

Just Heritage Tourism under Climate Stress: From Symbolic Participation to Consequential Heritage Governance an Integrative conceptual Study of Justice, Resilience, and Institutional Change

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Abstract

Heritage tourism is increasingly governed at the intersection of renewed visitor pressure and accelerating climate stress. As international tourism returns to near pre-pandemic levels, heritage places face greater exposure to sea-level rise, heat, wildfire, ecosystem degradation, infrastructure vulnerability, cultural disruption, and uneven adaptation capacity. Existing governance responses often rely on sustainability, resilience, and participation. These concepts are necessary, but insufficient when they leave unchanged the distribution of decision authority, cultural representation, climate burden, economic benefit, and institutional accountability. This paper argues that heritage tourism under climate stress cannot be evaluated only through sustainability claims or participatory procedures. It must be judged by whether affected communities exercise consequential influence over climate adaptation, heritage interpretation, visitor management, benefit distribution, and long-term cultural survival. Drawing on participation theory, Fraser's tripartite account of justice, institutional change theory, and political ecology, the paper develops consequential heritage governance as a diagnostic typology for assessing whether participation in heritage-tourism systems produces symbolic inclusion or institutionally meaningful authority. The writing is a desk-based conceptual working paper using systematic literature engagement, policy-document analysis, and conceptual synthesis. It makes three contributions: reframing climate-stressed heritage tourism as a justice problem rather than only a sustainability-management problem; defining consequential heritage governance as an institutional condition in which affected communities influence decisions, meanings, resources, risks, and accountability mechanisms; and proposing a diagnostic matrix across five dimensions: decision authority, interpretive control, climate burden and adaptation justice, redistribution of tourism value and costs, and institutional accountability. Its purpose is conceptual clarification, the paper develops analytically testable propositions and a diagnostic typology for future empirical application

Keywords: Heritage Tourism, Consequential Heritage Governance, Climate Justice, Heritage Resilience, Participatory Governance, Institutional Change, Political Ecology, Just Tourism

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1. Introduction: The Justice Problem in Heritage Tourism under Climate Stress

1.1. Tourism Recovery, Climate Stress and Vulnerable Heritage Places

The recovery of international tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed pressure on destinations whose economies, infrastructures, and cultural institutions depend on visitor mobility.

UN Tourism reported that approximately 1.4 billion tourists travelled internationally in 2024, indicating a virtual recovery to 99 per cent of pre-pandemic levels [1]. This recovery matters for heritage tourism because many cultural landscapes, historic urban centres, sacred sites, museums, coastal settlements, and World Heritage destinations rely on tourism revenue while also confronting the environmental and social costs of visitation.

Heritage tourism may be broadly understood as travel motivated by engagement with the historical, cultural, natural, and symbolic inheritances of place, yet these inheritances are not neutral objects of consumption. They are embedded in living communities, contested memories, property relations, public institutions, conservation regimes, and unequal capacities to absorb change [2,3].

At the same time, heritage places are increasingly exposed to climate stress. The IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report assesses climate-change impacts across ecosystems, biodiversity, human communities, infrastructure, and adaptation systems, and emphasises that vulnerability and adaptive capacity are unevenly distributed [4]. For heritage destinations, climate stress may appear through sea-level rise, coastal erosion, flooding, heat, wildfire, ecosystem degradation, water insecurity, material decay, livelihood disruption, and the weakening of cultural practices connected to place. The UNESCO, UNEP, and Union of Concerned Scientists report World Heritage and Tourism in a Changing Climate identifies climate change as a significant threat to World Heritage properties and to tourism-dependent communities associated with them [5]. ICOMOS similarly argues that climate action must recognise the cultural dimensions of heritage, adaptation, resilience, and community knowledge rather than treating heritage only as physical fabric or tourist infrastructure [6]. The convergence of tourism recovery and climate stress therefore creates a governance problem rather than a merely technical management challenge. Decisions about visitor access, conservation priorities, adaptation finance, infrastructure, marketing, land use, and emergency planning are also decisions about whose heritage is protected, whose livelihoods are prioritised, whose losses are tolerated, and whose authority counts. The question is not simply whether tourism can continue under climate stress, but under what institutional and ethical conditions heritage tourism can be governed justly.

1.2. Why Sustainability Language is Insufficient

The dominant institutional vocabulary for addressing tourism pressure has been sustainable tourism. Since the consolidation of sustainable tourism as a policy and research field in the 1990s, it has provided an important language for linking economic viability, environmental protection, and social benefit [7]. In heritage governance, this vocabulary is visible in the UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme, which promotes integrated destination-level planning, stakeholder cooperation, heritage protection, and appropriate tourism development [8]. These principles are necessary, particularly where poorly managed tourism threatens conservation, resident life, and ecological integrity. Nevertheless, sustainability language is not sufficient for justice-oriented heritage-tourism governance. Sustainability frameworks often assess whether tourism can be managed responsibly at an aggregate level.

Justice analysis asks a sharper set of questions: who bears risk, who receives benefit, who controls meaning, who participates in binding decisions, and who can hold institutions accountable. Critical tourism scholarship has long warned that sustainability

discourse can be absorbed by dominant actors without changing underlying power relations. argue that sustainable tourism is not a neutral technical field but a contested terrain shaped by development politics, global inequality, and market power [9]. similarly shows that sustainable tourism policy often reproduces policy failure because institutions learn rhetorically without undertaking deeper structural change [10]. argues that tourism has potential as a social force, but this potential is routinely subordinated to industry-centred growth imperatives [11]. Her later work after COVID-19 calls for tourism recovery to be reorganised around social and ecological justice rather than a rapid return to pre-crisis growth models [12].

For heritage tourism under climate stress, the problem is not sustainability itself. The problem is the use of sustainability as a legitimating language in contexts where decision authority, adaptation costs, interpretive control, and economic value remain unevenly distributed. A justice-oriented approach must therefore move beyond asking whether tourism is sustainable in general and ask whether governance arrangements redistribute authority, protect cultural survival, and make institutions answerable to those most affected.

1.3. From participation to consequence

Participation is often proposed as the remedy for the limitations of top-down sustainability management. Heritage policies, tourism strategies, and climate-adaptation plans increasingly refer to stakeholders, local communities, consultation, co-creation, and inclusion. Yet participation is not automatically democratic, redistributive, or just. ladder of citizen participation remains important precisely because it distinguishes participation that redistributes power from participation that merely manages dissent. Her critique shows that consultation, information-sharing, and placation can operate as forms of tokenism when communities are visible in the process but unable to shape outcomes [13].

Fung's participation cube deepens this insight by showing that participation must be analysed through institutional design [14]. Who participates? How do participants communicate and deliberate? How is participation connected to authoritative decisions? These questions are crucial for heritage-tourism governance because the presence of community consultation does not prove that communities influence adaptation priorities, heritage interpretation, visitorcapacity decisions, revenue distribution, or conservation trade-offs. Participation can be procedurally present while remaining substantively weak.

