2020	30
	2021–2023	60
Total Authors	Single-authored	20
	Co-authored	80
Geographical Areas	Zimbabwe	25
	Other African countries	15
	Asia (e.g., Cambodia, India)	30
	Latin America (e.g., Peru, Mexico)	10
Research Design	Qualitative	70
	Quantitative	20
	Mixed methods	10
Thematic	Stakeholder collaboration	50

	Innovation in tourism	30
	Cultural heritage preservation	40
	Sustainable tourism	20
Area of Use	Academic research	100
	Policy development	15
	Community-based tourism projects	5

Source: Secondary data

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extraction involves identifying key information from the selected studies, such as stakeholder roles, examples of innovation, and collaboration outcomes. Stakeholder Theory, Collaboration Theory, Innovation Theory, Sustainable Tourism Theory, and Institutional Theory are used as a guiding framework to analyse the roles and interactions of stakeholders in the reviewed studies. For example, the theories help 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; Rudko *et al.*, 2025).

Synthesis and Reference Chasing

The findings from the reviewed studies were synthesized to identify common themes, patterns, and gaps in the literature. Table 3 below 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 and thorough review of the literature (Cumming *et al.*, 2025).

Table 3: Major Contributors to Stakeholder Collaboration in Cultural Heritage Tourism

Author (2000–2025)	Topic	Country	Citations
Aas, Christina et al. (2005)	Stakeholder Collaboration and Heritage Management in Luang Prabang	Laos	881
Wang and Chia (2024)	A Study of Tourism Motivation, Perceived Value, and Destination Loyalty for	Macao	42

	Macao Cultural and Heritage Tourists		
Snis <i>et al.</i> (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 and Woyo (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 (2024)	Cultural and Heritage Tourism Trends for Sustainable Tourism	Multiple	5
Kudinova and Terzi (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 <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Development of Cultural Heritage Tourism through Stakeholder Synergy	Indonesia	3
Karki <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Heritage Conservation Practices in Kathmandu	Nepal	2
Nwachukwu <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Geo-Tourism for Wealth Creation: Unveiling the	Nigeria	2

	Geoscience Potential of Southeast Nigeria		
Viju, Arya et al. (2020)	Study on Stakeholder Collaboration and Heritage Tourism Management	India	2
Prasetyo <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Cultural heritage sports tourism design opportunities: a bibliometric analysis	Indonesia	2
Kumar <i>et al.</i> (2023)	The Impact of Tourism on the Preservation of UNESCO Cultural Heritage Sites in India 2023	India	2
Amam (2024)	Influence of Cultural Heritage Preservation on Tourism Development in Egypt	Egypt	2
Mugunzva (2015)	The Influence of Dimensions of Organisational Culture on the Management of Heritage Sites as Tourism Products in Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe	2
Liu (2023)	A Review of Chinese and Foreign Intangible Cultural Heritage Tourism	China	2
Karki <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Tourism and Tradition: Heritage Conservation Practices and Challenges Amid Mass Tourism in Kathmandu Valley	Nepal	2
Korov <i>et al.</i> (2024)	The model of Strategic Management of a Religious Tourism destination in function of Sustainable Development	Croatia	1

Source: Secondary Data

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 the 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 review's replicability 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).

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the role of stakeholder collaboration in critical innovation in cultural heritage tourism in Zimbabwe. The results are organized into theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research. 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.

