



Role of Community Empowerment in the Sustainable Cultural Heritage Management: A Review

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Abstract

The study's objective is to examine the role of cultural heritage in socially sustainable development and, through the descriptive analysis, provide a comprehensive understating concerning cultural heritage management, social empowerment, and sustainable development. The study highlights the importance of long-term planning, community engagement, and strengthening partnerships in developing sustainable cultural heritage management. Quality integration with economic, social-cultural, and environmental values is essential for further sustainable cultural heritage conservation. The descriptive analysis utilized in the study provides the theoretical understanding of community empowerment in the cultural heritage and its positive effects, such as social cohesion, well-being, and conflict elimination. These contributions represent the prerequisite of socially sustainable development. The documentary evidence analysis demonstrates the essence of community engagement in cultural heritage planning. Municipality document analysis reveals constraints of cultural heritage practice, particularly community participation organization in cultural heritage management. Distinct authors highlight the core contributors to successful community involvement in sustainable cultural tourism development: Knowing sustainable development principles, cultural heritage potential, and possible positive and negative implications of tourism. Practical cooperation between governmental, non-governmental, and educational organizations generates the prerequisite for effective cultural heritage management. The national strategy document for cultural heritage highlights the importance of social inclusivity in heritage planning and management. However, community participation in the process needs improvement, particularly in the context of Akhmeta municipality.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Sustainable development, community empowerment, social sustainability

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage has distinct potential for the future development of domestic areas. Besides its economic contribution, it generates social benefits for the local community. The participatory approach, such as community engagement in the heritage management process, is a remarkable foundation for sustainability achievement. Proper cultural heritage management supports social cohesion, forms the identity of the destination environment, advances quality performance, stimulates cultural tourism development, and increases the employment rate (Dümcke & Gnedovsky, 2013).

The bottom-up approach ensures the local communities' engagement in cultural heritage decision-making. As holders of existing cultural values and novelty idea generators, residents are critical stakeholders in sustainable cultural heritage management. Cultural heritage, such as traditional folks, handicrafts, and historical buildings, represents the community's historical background. Cultural assets represent commodity sources for tourism. Therefore, properly managing long-term cultural tourism and sustainable development is essential to avoid the destruction of these resources. The sustainability approach suggests adequate policy development and practical tools for operating specific projects. Operational instruments help decision-makers make sustainable choices during heritage preservation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural heritage and its potential

Cultural artifacts, technologies, stories, and the traditional lifestyle of the local community in which cultural diversity was generated would be lost without sustainable management (UNESCO, 1972). The World Heritage Centre (WHC), established by the United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), addresses and determines both cultural and natural diversity as a means to attain sustainable development (UNESCO, 1972).

Cultural heritage is characterized by a distinct collection of cultural values inherited from the past, preserved in the present, and supported for their beneficial value for future generations. UNESCO (1972) defines two types of cultural heritage: Tangible cultural heritage related to historical importance and monuments, artifacts, and other material property, which offer a specific basis for meanings and require preservation. Preserving tangible cultural heritage is crucial, as it embodies collective memories and provides an accurate way to engage with history. Intangible cultural heritage comprises social practices, rituals, performing arts, customs, and skills that promote significant socioeconomic benefits for local communities. Besides empowering local society, cultural heritage fosters skill and knowledge development, which are crucial for creating social value (Dümcke & Gnedovsky, 2013). Consequently, Personal creativity can be developed through cultural heritage, which also serves as a destination's competitive advantage.

Visitors and residents alike have the opportunity to enjoy and experience the rich cultural heritage of the area. (Bole, 2013). Dümcke and Gnedovsky (2013) highlight cultural heritage's potential for social progress, including conserving national distinctiveness, stimulating new knowledge development, transferring successful heritage practice, promoting the place, integrating vulnerable public groups, and encouraging social empowerment and dialogue. Different scholars propose that cultural heritage has connected social and economic effects. Social cohesion leads to conflict reduction, which is a prerequisite for economic development, such as attracting investment.

2.2 Cultural heritage management

Nasser (2003) The relationship between cultural heritage and sustainable development has limited practical evidence, although long-term planning and local participation have been found to be positively linked to sustainable cultural heritage development.

After conducting a literature review on cultural heritage management, this study identified and clarified the differences between sustainable and traditional heritage management across various dimensions. Table 1 represents the conceptual framework of cultural heritage management.

