

Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism: A Perspective on Drivers and Barriers

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Sustainable cultural heritage tourism entails simultaneously safeguarding tangible and intangible heritage while supporting economic development, community wellbeing, and ecological integrity (Mzembe et al., 2023). Yet the drivers and barriers shaping sustainability integration in this sector remain fragmented and under-theorised. This paper is based on a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed studies in tourism, heritage, and sustainability journals. Following established review protocols, relevant studies were identified through structured keyword searches supplemented by citation tracking. Abstracts of these studies were then screened. A full-text evaluation against the inclusion/exclusion criteria was undertaken to produce a final sample of research articles. We conducted a thematic analysis. Our review shows that sustainable cultural heritage tourism is shaped by four interrelated drivers: governance and policy architecture, community agency, market and commodification pressures, and supranational institutional influence (Loulanski and Loulanski, 2011; Parra-Requena et al., 2023). These are, however, counterbalanced by barriers such as path-dependent lock-in mechanisms, weak policy integration across governance levels, tokenistic community participation, and the symbolic adoption of sustainability commitments that serve as marketing tools rather than substantive mechanisms (Mzembe et al., 2023). Drivers and barriers are dialectically related, as the same issues that drive sustainable cultural heritage may also serve as constraints that limit the path towards sustainable cultural heritage tourism. This review offers a holistic lens for understanding conditions that can enable and inhibit sustainability in cultural heritage tourism. The findings will inform future research and policy.