In heritage-tourism systems, communities may be photographed, represented in branding, invited to workshops, named in management plans, or included in advisory bodies while retaining little authority over the terms through which their heritage is interpreted, commodified, protected, or transformed. Participation becomes symbolic when it produces visibility without influence. It becomes consequential only when community engagement alters priorities, redistributes authority, shapes institutional decisions, and creates mechanisms through which affected actors can

contest, monitor, and revise governance outcomes. The decisive issue is therefore not whether participation exists, but whether participation becomes consequential.

1.4. Research question

This paper is organised around the following research question: Under what institutional conditions can heritage-tourism governance move from symbolic participation to consequential community influence over climate adaptation, heritage interpretation, visitor management, benefit distribution, and cultural survival?

This formulation directs attention to institutional design: formal and informal rules, authority structures, resource-allocation mechanisms, accountability arrangements, and the organisational conditions through which governance claims are made, contested, and tested. It also treats climate stress not as an external background pressure, but as an analytical mechanism that redistributes risk, reveals unequal adaptive capacity, intensifies conflicts over heritage futures, and forces political decisions about acceptable loss.

1.5. Contribution of the paper

The paper makes three interconnected contributions. First, it reframes heritage tourism under climate stress as a justice problem. This reframing shift analysis from aggregate sustainability management toward questions of redistribution, recognition, representation, environmental exposure, cultural survival, and institutional accountability. account of justice as redistribution, recognition, and representation is especially useful for analysing tourism value, cultural authority, and political voice [15]. environmental-justice framework extends this concern into ecological vulnerability, recognition, capabilities, and procedural fairness under conditions of unequal environmental harm [16].

Second, the paper develops consequential heritage governance as a diagnostic concept. Consequential heritage governance refers to institutional arrangements through which affected communities and local actors exercise meaningful influence over heritage interpretation, climate adaptation, visitor management, resource allocation, benefit distribution, and long-term cultural survival. The concept does not replace Arnstein, Fung, or Fraser. It adapts and combines their insights for the specific problem of climate-stressed heritage-tourism governance, where participation must be assessed not only by procedural inclusion but by its consequences for authority, interpretation, adaptation burden, value distribution, and accountability.

Third, the paper proposes a governance matrix for distinguishing symbolic inclusion, procedural consultation, collaborative involvement, and consequential governance across five dimensions: decision authority, interpretive control, climate burden and adaptation justice, redistribution of tourism value and costs, and institutional accountability. The matrix is designed as a diagnostic tool for scholars and policy actors. It does not claim to measure causal effects empirically in this paper, rather, it clarifies

the institutional conditions under which participation in heritage-tourism governance can become consequential under climate stress.

The manuscript proceeds as follows. Section 2 develops the theoretical foundations across participation theory, justice theory, institutional theory, and political ecology. Section 3 explains the desk-based methodological approach. Section 4 diagnoses the structural limits of symbolic participation in heritage-tourism governance. Section 5 develops the consequential heritage governance framework and diagnostic matrix. Section 6 translates the framework into policy and institutional-design implications. Sections 7 and 8 address limitations, future research, and the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Foundations: Participation, Justice, Institutions, and Political Ecology

This section establishes the theoretical foundations of the paper and clarifies the conceptual position of consequential heritage governance. The concept is not proposed as a replacement for existing theories of participation, justice, institutions, or political ecology. Rather, it emerges from their intersection. Participation theory explains why inclusion may remain tokenistic when it does not redistribute authority. Justice theory clarifies why heritage-tourism governance must be assessed through distribution, recognition, and representation. Institutional theory explains why weak or symbolic arrangements persist even when policy language becomes more inclusive. Political ecology shows how climate stress is mediated by power, land use, tourism development, and unequal adaptive capacity. Together, these bodies of work make it possible to ask a more precise question: under what institutional conditions does participation in heritage-tourism governance become consequential for communities facing climate stress?

2.1. Participation Beyond Tokenism: Arnstein and Fung

Participation is one of the most frequently invoked concepts in contemporary governance, but it is also one of the most easily diluted. In heritage tourism, participation may refer to community consultation, stakeholder meetings, public hearings, advisory bodies, participatory planning workshops, cultural performances, local guide involvement, or the inclusion of community language in policy documents. These practices may be important, but they should not be treated as equivalent. The analytical problem is that participation can signify anything from symbolic visibility to substantive authority.

Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation remains foundational because it identifies participation as a question of power rather than mere presence. Her ladder distinguishes nonparticipation, tokenism, and citizen power [13]. The lower rungs, including manipulation and therapy, describe situations in which participation is used to educate, manage, or pacify citizens rather than empower them. The middle rungs, including informing, consultation, and placation, represent tokenistic forms of participation in which citizens may be heard but not necessarily heeded. The upper rungs, including partnership, delegated power, and citizen control, indicate

stronger forms of citizen authority. Arnstein's central contribution is therefore not the ladder metaphor itself, but the insistence that participation must be judged by whether it redistributes power.

This insight is directly relevant to heritage-tourism governance. Communities may be consulted during tourism planning, displayed in promotional materials, represented in destination branding, or invited to participate in conservation events without having authority over the decisions that shape their heritage futures. In such cases, participation may increase visibility without altering power. Heritage communities may become objects of consultation rather than subjects of governance. Arnstein helps identify this condition as tokenism rather than democracy. Her framework is therefore useful for diagnosing symbolic participation in heritage tourism, especially when official processes create the appearance of inclusion while decision-making authority remains concentrated in state agencies, heritage experts, destination-management organisations, private investors, or international institutions.

However, Arnstein's framework also has limits for the problem addressed in this paper. The ladder is powerful because it clarifies the distinction between tokenism and citizen power, but it does not fully specify the institutional design conditions through which participation becomes linked to concrete policy decisions. Nor does it address the particular complexities of heritagetourism systems under climate stress, where authority is distributed across conservation agencies, tourism ministries, local governments, private firms, international organisations, customary institutions, and community actors. Heritage tourism is not governed through a single participatory arena. It is governed through layered institutions, expert knowledge regimes, planning systems, tourism markets, conservation norms, and legal frameworks. For this reason, participation cannot be assessed only as a vertical movement from tokenism to citizen control. It must also be examined as a matter of institutional design, authority connection, and outcome consequence.

Fung's participation cube is useful here because it disaggregates participation into design dimensions. Fung asks who participates, how participants communicate and make decisions, and how participation is connected to authoritative policy action [14]. This framework advances the analysis beyond the question of whether participation exists. It directs attention to the composition of participants, the mode of deliberation, and the degree of influence that participation has over binding decisions. Participation may involve expert administrators, professional stakeholders, organised civil-society groups, randomly selected citizens, affected residents, or open public forums. It may operate through passive listening, expression of preferences, deliberation, negotiation, or technical co-production. It may have no policy effect, produce advice, generate co-governance, or exercise direct authority.