Table 1: Conceptual framework of heritage management

<i>A Comparative Framework for Sustainable Heritage Management</i>		
Dimension	Traditional Heritage Management	Sustainable Heritage Management
Situational analysis	• The analysis is based on issues of immediate concern for conserving heritage value. • Technical expertise and specialized skills are dominant.	• Analysis based on broad trends and issues that impact the sustainable use of heritage sites. • Volunteer capabilities are encouraged.
Strategic orientation	• Segmented and isolated planning process • Short-term cultural heritage-oriented goal • Quantitative measures of heritage-specific results	• Integrated planning process • Long-term sustainability development • Qualitative and quantitative sustainability measures
Stakeholders value	• Partners' opinion is isolated at the first stage of the planning process • Vision is related to conserving heritage value	• Partners and community opinion are isolated from the nominating process • Vision-related to the continuity of community value

Traditional cultural heritage management uses specialized skills and best practices of analysis. The primary research methodology for heritage evaluations is a quantitative measurement. Conventional methods of preserving cultural heritage tend to focus on achieving short-term goals. The first management level considers cultural heritage conservation principles before evaluating potential partners' ideas and recommendations. On the other hand, sustainable cultural heritage management removes obstacles for anyone interested in managing it. Sustainable management employs a qualitative and quantitative methodology to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework and statistical inferences regarding cultural heritage. Integrating local society is a core principle of sustainable cultural heritage management. As sustainability principles emphasize long-term perspectives, sustainable cultural heritage management involves creating plans and executing projects concentrated on long-term protection and development.

CH management is controlled by conservation practice and the view of heritage value. 'This view does not align with the evident evolution of World Heritage discourse, particularly in relation to the concept of authenticity and limits of acceptable change that support a continued relationship between local communities and their heritage' (Landorf, 2009, p. 16). Regarding

this, public participation in heritage management is insignificant and does not represent an integral part of the protection framework. The essence of sustainable heritage management during the heritage site assessment is to consider its historical and architectural values.

2.3 Community role in cultural heritage management

The local cultural heritage is the primary characteristic of the community (Loulanski, 2006). Utilizing innovative technology in cultural heritage planning is crucial, as locals can provide innovative ideas and serve as heritage advisors to manage cultural heritage more effectively. Sustainability achievements of cultural heritage occur when modern development approaches are successfully integrated with cultural heritage for preservation and progress (Dümcke & Gnedovsky, 2013). Locals play a significant role in destination development; specialized skills development is essential for predicting the fundamental needs for the proper progress of cultural values. Active participation of the community in cultural events is essential to acquire practical tools and theoretical knowledge.

The participatory approach emphasizes the development needs of local communities and supports the connection between community and cultural heritage management. An essential aspect of the participatory approach theoretical framework is to provide a platform for interested parties to share knowledge, which contributes to further development and strengthens partnerships among diverse stakeholders. The button-up method, which was studied through various ideas, creates an inclusive atmosphere for motivated, vital players. An essential aspect of the button-up approach is to see heritage experts as consultants who offer sustainable management advice and allow the local community to share their ideas rather than considering them as leaders for decision-making. (Hribara et al., 2015). The latter issue refers to the primary principle of empowerment theory, which states that individuals should have the power and resources to take control of their own lives and make their own decisions (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989). Empowerment is considered a helper of individual professional development. The theory suggests changing the terminology to use "participant" instead of "client" and "collaborator" instead of "expert."

The involvement of local people in the process of managing cultural heritage is varied. In Finland, the craft industry is involved in sustainable cultural tourism development. Meanwhile, financial aid and novel initiatives in Ireland support community engagement in the development process. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among the community for the sustainable development of cultural heritage (Mertayasa et al., 2021). Proper skills are crucial for effective community engagement in heritage management and cultural tourism operation. Sofield (2003) suggested programs for developing specialized skills and knowledge to encourage the community's interest in participating in cultural heritage planning and operation processes.

2.4 Sustainability of cultural heritage management

Nurianty (2004) stated that cultural heritage represents one of the essential resources for tourism development. Sulistyanto (2014) Considering cultural heritage's limited, authentic, and vulnerable nature, it is crucial to uphold its main principles. In the context of tourism, the basis of cultural heritage management was highlighted (ibid. 2014). One of the main objectives of cultural tourism development policy is to create job opportunities and generate income on a local level while preserving cultural resources and ensuring safety, authenticity, and historical value.