Theoretical Implications

Stakeholder Collaboration as a Catalyst for Innovation

The study reinforces the theoretical frameworks of Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984; Esposito et al., 2025) and Collaboration Theory (Xue et al., 2025), demonstrating that multi-stakeholder engagement fosters innovation by mobilising diverse resources, knowledge, and expertise. The integration of indigenous knowledge systems in Zimbabwe aligns with the principles of Stakeholder Theory that emphasizes the importance of involving local communities in decision-making processes. For example, Tapera et al (2024) found that incorporating local cultural practices into tourism development at the Great Zimbabwe ruins enhanced the site's authenticity and visitor satisfaction. Similarly, Macherera et al. (2023) emphasized that participatory management approaches, in which local communities are actively involved in decision-making, yield greater social and economic benefits that promote cultural integrity. Beyond Zimbabwe, studies in other cultural heritage contexts affirm the value of stakeholder engagement. James et al. (2025) and Basyar et al. (2025) highlight how stakeholder collaboration at Thailand's heritage sites facilitates innovative tourism experiences. Likewise, Almasoudi et al (2025) underscore the necessity of multi-stakeholder governance in heritage tourism, arguing that collaboration among local communities, governments, and private investors ensures equitable development and sustainable resource utilization.

Innovation Theory in Heritage Tourism

The findings support Innovation Theory (Grover *et al.*, 2025) by illustrating how technological advancements, such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), enhance visitor experiences and site accessibility. The study also underscores the role of open innovation and co-creation in developing community-based tourism models, which are essential for sustainable heritage tourism. For instance, Macherera *et al.* (2023) highlighted how digital tools, such as mobile applications and VR tours, have been used to enhance the interpretation of cultural heritage sites in Zimbabwe, making them more accessible to a global audience. Additionally, Almasoudi *et al.* (2025) and Basyar *et al.* (2025) emphasize the transformative potential of digital technologies in heritage tourism, particularly in overcoming infrastructural deficits in developing countries. Furthermore, research in developed economies suggests that digital transformation in heritage tourism excites visitor experiences and engagement. (Almasoudi *et al.*, 2025; Shah *et al.*, 2025). In Europe, Shakya *et al.* (2024) found that integrating digital storytelling with augmented reality (AR) technology increased visitor

satisfaction and conservation awareness according to UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These findings indicate that innovation-driven tourism models can be customised to Zimbabwe's tourism operations. Some examples are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Examples of Innovation in Cultural Heritage Tourism

Innovation Type	Examples	Impact
Digital Technologies	Virtual reality (VR) tours, augmented reality (AR) apps, and mobile applications	Enhances visitor engagement, accessibility, and educational value of heritage sites.
Community-Based Models	Community-led tourism initiatives at Great Zimbabwe and Matobo Hills	Ensures cultural authenticity, generates socio-economic benefits, and promotes local ownership.
Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)	Collaboration between the government, the private sector, and local communities	Mobilizes resources, improves infrastructure, and fosters sustainable tourism development.

Source: Author's own construct

Sustainable Tourism Theory

The results align with Sustainable Tourism Theory (Han *et al.*, 2024), which emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that integrates economic, environmental, and socio-cultural sustainability. Collaborative governance models, such as public-private partnerships (PPPs), are effective in addressing challenges posed by inadequate funding and aging infrastructure. For example, Nhambura *et al.* (2024) demonstrate that PPPs in Zimbabwe have been instrumental in improving policy frameworks and resource mobilization for heritage tourism. Similarly, Kawashima *et al.* (2024) highlight the success of community-based tourism models in enhancing heritage site sustainability and innovation in rural areas. Research from other African countries further underscores these findings (Bakari *et al.*, 2024; Duysen *et al.*, 2024; Ezenwa *et al.*, 2025). Ntshabeleng (2025) observes that sustainable tourism in South Africa is strengthened by stakeholder partnerships that promote both conservation and economic development. Likewise, Harfst *et al.* (2025) argue that sustainable tourism principles applicable in Mediterranean heritage sites ensure long-term viability characterized by responsible tourism behaviours by visitors and stakeholders.