For heritage tourism, Fung's framework helps reveal that participation design is never neutral. If only recognised heritage experts and tourism operators are invited to planning meetings, local cultural custodians may remain marginal. If public consultation occurs after conservation and development

priorities have already been set, participation becomes reactive rather than agenda-setting. If communities are allowed to speak but institutions are not required to respond, justify, or revise decisions, participation remains weakly connected to authority. If community representatives lack resources, technical support, or legal recognition, formally participatory processes may reproduce inequality. Fung therefore helps specify the design mechanisms through which participation can either challenge or reproduce existing governance hierarchies.

Yet Fung's framework also does not fully resolve the heritage-tourism problem under climate stress. It maps participation design, but it does not by itself determine which substantive justice claims should guide evaluation. In climate-stressed heritage tourism, the relevant issues extend beyond participation architecture. They include cultural survival, interpretive authority, adaptation burden, visitor management, tourism value distribution, land-use conflict, and accountability for long-term loss. A participatory process may be well designed in procedural terms and still fail to address who benefits economically from tourism, who controls heritage narratives, who pays for adaptation, or who defines acceptable cultural and environmental loss.

Arnstein and Fung therefore provide necessary but insufficient foundations. They show that participation must be connected to power and institutional design, but heritage tourism under climate stress also requires a theory of justice.

2.2. Justice as Redistribution, Recognition, And Representation: Fraser

Nancy Fraser's tripartite framework of justice provides the second theoretical foundation. Fraser argues that justice cannot be reduced to economic distribution alone, nor to cultural recognition alone. In contemporary political life, injustice often takes multiple forms: maldistribution, misrecognition, and misrepresentation. Redistribution concerns the economic structure of society and the allocation of resources, opportunities, burdens, and benefits. Recognition concerns cultural status, respect, identity, and the avoidance of institutionalised subordination. Representation concerns political voice, membership, and the capacity to participate as a peer in decision-making processes [15].

This framework is particularly valuable for heritage tourism because heritage is simultaneously economic, cultural, and political. It generates revenue, employment, land value, investment, and public expenditure. It also organises memory, identity, cultural authority, and symbolic meaning. Finally, it is governed through institutions that decide whose claims count, which histories are protected, which communities are recognised, and which losses are considered acceptable. Heritage-tourism injustice therefore cannot be diagnosed through a single dimension. A community may receive some economic benefit from tourism while losing control over cultural representation. Another community may be symbolically recognised in official narratives while remaining excluded from decisions about land use, visitor numbers, conservation priorities, or adaptation finance. A third may be invited into participatory

processes while continuing to absorb climate risks and tourism costs without sufficient institutional protection.

Redistribution helps analyse the political economy of heritage tourism. It asks who owns tourism assets, who receives income, who obtains employment, who pays for conservation, who absorbs visitor-related costs, and who carries adaptation burdens. Heritage tourism can produce significant economic value, but that value is often unevenly captured. External investors, tour operators, hotel chains, platform intermediaries, and state agencies may benefit from heritage branding, while local communities experience rising living costs, precarious employment, land pressure, cultural labour extraction, or environmental degradation. A justice-oriented framework must therefore ask whether tourism value is redistributed in ways that strengthen local capacity, cultural continuity, and long-term resilience.

Recognition helps analyse the cultural politics of heritage. Heritage is not merely a collection of objects, buildings, landscapes, or traditions. It is a process through which meanings are authorised, contested, and transmitted. Critique of authorised heritage discourse is important here because it shows that heritage institutions often privilege expert, monumental, and state-centred understandings of heritage while marginalising living, every day, Indigenous, minority, or community-based meanings [2]. In tourism, this problem can become sharper. Cultural practices may be simplified for visitors, sacred sites may be aestheticised, difficult histories may be softened, and community identity may be converted into marketable destination imagery. Recognition therefore requires more than positive representation. It requires that communities have authority over how their heritage, memory, identity, and cultural knowledge are interpreted and circulated.

Representation helps analyse political voice and decision authority. Fraser's contribution is especially relevant because she links justice to the question of who is included within the frame of decision-making. In heritage-tourism governance, affected communities may be recognised culturally and even receive some economic benefits, but still lack representation in institutions that decide adaptation strategy, tourism development, visitor management, conservation rules, and revenue allocation. Representation is therefore not equivalent to being mentioned in policy documents or invited to consultation meetings. It concerns whether affected actors have standing, voice, and influence within governance arrangements that shape their futures.

Consequential heritage governance does not replace Fraser's framework. It operationalises it in the specific field of climate-stressed heritage tourism. Redistribution becomes a question of tourism value, adaptation costs, employment, land, conservation finance, and economic leakage [16]. Recognition becomes a question of interpretive control, cultural survival, heritage narratives, and respect for local knowledge. Representation becomes a question of decision authority, institutional channels, accountability mechanisms, and the right to contest decisions. Fraser provides the normative architecture, consequential heritage

governance translates that architecture into a diagnostic framework for evaluating heritage-tourism institutions under climate stress.

2.3. Institutional Persistence and Institutional Change

Participation and justice frameworks explain what is normatively at stake, but they do not fully explain why weak, symbolic, or exclusionary governance arrangements persist. This is where institutional theory becomes necessary. Heritage-tourism governance is not produced only by ideas or values. It is structured by formal and informal institutions: laws, planning procedures, property regimes, conservation rules, tourism strategies, funding mechanisms, professional norms, administrative routines, expert hierarchies, customary practices, and informal networks of influence.

North famously defines institutions as the rules of the game that structure human interaction. This includes both formal constraints, such as laws and regulations, and informal constraints, such as norms, conventions, customs, and codes of conduct [17]. In heritage-tourism governance, formal institutions may include heritage-protection legislation, zoning rules, destination-management plans, environmental-impact procedures, World Heritage management systems, and tourism licensing regimes. Informal institutions may include expert authority, bureaucratic habit, elite access, investor influence, customary leadership, social hierarchy, and assumptions about whose knowledge is legitimate. Both matter because communities can be formally included but informally marginalised. A consultation requirement may exist on paper while actual influence remains limited by technical language, weak enforcement, unequal resources, or pre-existing administrative priorities.

Path dependence explains why governance arrangements can remain stable even when their limitations are widely recognised. It argues that political processes often exhibit increasing returns: once institutions are established, the costs of reversal rise, actors adapt to existing arrangements, and alternative pathways become harder to pursue [18]. In heritage tourism, this means that growth-oriented tourism models, expert-led conservation systems, centralised planning procedures, or investor-driven destination strategies may persist even when policy documents adopt the language of participation and sustainability. Institutions do not automatically change because new vocabulary appears. Sustainability language may be layered onto old structures without changing who decides, who benefits, or who is accountable.