Sustainable development is a complex process considering economic, social-cultural, and environmental factors. It requires specialized assessment methods to ensure all these factors are considered equally. Sustainable management involves community participation in decision-making, accessibility to society, benefits from the destination, consideration of community identity, and perception as an aesthetic part of heritage. (Vitiello, 2012). Consequently, cultural heritage development is considered in the context of social-cultural sustainability. Sustainable development involves rational use of cultural resources and accessibility for locals, ecological environment protection, and economic sustainability linked to financial benefits for the destination. (Lombardi et al., 2015).

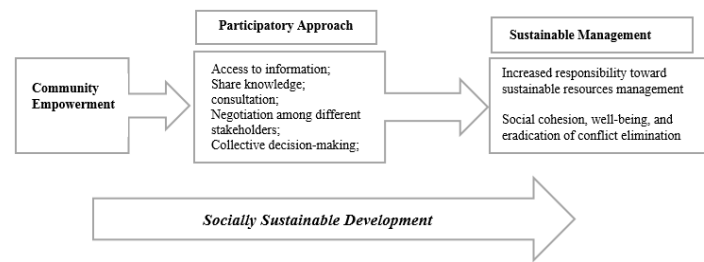
Cultural heritage management principles should consider long-term planning, diverse situational impacts, future missions, and potential conflicts (Simpson, 2001). Williams (2006) stated that an effective strategy for evaluating the sustainability of cultural heritage is to use a robust framework.

Different stakeholders' participation in the planning process leads to a better understanding of cultural and social challenges and collective responsibilities towards sustainable resource management. Cultural heritage researchers emphasize the importance of local community involvement in cultural heritage management, particularly tourism, which highlights heritage's social and economic contributions to local communities (Landorf, 2009). Effective negotiation among interested parties is critical for strengthening advanced partnerships in cultural heritage (Ladkin & Fletcher, 2005).

Li (2008) stated that sustainability principles should be integrated into heritage marketing by developing a long-term strategic plan for individual cultural sites. Sustainable heritage management utilizes marketing tools to foster a reciprocal relationship between visitors and heritage sites. (Berthon et al., 2017). Sustainable heritage management involves using conservation tools to foster respect for and appreciation of local cultural heritage, which is achieved through community engagement, as well as educational and informational programs (ibid. 2017). A successful marketing strategy balances visitors' needs with cultural site requirements and emphasizes the importance of managing cultural sites themselves, enabling them to become economically self-sustaining and support proper heritage maintenance. A well-planned marketing strategy can assist managers in finding the right balance between the expectations of visitors and the requirements of heritage sites. It is important to note that their accessibility and capacity define the exclusivity of heritage sites. Sustainability principles aim to create a positive visitor experience and raise awareness, which in turn contributes to the overall exclusivity of these sites (Berthon et al., 2017).

The Budapest Declaration emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage in promoting socioeconomic benefits and improving the living conditions of local communities. It also highlights the active involvement of locals in recognizing, protecting, and managing cultural heritage sites (UNESCO, 2002). The Budapest Declaration was followed by the Amsterdam conference, which focused on linking universal and local values to manage a sustainable future for world heritage. The conference emphasized the importance of developing cultural heritage in a way that considers the continuity between past authentic values and future sustainable changes. The latter approach is necessary for cultural benefit evolution (de Merode et al., 2004). According to the literature review, Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between community empowerment and sustainable management.

Figure 1: Conceptual model: relationship between community empowerment and sustainable management



3. Previous research review

3.1 Research objectives

The objective of the study is to propose a model that demonstrates the factors leading to the participatory approach. These factors include access to information, sharing knowledge, consultation, and collective decision-making. The study also aims to identify the factors that contribute to social sustainability, such as increasing responsibility towards the rational use of resources, social well-being, and social cohesion. The factors for social sustainability are gathered from previous research reviews as well as cultural heritage practices introduced by the analysis of the national document. The research examines the connection between the frameworks implemented for managing complex cultural heritage and the emerging sustainable development paradigm. The study identifies the key factors that contribute to the sustainable development of the destination through cultural heritage management. The research also studies the consequences of community participation in cultural heritage management and characterizes the social effect of the latter management.