Institutional Theory

The study highlights the influence of institutional frameworks, such as government policies and UNESCO regulations, on stakeholder collaboration and innovation. According to Institutional Theory (Rudko *et al.*, 2025), formal and informal structures shape the operational environment of cultural heritage tourism, particularly in developing countries such as Zimbabwe. For instance, the Zimbabwe Tourism Growth Strategy (2020) underscores the importance of leveraging technology and fostering multi-stakeholder engagement to enhance the sector's resilience and competitiveness. Additionally, UNESCO's regulations on the management of heritage sites play a crucial role in shaping stakeholder interactions and decision-making processes. Macherera *et al.* (2023). Studies from Southeast Asia highlight the significance of institutional frameworks in heritage tourism (Rachmawati *et al.*, 2024). Mat *et al.* (2025) and Ismail *et al.* (2024) discuss how regulatory policies in Malaysia have influenced stakeholder interactions, while Rainanto *et al.* (2025) demonstrate how institutional constraints shape the governance of heritage tourism in postcolonial nations.

Table 5: Summary of Theoretical Frameworks and Their Implications

Theory	Key Concepts	Implications for Cultural Heritage Tourism
Stakeholder Theory	Stakeholder identification, engagement, and management	Ensures inclusive decision-making and equitable distribution of tourism benefits among stakeholders.
Collaboration Theory	Shared goals, trust-building, resource-pooling, and conflict resolution	Facilitates cooperative planning and problem-solving among diverse stakeholders.
Innovation Theory	Open innovation, co-creation, knowledge sharing, and diffusion of innovations	Encourages the adoption of new technologies and practices to enhance visitor experiences and site management.
Sustainable Tourism	Triple Bottom Line (economic, environmental, and social sustainability)	Promotes balanced tourism development that preserves cultural heritage while benefiting local communities.
Institutional Theory	Institutional isomorphism, legitimacy, and path dependency	Explains how policies and regulations shape stakeholder interactions and innovation in heritage tourism.

Source: Author's own construct

Practical Implications

Enhanced Visitor Experiences

The adoption of digital technologies, such as VR and AR, through stakeholder collaboration, has practical implications for improving visitor engagement and accessibility. For example, the implementation of virtual tours at Great Zimbabwe and interactive mobile applications for site navigation can attract a wider audience, including those who may not be able to visit in person (Macherera et al., 2023; Tapera et al., 2024; Nhambura et al., 2024). James et al. (2025) and Nazatul et al. (2025) found that digital storytelling and gamification have significantly enhanced visitor experiences at heritage sites globally, making them more interactive and educational. In Zimbabwe, Tapera et al. (2024) highlight how digital platforms have been used to overcome infrastructural challenges, offering alternative ways to experience cultural heritage sites remotely.

Table 6: Practical Applications of Digital Technologies in Heritage Tourism

Technology	Application	Benefits
Virtual Reality (VR)	Virtual tours of Great Zimbabwe	Allows remote access to heritage sites, enhancing global reach and accessibility.
Augmented Reality (AR)	AR apps for on-site interpretation at Matobo Hills	Provides interactive and educational experiences for visitors, enhancing engagement.
Mobile Applications	Navigation and storytelling apps for heritage sites	Enhances the visitor experience by providing real-time information and guided tours.

Source: Author's own construct

Community Empowerment

The study highlights the success of community-based tourism initiatives in Zimbabwe, including those at the Great Zimbabwe ruins and the Matobo Hills. These initiatives demonstrate that local communities' participation in tourism management not only preserves culture but also generates socio-economic benefits like employment. Nhambura et al. (2024) found that community-led tourism projects at the Great Zimbabwe improved site management and visitor experiences. Similarly, James et al (2025) emphasized the importance of

participatory governance models that enhance community engagement and ownership of tourism initiatives.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

The findings suggest that PPPs are a practical tool for mobilizing resources and fostering innovation in heritage tourism. Collaborative efforts among government agencies, private-sector actors, and local communities can address infrastructure challenges through improved site management that aligns with successful models such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Ramadhani *et al.* (2024) highlight the role of PPPs in improving policy frameworks and resource mobilization, which are essential for nurturing innovation in heritage tourism. In Zimbabwe, Macherera *et al.* (2023) and Tapera *et al.* (2024) demonstrate that PPPs are instrumental in addressing funding gaps in the management of heritage sites.