The literature on gradual institutional change sharpens this point., and later show that institutional change often occurs incrementally through mechanisms such as layering, conversion, drift, and displacement [19,20]. Layering occurs when new rules are added onto existing institutions without replacing them. Conversion occurs when existing institutions are redirected toward new purposes. Drift occurs when institutions remain formally unchanged despite changing external conditions, producing new effects over time. Displacement occurs when old institutions are replaced by new ones. These concepts are useful for analysing why participatory

and sustainability reforms in heritage tourism may remain limited. A community advisory board may be layered onto a centralised planning system without altering final authority. A conservation institution may be converted toward tourism promotion without sufficient community safeguards. Climate change may produce institutional drift when heritage-management systems designed for stable environmental conditions are not revised to address accelerating risk. More transformative change would require not only adding participation mechanisms, but altering authority, resources, accountability, and enforcement.

Institutional theory therefore helps identify a core danger in heritage-tourism governance: progressive language can coexist with institutional continuity. Policies may speak of community participation while retaining expert control. Tourism strategies may endorse sustainability while maintaining growth-oriented metrics. Climate-adaptation plans may recognise vulnerability while assigning responsibility to local communities without redistributing resources. Heritage-management systems may invoke cultural diversity while privileging official or monumental forms of heritage. Without institutional change, participation risks becoming symbolic and justice remains declaratory.

This is why consequential heritage governance must be defined institutionally, not only normatively. It requires formal roles, decision channels, recognised authority, resource access, accountability mechanisms, and mechanisms for revision. Affected communities must not only be heard, institutions must be required to respond. Their knowledge must not only be acknowledged, it must be capable of shaping adaptation, interpretation, visitor management, and benefit distribution. Institutional theory thus shifts the paper from a moral claim to a governance claim. The question is not only what justice requires, but how institutions can be designed or transformed so that justice has consequences.

2.4. Political Ecology and Unequal Climate Burden

Political ecology provides the fourth foundation because it makes climate stress an analytical mechanism rather than a background condition. Climate change is often discussed in tourism and heritage policy as a risk to be managed through adaptation, conservation planning, infrastructure protection, monitoring, and resilience-building. These responses are necessary, but political ecology insists that environmental risk is never distributed neutrally. Exposure, vulnerability, adaptive capacity, and loss are shaped by political economy, land use, institutional authority, historical inequality, and social power. Work on land degradation is foundational because it asks not only what environmental degradation is occurring, but how serious it is and for whom [21]. This question is central to climate-stressed heritage tourism. Sea-level rise, heat, flooding, wildfire, ecosystem degradation, and water insecurity do not affect all actors equally. Tourism investors may relocate capital, diversify portfolios, or externalise costs. State agencies may prioritise nationally significant monuments or revenue-generating sites. Visitors may shift to alternative destinations. Local communities, by contrast, may face livelihood loss, cultural dislocation, housing pressure, reduced access to

sacred or customary spaces, or the erosion of place-based practices. Political ecology therefore asks who is exposed, who is protected, who benefits, and who pays.

Bryant and Bailey define political ecology as an approach that integrates political, economic, and ecological analysis [22]. Similarly emphasises themes such as degradation and marginalisation, conservation and control, environmental conflict, identity, and the production of environmental subjects [23]. These themes are directly relevant to heritagetourism governance. Conservation can protect heritage, but it can also restrict local use. Tourism can finance preservation, but it can also intensify land pressure and cultural commodification. Climate adaptation can reduce risk, but it can also redistribute burdens if communities are asked to adapt without authority or resources. Visitor management can protect fragile sites, but it can also privilege tourist experience over resident life. Political ecology enables the paper to analyse these tensions as governance struggles rather than technical problems.

Climate justice scholarship reinforces this point. Argues that climate justice requires attention to the uneven and disproportionate impacts of climate change and to the need for fair redress [24]. This is especially important for heritage tourism because climate vulnerability is shaped not only by geography, but by historical responsibility, colonial legacies, development models, property regimes, labour relations, infrastructure inequality, and institutional capacity. A coastal heritage community may be climate-exposed because of sealevel rise, but its vulnerability may also be intensified by tourism development in sensitive zones, exclusion from planning, weak public infrastructure, or dependence on precarious tourism labour. Climate stress is therefore not simply an environmental pressure placed upon heritage tourism. It is a force that reveals and intensifies pre-existing inequalities.

In this paper, political ecology performs three analytical functions. First, it prevents climate stress from being treated as an external hazard that affects all stakeholders equally. Second, it connects environmental vulnerability to tourism development, land use, institutional authority, and unequal adaptive capacity. Third, it raises the question of acceptable loss. In heritage governance, climate adaptation often involves difficult decisions: which places should be protected, which practices can continue, which sites may be transformed, which communities may need support, and which losses are deemed unavoidable. These are not purely technical decisions. They are ethical and political decisions about heritage futures.

Political ecology therefore strengthens the case for consequential heritage governance. If climate stress is mediated by power, then participation cannot be merely consultative. Communities facing climate burdens must have influence over adaptation priorities, resource allocation, visitor management, and definitions of cultural loss. Without such influence, resilience can become unjust: communities may be praised for adapting while institutions avoid redistributing power, responsibility, and resources.

2.5. Toward Consequential Heritage Governance

The concept of consequential heritage governance emerges from the intersection of these four theoretical traditions. Participation theory provides the critique of tokenism and the tools for analysing participatory design. Justice theory provides the normative framework for assessing redistribution, recognition,

and representation. Institutional theory explains why symbolic governance persists and why formal inclusion does not necessarily produce substantive change. Political ecology shows that climate stress is not an external environmental backdrop, but a power-laden mechanism that redistributes risk, exposes institutional asymmetry, and intensifies conflicts over heritage futures.