3.2 Documentary Evidence Analysis

The descriptive analysis provides a theoretical framework concerning an individual's sensitivity and awareness and allows for adaptability during the research process. Data from the municipal report and Georgian Cultural Strategy 2025 document, along with journals and publications related to sustainable development, cultural heritage, and community empowerment, correspond to the topic of discussion. According to the literature, this study provides a descriptive narrative of community involvement in cultural heritage management based on sustainability principles. The analysis of documentary evidence allows for evaluating the local community's perceptions of sustainable cultural heritage management. It also demonstrates the sustainability of CH management in the destination and the willingness of locals to participate in the process.

The analysis of the document evidence on "Challenges in the field of culture in Akhmeta municipality" showcases the cultural heritage management practices and identifies the key decision-makers. Moreover, the study highlights the prevalent issues related to community participation in the planning and management process of cultural heritage.

The Georgian Cultural Strategy is a fundamental document created after long-term consultations with various societal groups. It evaluates relevant national and international conventions and treaties. The document aims to address challenges related to cultural creativity and promote awareness of culture as a source of social well-being, economic contribution, and sustainable development. Efforts are being made to strengthen national identity through culture, which is a significant focus. The strategy aims to foster partnerships between

government, NGOs, donors, businesses, and educational institutions, aligning with the national culture policy. Georgian cultural strategy prioritizes creativity and innovation, which can revitalize cultural diversity, promote sustainable development, and enhance social well-being. The strategy objectives focus on societal progress through knowledge, creativity, and innovation (Cultural Strategy, 2025).

Documentary evidence analysis reveals a disparity between the attitudes of current heritage experts towards decision-making and the community's perception of cultural heritage management.

Georgian Cultural Strategy highlights the importance of CH management development objectives according to the sustainability principle. The document highlights the significance of an innovation-oriented skill and knowledge program for the local community. In addition, digital technology integration and community empowerment in cultural heritage are crucial. The strategic mission is emphasized, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Objective of cultural strategy of Georgia



Source: Georgian Cultural Strategy 2025

The analysis of documentary evidence revealed that only a few community representatives were involved in the process despite the community's significant interest in managing cultural heritage. The aim of the study is to explore ways to increase the community's involvement in heritage management and understand their perception of participation. Local residents expressed a strong desire to participate in managing and preserving cultural heritage, emphasizing the importance of their opinions in the decision-making process (*Cultural Challenges*, 2020).

4. Conclusion

The analysis reveals a gap between heritage experts' decision-making attitudes and the community's perception of cultural heritage management. The Georgian Cultural Strategy emphasizes the sustainable management of cultural heritage, highlighting its importance. The document emphasizes the importance of providing skill and knowledge programs for the local community, focusing on innovation. Additionally, the document stresses the significance of integrating digital technology with community empowerment to preserve and manage cultural heritage.

The national strategy document for cultural heritage highlights the importance of social inclusivity in heritage planning and management. However, community participation in the

process needs improvement, particularly in the context of Akhmeta municipality. Adopting sustainable development concepts in cultural heritage practice is complex, and one apparent reason is that the state party assumes responsibility for cultural heritage activities.

Accordingly, there is the question of how theoretical evidence on sustainable cultural heritage management is reflected in practice (UNESCO, 2005). Integrating indigenous local values into a community-led concept fosters collective responsibility and strengthens the connection between the community and its cultural heritage. International evidence regarding cultural heritage highlights the significance of community engagement in the heritage management process. However, formal partnerships between major governmental and non-governmental organizations receive more attention than informal community and interested citizenship partnerships. However, formal partnerships between major governmental and non-governmental organizations receive more attention than informal community and interested citizenship partnerships. However, practical implications show that more attention is paid to formal partnerships between major governmental and non-governmental organizations than informal community and interested citizenship partnerships (Landorf, 2009). One way to sustainably manage cultural heritage is through cultural tourism that centers around authentic local traditions, festivals, and crafts, which help define the destination's profile and the local community's identity. It also supports groups that manage and use cultural resources for sustainable tourism. Residents will understand that protecting their local culture can improve social and economic conditions. Improvement of cultural tourism programs can be achieved through education and conservation of cultural heritage.

5. Limitation and Future Research

The study's theoretical framework offers opportunities for mixed methodology. Surveys can comprehensively study local communities' attitudes, evaluating their willingness and ability to participate in managing cultural resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new framework for researching the impact of digital transformation on cultural heritage. This has both benefits and challenges for visitors and holders of cultural heritage.

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