Future Research Directions

The findings of this study highlight several areas for future research. Research can be conducted on the global tourism landscape, its contemporary trends, challenges, and the technologies that shape and reshape the sustenance of heritage tourism. Future research may explore adaptive governance models, comparative studies across regions, longitudinal studies of community-based tourism, the impact of digital technologies, and inclusive policy frameworks for cultural heritage.

Adaptive governance models are essential for addressing the dynamic and complex challenges facing cultural heritage tourism. Governance structures must be flexible and responsive to environmental, technological, and socio-political changes to ensure effective stakeholder collaboration and sustainable development. Amore (2025) emphasizes the importance of adaptive governance in managing complex tourism systems, particularly in cultural heritage sites where multiple stakeholders operate. Adaptive governance frameworks promote resilience and sustainability, enabling informed adjustments in response to emerging patterns of challenges. Saarinen *et al.* (2025) discuss the necessity of governance models that can accommodate diverse stakeholder interests while maintaining long-term heritage preservation goals. Rahman *et al.* (2025) propose adaptive co-management as a strategy to integrate diverse knowledge systems, thereby encouraging stakeholder collaboration in environmental and cultural heritage governance. Future research can further examine how adaptive governance frameworks can be designed to ensure binding stakeholder collaboration, and the role of emerging technologies, for example, blockchain and Artificial Intelligence, in facilitating

sound resolutions. Research can further interrogate adaptive governance in relation to postcolonial cultural heritage operations. A relevant case study is the implementation of adaptive governance on UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as Machu Picchu, Peru, which balances conservation efforts with mass tourism. (Vadhera, 2025).

Comparative studies between Zimbabwe and other developing countries, such as Cambodia, Peru, and India, may provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of tourism innovation from the perspective of diverse stakeholder collaboration operating within different institutional cultures. Such studies can identify best practices, transferable models, and context-specific challenges. Tang et al. (2025) and Paiva et al. (2025) highlight the importance of cross-regional comparisons that identify best practices for heritage tourism management, with classical examples from Southeast Asia and Latin America, where participatory governance models have improved sustainability. Khoo et al. (2025) and Orrick et al. (2024) explore the postcolonial challenges of heritage tourism management and its limitations when applied to Western-centric models. Wani et al. (2025) and Gavit et al. (2024) examine the role of community engagement in heritage tourism across China and India, providing comparative insights into policy effectiveness. Future research can also investigate the lessons Zimbabwe can learn from successful stakeholder collaboration models in other developing countries. A practical case study is Cambodia's collaborative management approach at Angkor Wat, which involves government agencies, UNESCO, and local communities (Vadhera, 2025), as well as the participatory conservation model used in Rajasthan, India, where public-private partnerships have revitalized heritage sites and improved economic opportunities for local communities (Dave et al., 2023).

Table 7: Summary of The Future Research Direction

Research Area	Key Focus	Relevant Literature	Potential Research Questions	Case Studies
Adaptive Governance Models	Designing flexible governance structures for dynamic challenges in heritage tourism.	Amore (2025), Saarinen et al. (2025), Rahman et al. (2025)	How can adaptive governance frameworks enhance stakeholder collaboration? What role can emerging technologies (e.g.,	Machu Picchu, Peru (Vadhera, 2025)

			blockchain, AI) play in decision-making? How can adaptive governance be implemented in postcolonial nations?	
Comparative Studies	Cross-regional comparisons to identify best practices and challenges.	Tang et al. (2025), Paiva et al. (2025), Khoo et al. (2025), Wani et al. (2025)	What lessons can Zimbabwe learn from other developing countries? How do cultural and institutional differences impact stakeholder collaboration? What governance and funding models are effective across regions?	Angkor Wat, Cambodia (Vadhera, 2025); Rajasthan, India (Dave et al., 2023)
Longitudinal Studies on CBT	Assessing long-term sustainability and socio-economic impacts of community-based tourism.	Wu et al. (2025), Tapera et al. (2024), Jackson et al. (2025), Pham et al. (2025)	What are the long-term socio-economic impacts of CBT in Zimbabwe? How can CBT models be scaled up? What factors contribute to the success or failure of CBT projects?	Maasai Mara community conservation initiatives, Kenya (Riboldi et al., 2015)
Impact of Digital Technologies	Exploring the role of VR, AR, and AI in visitor engagement and	Lucchi (2025), Pokhrel et al. (2025), Boboc et al.	How do digital technologies impact visitor engagement and satisfaction? What are the ethical	AR applications at Pompeii, Italy (Baldi et al., 2023);