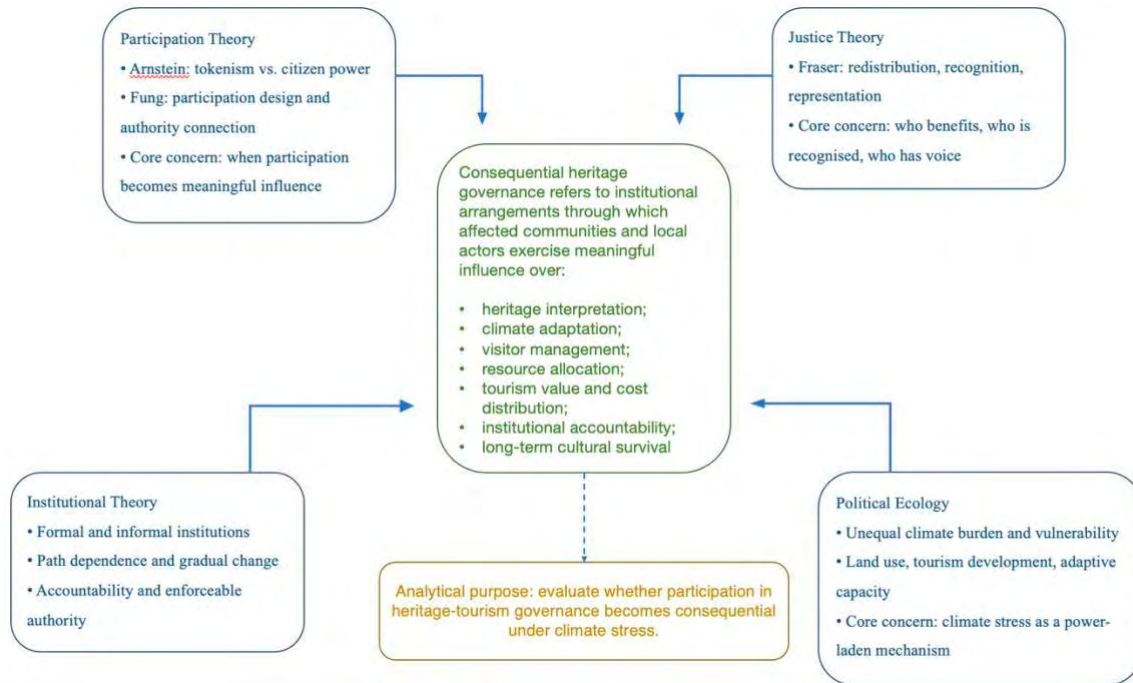


Figure 1: Theoretical Foundations of Consequential Heritage Governance Synthesis of four Intellectual Traditions

Consequential heritage governance is therefore defined as institutional arrangements through which affected communities and local actors exercise meaningful influence over heritage interpretation, climate adaptation, visitor management, resource allocation, benefit distribution, and long-term cultural survival. The key word is consequential. Participation becomes consequential when it affects priorities, decisions, resources, narratives, responsibilities, and accountability. It is not enough for communities to be visible, consulted, or represented symbolically. Nor is it enough for policies to use the language of sustainability, resilience, or inclusion. The analytical test is whether governance arrangements give affected actors recognised authority and enforceable channels to shape outcomes.

This concept adds to Arnstein by moving from a general critique of tokenism to a sectorspecific framework for climate-stressed heritage tourism. It adds to Fung by connecting participation design to substantive justice dimensions, including climate burden, interpretive authority, tourism value, and cultural survival. It adds to Fraser by operationalising redistribution, recognition, and representation within heritage-tourism institutions. It adds to institutional theory by specifying the kinds of institutional change required for participation to alter authority and accountability. It adds to political ecology by making unequal climate burden a central governance criterion rather than a contextual variable.

The resulting framework is diagnostic rather than prescriptive in a narrow policy sense. It does not assume that every heritage-tourism context requires identical institutional arrangements. Heritage places differ by legal system, cultural history, ownership structure, climate exposure, governance capacity, tourism intensity, and community composition. Consequential heritage governance therefore does not prescribe a single model such as full community control, comanagement, participatory budgeting, or legal consent procedures in all cases. Instead, it asks whether the institutional arrangement in a given context enables affected communities to influence decisions that materially shape their heritage futures.

This theoretical synthesis also clarifies the stakes of the paper. The problem is not simply that heritage tourism needs more participation. The problem is that participation can remain symbolic when it is detached from justice, institutional change, and climate burden. The task is therefore to move from participation as procedure to participation as consequence. In climate-stressed heritage-tourism systems, justice requires institutions capable of redistributing authority, recognising cultural meaning, allocating adaptation burdens fairly, ensuring durable community benefit, and remaining accountable over time.

3. Methodological Approach: Conceptual Synthesis and Policy-Document Analysis

This paper uses a desk-based conceptual research design combining systematic literature engagement, policy-document analysis, and conceptual synthesis. The purpose of this methodological approach is to develop a diagnostic framework for analysing heritage-tourism governance under climate stress. The paper does not present original fieldwork, interviews, surveys, ethnography, or quantitative modelling. Nor does it claim to provide a formal scoping review or systematic review. Its contribution is conceptual and diagnostic where it clarifies the institutional conditions under which participation in heritage-tourism governance can move from symbolic inclusion toward consequential community influence.

3.1. Research Design

The research design is appropriate to the paper's central aim: framework-building rather than empirical measurement. Conceptual papers are not exempt from methodological discipline. They require a clear statement of the problem, a justified selection of theoretical resources, and an explicit account of how concepts are related, extended, or reorganised to generate new analytical insight [25,26]. In this writing, the conceptual problem is the inadequacy of sustainability and participation language when those frameworks do not alter the distribution of authority, recognition, climate burden, tourism value, and institutional accountability in heritage-tourism systems.

The writing therefore proceeds through three linked methodological steps. First, it engages selected bodies of scholarship relevant to the problem of justice-oriented heritage-tourism governance under climate stress. Second, it examines policy and institutional documents from heritage, tourism, and climate-adaptation fields in order to identify how public institutions frame climate risk, sustainability, participation, heritage protection, and community responsibility. Third, it synthesises the theoretical and policy materials into a diagnostic framework: consequential heritage governance.

This design is desk-based but not arbitrary. Its logic is theoretical sampling rather than exhaustive coverage. The literature and documents are selected because they illuminate the paper's central conceptual problem: why participation in heritage-tourism governance may remain symbolic, and what institutional conditions would be required for it to become consequential. The paper's method is therefore closer to conceptual synthesis and integrative literature engagement than to empirical hypothesis testing.

3.2. Systematic Literature Engagement

The article engages four bodies of scholarship. The first concerns climate justice and political ecology. This literature is used to show that climate stress is not only an environmental pressure, but also a distributive, political, and institutional problem. It helps identify how exposure, vulnerability, adaptation capacity, and acceptable loss are shaped by power, land use, development models, and uneven responsibility.

The second body of literature concerns heritage resilience, cultural survival, and the politics of heritage. This literature is used to show that heritage cannot be reduced to physical conservation or tourism assets. Heritage involves memory, identity, cultural authority, social practice, place attachment, and intergenerational continuity. In climate-stressed tourism contexts, the question is therefore not only whether monuments, landscapes, or sites can be preserved, but whether the communities and cultural systems that give heritage meaning can survive with dignity and authority. The third body of literature concerns participatory governance and justice theory. Participation theory, especially the work of Arnstein and Fung, provides tools for distinguishing tokenistic inclusion from participation connected to authority. Justice theory, especially Fraser's framework of redistribution, recognition, and representation, provides the normative basis for assessing tourism value, cultural interpretation, and political voice. These literatures allow the paper to ask whether participation is procedurally present or institutionally consequential.

The fourth body of literature concerns institutional change in tourism, heritage governance, and public policy. This literature explains why weak, symbolic, or exclusionary arrangements may persist even when policy documents adopt progressive language. Concepts such as formal and informal institutions, path dependence, institutional layering, conversion, drift, and accountability help explain how sustainability and participation can be absorbed into existing structures without altering the underlying distribution of power.

The literature engagement is systematic in the sense that it is organised around defined theoretical clusters and a clear analytical purpose. It is not systematic in the stricter review method sense of claiming exhaustive database coverage, replicable search strings, comprehensive screening, or formal quality appraisal. This distinction is important. The paper does not present itself as a scoping review, because it does not follow a full scoping-review protocol or PRISMA-ScR reporting structure. Its purpose is not to map all literature on heritage tourism, climate justice, or participation, but to develop a theoretically disciplined synthesis capable of supporting a new diagnostic concept.

3.3. Policy-Document Analysis

The work also uses policy-document analysis to examine how public institutions frame the governance problem. Document analysis is appropriate for this study because policy documents are not merely neutral containers of information. They are institutional texts that define problems, assign responsibility, authorise certain forms of knowledge, legitimise particular interventions, and shape the vocabulary through which governance is conducted [27]. In heritage tourism, documents matter because they frame what counts as heritage, who counts as a stakeholder, how climate risk is understood, and what forms of participation are considered sufficient.

The document corpus is composed of publicly available materials from international heritage, tourism, and climate-related

institutions. These include documents and programme materials from UNESCO and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, UN Tourism, ICOMOS, IPCC-related climate-adaptation sources where relevant, and selected international heritage or tourism policy materials that address sustainability, resilience, participation, conservation, visitor management, climate risk, or community responsibility. The purpose is not to evaluate these organisations comprehensively. Rather, the documents are used as institutional evidence of how key policy fields frame the relationship between heritage, tourism, climate stress, and participation.

The analysis focuses on five questions. First, how do policy documents define the problem of climate risk for heritage and tourism? Second, how do they frame sustainability and resilience? Third, how do they describe the role of communities, stakeholders, local actors, or rightsholders? Fourth, how do they connect participation to decision-making authority, benefit distribution, heritage interpretation, or accountability? Fifth, what forms of responsibility are assigned to communities, states, tourism actors, conservation institutions, and international bodies?

This approach treats policy documents as objects of interpretation rather than as direct evidence of implementation. A policy document may endorse participation without proving that participation is influential in practice. It may call for community benefit without demonstrating equitable benefit distribution. It may recognise climate risk without specifying who pays for adaptation or who decides what losses are acceptable. The methodological value of document analysis is therefore diagnostic: it reveals the institutional vocabulary, assumptions, silences, and problem framings through which heritage-tourism governance is organised.

3.4. Conceptual Synthesis

The final methodological step is conceptual synthesis. Conceptual synthesis involves relating existing concepts across literatures in order to clarify an under-specified problem and generate a more precise analytical framework. This paper does not treat participation, justice, institutions, and political ecology as separate literatures placed side by side. It uses them relationally. Participation theory identifies the difference between symbolic inclusion and power-sharing. Justice theory specifies the normative dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and representation. Institutional theory explains the persistence of weak governance arrangements and the conditions under which change may occur. Political ecology shows that climate stress is mediated by unequal power, land use, tourism development, and adaptive capacity.

The synthesis proceeds by identifying a conceptual gap. Existing participation frameworks are essential, but they do not fully address the specific combination of climate burden, interpretive authority, tourism value distribution, cultural survival, and institutional accountability that characterises heritage tourism under climate stress. Existing sustainability and resilience frameworks are also important, but they may remain politically incomplete when they do not specify who decides, who benefits, who adapts, who pays, and who can contest institutional failure. The concept of

consequential heritage governance is developed to address this gap.

The resulting framework distinguishes between symbolic participation and consequential governance. Symbolic participation refers to arrangements in which communities are visible, consulted, or rhetorically included but lack meaningful influence over decisions and outcomes. Consequential heritage governance refers to institutional arrangements through which affected communities and local actors exercise meaningful influence over heritage interpretation, climate adaptation, visitor management, resource allocation, benefit distribution, and long-term cultural survival. The framework is then organised into diagnostic dimensions: decision authority, interpretive control, climate burden and adaptation justice, redistribution of tourism value and costs, and institutional accountability.

3.5. Scope and Limitations of The Method

The scope of the paper is conceptual. It does not present new interviews, surveys, ethnographic observation, participatory research, or statistical analysis as above mentioned. It does not claim to measure the outcomes of heritage-tourism governance at a specific site. It does not assess whether a particular destination is just or unjust, nor does it rank institutions according to performance. These are limitations, but they are also consistent with the paper's purpose.

The main limitation of the method is that it cannot determine how consequential participation operates in practice without empirical application. Whether communities actually influence adaptation decisions, heritage narratives, visitor-management rules, revenue distribution, or accountability mechanisms requires site-specific research. Such research would require interviews, document tracing, institutional analysis, community-based methods, comparative case studies, or mixed-method evaluation. The present paper does not provide that evidence.

The paper's purpose is not to test causal effects empirically, but to clarify the institutional conditions under which participation in heritage-tourism governance can become consequential under climate stress. Its contribution is therefore diagnostic and preparatory. It provides a conceptual framework that future empirical research can apply to climate-stressed heritage-tourism contexts, including coastal cultural landscapes, historic urban centres, island destinations, Indigenous and minority heritage sites, community-based tourism systems, and World Heritage properties facing visitor pressure and environmental risk. In this sense, the paper's methodological modesty is deliberate. It offers a theoretically grounded framework without overstating what desk-based research can prove.

4. The Limits of Symbolic Participation in Heritage-Tourism Governance

The preceding section established that consequential heritage governance draws from participation theory, justice theory, institutional theory, and political ecology. This section diagnoses

the problem that makes such a framework necessary: participation, representation, resilience, sustainability, and adaptation may all be present in heritage-tourism governance while remaining insufficiently consequential. The issue is not that these concepts are irrelevant.

Participation matters, representation matters, resilience matters, sustainability matters, adaptation matters. The problem is that each can become politically shallow when detached from authority, redistribution, cultural control, and accountability.

In heritage-tourism governance, symbolic participation is especially difficult to detect because it often appears normatively positive. Communities may be invited, consulted, displayed, celebrated, or named as stakeholders. Policy documents may use the language of inclusion and sustainability. Tourism strategies may promise local benefit and cultural respect. Climate adaptation plans may acknowledge vulnerability. Yet these gestures do not necessarily alter who decides, who benefits, who interprets heritage, who bears climate risk, or who can contest institutional failure. Symbolic participation is therefore not defined by the complete absence of inclusion. It is defined by the absence of consequential influence.