	cultural preservation.	(2022), Tran et al. (2025)	implications of digital interventions? How can developing countries effectively integrate digital technologies?	AI-driven chatbots in Japan (Coşeleva <i>et al.</i> , 2024)
Inclusive Policy Frameworks	Developing policies that promote stakeholder collaboration and innovation.	Pai et al. (2025), Vadhera (2025), Esposito et al. (2025)	How can inclusive policy frameworks enhance stakeholder collaboration? What role do international organizations like UNESCO play? How can policies ensure equitable benefits for local communities?	UNESCO-endorsed sustainable tourism strategy at Petra, Jordan (Jones et al., 2023)

Source: Author's own construct

Longitudinal research on community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas, would help assess their long-term sustainability, socio-economic benefits, and challenges. Wu et al (2025) emphasize the need for longitudinal studies to evaluate the effectiveness of CBT in promoting sustainable development. Tapera et al. (2024) found that community-led tourism projects at Great Zimbabwe have improved site management and visitor experiences, but also highlighted sustainability challenges. Jackson et al (2025) and Pham et al (2025) discuss the importance of financial independence in CBT initiatives that ensure long-term viability. Future research should examine the long-term socioeconomic impacts of community-based tourism initiatives in Zimbabwe and how these models can be scaled up to benefit additional rural and economically disadvantaged areas. A relevant case study is the Maasai Mara community conservation initiatives in Kenya, which have successfully integrated conservation efforts with local economic empowerment tourism operations (Riboldi *et al.*, 2015).

The adoption of digital technologies, such as Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI), is transforming cultural heritage tourism. Future studies should explore their broader implications on visitor engagement, cultural preservation, and potential

risks. Lucchi (2025) highlights the transformative potential of VR that enhances heritage site accessibility and tourist awareness. Pokhrel *et al.* (2025) explore the role of digital technologies in facilitating multi-stakeholder collaboration in tourism management. Boboc *et al.* (2022) and Tran *et al.* (2025) discuss the ethical concerns of over-commercialization and the loss of authenticity associated with digital interventions in heritage tourism. Future research should examine how digital technologies affect visitor engagement and satisfaction at cultural heritage sites; the ethical implications of their use in heritage tourism and how these can be mitigated; and how developing countries with limited resources can effectively integrate digital technologies into heritage tourism. Case studies include the use of (AR) applications at Pompeii, Italy. (Baldi et al, 2023) and the use of Artificial Intelligence-driven chatbots in museum tours in Japan (Coşeleva *et al.*, 2024).

Research should focus on developing inclusive policy frameworks that facilitate stakeholder collaboration in critical innovations in cultural tourism. This includes examining the role of international organizations, such as UNESCO, in the development of heritage tourism policies and practices in developing countries. Pai et al. (2025) highlight the importance of policy reforms in promoting participatory governance in heritage tourism. Vadhera (2025) emphasizes capacity-building programs as key in equipping stakeholders with the necessary skills. Future research should explore how inclusive policy frameworks can be designed to enhance stakeholder collaboration in cultural heritage tourism, and the role of international organizations such as UNESCO in the crafting of heritage tourism policies for developing countries that offer significant benefits to local communities. A relevant case study is the UNESCO-endorsed sustainable tourism strategy implemented at Petra, Jordan (Jones et al. 2023). By addressing the cited and discussed grey areas in cultural tourism, scholars and policymakers may develop more inclusive, sustainable, and innovative approaches to cultural heritage tourism that ensure long-term viability in an ever-changing global landscape.

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