4.1. Participation Without Authority

Participation becomes symbolic when it produces visibility without influence. Heritage communities may be included in consultations, workshops, advisory committees, tourism campaigns, heritage festivals, or conservation events without having authority over the decisions that structure tourism development and heritage management. They may be asked to comment on plans whose priorities have already been determined, invited to validate narratives already written, or mobilised to legitimise projects whose economic and institutional terms they did not shape. In such cases, participation functions less as democratic governance than as procedural legitimization.

Arnstein's critique remains central because it reminds us that consultation is not equivalent to power. Participation may be used to inform, persuade, or placate communities while leaving final decision-making authority unchanged [13]. Critique of participatory development extends this warning by showing that participatory methods can reproduce domination when they conceal power relations, manufacture consensus, or transfer responsibility without transferring authority [28]. These critiques are highly relevant to heritage tourism, where participation often occurs within institutions already structured by expert authority, state heritage law, donor priorities, tourism-market interests, and destination branding.

Fung's (2006) participation cube helps explain why participation without authority persists [14]. A process may appear participatory because it includes local actors, but its real significance depends on who is invited, how discussion occurs, and whether participation is connected to authoritative decisions. If community consultation has no binding relationship to conservation priorities, visitor limits, tourism revenue allocation, land-use planning, or climate-

adaptation strategy, then participation remains procedurally visible but institutionally weak. Its function is expressive rather than consequential.

This does not mean that consultation is always meaningless. Consultation can be valuable when it occurs early, includes affected actors, provides access to information, requires institutional response, and creates traceable influence over decisions. The problem is consultation without authority. In heritage-tourism governance, affected communities often face decisions about visitor pressure, cultural representation, infrastructure, conservation restrictions, relocation risk, or environmental degradation. If they are merely asked for opinions after the institutional frame has already been set, participation becomes symbolic. The central question is therefore not whether communities are consulted, but whether their participation can alter decisions.

4.2. Representation Without Control

A second failure mode occurs when communities are represented in heritage-tourism narratives without controlling the terms of representation. Heritage tourism depends heavily on stories, images, performances, landscapes, rituals, cuisines, crafts, architecture, memory, and identity. These elements are not passive cultural resources. They are part of how communities understand themselves, transmit knowledge, and claim continuity across generations. Yet tourism often converts heritage into a consumable narrative for visitors, investors, and destination markets.

Smith's critique of authorised heritage discourse is important because it shows that heritage is not simply discovered and preserved, it is authorised through institutions, expertise, and power [2]. Official heritage regimes may privilege monuments, material fabric, expert knowledge, and state-sanctioned narratives while marginalising living cultural practices, difficult memories, Indigenous authority, minority histories, or everyday attachments to place. In tourism, this problem is intensified because heritage narratives must often be made legible, attractive, and marketable. Communities may appear in brochures, museum displays, walking tours, websites, and destination campaigns while losing authority over how their identities, memories, and territories are interpreted. Commodification is relevant here, but it should not be treated simplistically. Cautions against assuming that commodification automatically destroys authenticity, meanings may be negotiated, and new cultural forms may acquire authenticity over time [29]. This is important because not all tourism representation is exploitative, and not all cultural performance for visitors is necessarily inauthentic. The stronger justice claim is more precise: commodification becomes unjust when communities lose authority over the terms of representation and the distribution of value. The issue is not the mere presence of tourism markets, but the unequal control of narrative, image, access, and benefit.

Representation without control can take several forms. Cultural practices may be simplified to fit tourist expectations. Sacred or politically sensitive histories may be depoliticised. Local residents may become visual symbols of authenticity while external actors

manage the tourism economy. Difficult histories of displacement, colonialism, labour, environmental degradation, or conflict may be softened to protect destination image. Digital platforms may further reshape visibility by privileging what is searchable, photogenic, reviewable, and commercially legible. In each case, the problem is not simply misrepresentation. It is the institutional separation between being represented and having authority over representation.

Consequential heritage governance therefore requires interpretive control as a core dimension. Communities must be able to shape how their heritage is narrated, circulated, commercialised, and protected. Recognition cannot be reduced to positive imagery. It must include authority over meaning.

4.3. Resilience Without Justice

Resilience is often used positively in climate, heritage, and tourism policy. It suggests the capacity to absorb disturbance, adapt to change, and continue functioning under stress. For heritage places facing sea-level rise, heat, wildfire, flooding, ecological degradation, and visitor pressure, resilience is clearly relevant. The problem is not resilience as such. The problem is resilience without justice.

Critical resilience scholarship shows that resilience is a contested concept. argues that resilience can be used as a bridge across disciplines, but also risks becoming conceptually vague or politically conservative if it emphasises adaptation without asking adaptation to what, for whom, and under whose authority [30]. similarly argue that resilience thinking must engage social theory because questions of power, knowledge, and normativity cannot be separated from socio-ecological change [31]. goes further by warning that resilience can align with neoliberal forms of governance when it shifts responsibility for adaptation onto individuals and communities while leaving structural conditions intact [32].

This critique is directly relevant to heritage tourism under climate stress. Communities may be praised for resilience while being asked to absorb increasing climate risks, unstable tourism income, conservation restrictions, rising living costs, infrastructure vulnerability, and cultural disruption. They may be expected to adapt their livelihoods, protect cultural practices, manage visitor pressure, and maintain destination attractiveness without receiving corresponding authority, finance, protection, or institutional support. In this setting, resilience becomes unjust when adaptation burdens are shifted onto communities without redistributing power, responsibility, and resources.

Adger's account of vulnerability is useful because it defines vulnerability in relation to exposure, sensitivity, and the capacity to adapt [33]. This means that vulnerability is not merely a physical condition. It is shaped by social relations, institutional capacity, access to resources, and political-economic conditions. A heritage community may be exposed to coastal flooding, but the injustice lies partly in why it lacks protective infrastructure, why tourism

development was permitted in vulnerable zones, why adaptation funding is inadequate, or why community knowledge is excluded from planning. Resilience cannot be just if it asks communities to adapt to risks they did not create and cannot govern.

For this reason, the paper treats resilience as politically incomplete unless tied to justice. Resilience should not mean that communities become more capable of enduring harm. It should mean that institutions reduce harm, redistribute adaptation burdens, protect cultural survival, and enable affected actors to shape decisions about future pathways. In climate-stressed heritage tourism, resilience must be evaluated by its institutional and distributive consequences, not only by the capacity of destinations to continue receiving visitors.

4.4. Sustainability Without Redistribution

Sustainability is another governance concept that may become shallow when detached from redistribution. Sustainable tourism is often framed around balancing economic, environmental, and social objectives. This balance is important, but it can conceal the political economy of tourism. A destination may reduce environmental impacts, improve visitor management, and promote community language while still reproducing unequal ownership, low-paid labour, external profit capture, resident displacement, cultural extraction, or weak local control.

Critical tourism scholarship has repeatedly shown that tourism development is shaped by unequal political-economic relations. argue that sustainable tourism is embedded in global development politics and cannot be separated from questions of power, inequality, and market expansion [9]. calls for stronger political-economic analysis of tourism development, particularly because mainstream approaches often focus on tourism's contribution to growth while giving less attention to ownership, class relations, state power, capital accumulation, and uneven development [34]. Scheyvens (2011) similarly shows that tourism's poverty-reduction potential depends on the actual distribution of opportunities, benefits, and control, not on the mere presence of tourism activity.

In heritage tourism, sustainability without redistribution is especially problematic because heritage value is often locally produced but externally captured. Communities maintain cultural practices, landscapes, historical memory, hospitality, and place identity, yet tourism revenue may flow disproportionately to external investors, tour operators, hotel owners, platform intermediaries, or state agencies. Local residents may receive seasonal or low-paid work while bearing costs associated with congestion, housing pressure, cultural commodification, environmental degradation, and adaptation needs. Conservation finance may depend on tourism revenue, but the benefits and burdens of that model may remain unevenly distributed.

The politics of overtourism illustrates this problem. The World Tourism Organization's 2018 report on overtourism identifies growing visitor pressure in urban destinations and its impacts on residents, infrastructure, and local life [35]. However, overtourism

should not be understood only as excess demand. It is also a governance failure: a failure to align visitor numbers, destination capacity, resident rights, conservation limits, infrastructure, housing, public space, and ecological vulnerability. When heritage destinations remain committed to growth metrics while residents absorb the costs, sustainability language becomes politically inadequate.

The central point is therefore straightforward: sustainable tourism is incomplete if it does not ask who owns, who profits, who decides, who pays, and who is protected. Redistribution must include income and employment, but it should not be reduced to them. It also includes land access, public investment, procurement, conservation finance, taxation, adaptation funding, cultural labour, and institutional capacity. A justice-oriented heritage-tourism framework must therefore evaluate whether tourism value strengthens community resilience and cultural survival, or whether it extracts value while leaving risks and costs localised.

4.5. Climate Adaptation Without Institutional Accountability

The final failure mode is climate adaptation without institutional accountability. Climate adaptation is indispensable for heritage places exposed to sea-level rise, heat, wildfire, flooding, erosion, ecosystem degradation, and infrastructure risk. Policy responses may include vulnerability assessments, risk mapping, conservation planning, early-warning systems, infrastructure upgrades, drainage improvements, landscape management, emergency planning, relocation strategies, and visitor-management reforms. These measures are necessary, but they can become technocratic if they treat adaptation as a technical exercise rather than a contested governance process.

argue that adaptation is a socio-political process involving authority, knowledge, and subjectivity [36]. This means that adaptation does not simply respond to climate risk, it also shapes who is authorised to know, decide, adapt, and bear responsibility. In heritage tourism, adaptation decisions may determine which sites receive protection, which cultural practices are prioritised, which infrastructures are funded, which visitor activities are restricted, which communities face relocation pressure, and which losses are treated as acceptable. These decisions cannot be reduced to technical risk management.

UNESCO's 2023 Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage recognises that climate change affects World Heritage properties and that climate action must be integrated into heritage protection and management [37]. ICOMOS's *The Future of Our Pasts* similarly calls for cultural heritage to be engaged in climate action and for heritage knowledge to inform adaptation and mitigation. These policy directions are important. Yet the justice question remains: who defines the adaptation priorities, who pays for adaptation, who monitors implementation, and who has the authority to challenge failure?

Institutional accountability matters because climate adaptation decisions can produce winners and losers. A seawall may protect

a historic district but damage coastal ecosystems or redirect risk elsewhere. Visitor limits may protect fragile heritage but reduce local income if compensation mechanisms are absent. Conservation restrictions may protect material heritage while limiting local livelihood practices. Relocation may reduce physical exposure while severing cultural ties to place. Risk mapping may identify vulnerability but fail to generate funding or enforceable obligations. Adaptation is therefore not automatically just because it is climate-oriented.

Consequential heritage governance requires adaptation to be answerable. Institutions must be required to justify decisions, disclose trade-offs, monitor outcomes, respond to grievances, revise failed policies, and recognise the authority of affected communities. The key questions are: who defines acceptable loss, who pays for adaptation, who benefits from protection, who is asked to change, and who can contest decisions? Without accountability, climate adaptation may reproduce the same symbolic pattern as participation: communities are acknowledged as vulnerable but not empowered as decision-makers.

This section has identified five limits of symbolic governance: participation without authority, representation without control, resilience without justice, sustainability without redistribution, and adaptation without accountability. These limits do not imply that participation, representation, resilience, sustainability, or adaptation should be abandoned. Rather, they show that these concepts must be made consequential. The next section develops consequential heritage governance as a diagnostic framework for assessing whether heritage-tourism institutions distribute authority, recognition, climate burden, tourism value, and accountability in ways that can support just governance under climate stress.

5. Analytical Propositions and Diagnostic Typology

The previous section identified five limits of symbolic governance in heritage-tourism systems: participation without authority, representation without control, resilience without justice, sustainability without redistribution, and adaptation without accountability. These limits show why a more precise diagnostic concept is needed. Heritage-tourism governance under climate stress cannot be evaluated only by asking whether participation exists, whether sustainability is invoked, or whether adaptation is planned. It must be evaluated by asking whether affected communities have institutionalised influence over the decisions, narratives, resources, risks, and accountability mechanisms that shape their heritage futures.

This section develops consequential heritage governance as the paper's central conceptual contribution. The framework is diagnostic rather than prescriptive in a narrow policy sense. It does not assume that every heritage-tourism destination should adopt identical institutional arrangements. Heritage places differ by legal system, cultural history, property regime, community structure, climate exposure, conservation status, tourism intensity, and administrative capacity. The framework therefore does not prescribe one universal model of community control, co-

management, participatory budgeting, or legal consent. Instead, it asks whether governance arrangements in a given context enable affected actors to exercise meaningful influence over outcomes.

5.1. Defining Consequential Heritage Governance

Consequential heritage governance refers to institutional arrangements through which affected communities and local actors exercise meaningful influence over heritage interpretation, climate adaptation, visitor management, resource allocation, benefit distribution, and long-term cultural survival.

Several elements of this definition require clarification. First, the term “institutional arrangements” signals that the framework is concerned with rules, roles, mandates, procedures, resources, and accountability mechanisms. It is not enough for communities to be informally respected or symbolically acknowledged. Consequential governance requires channels through which community influence can be exercised, recorded, defended, and enforced. These channels may include formal representation, co-management structures, statutory consultation requirements, community review mechanisms, participatory monitoring, consent procedures, benefit-sharing agreements, grievance systems, or mandated institutional responses.

Second, “affected communities and local actors” refers to those whose livelihoods, cultural practices, memory, identity, land, environment, and everyday life are shaped by heritagetourism governance. This category may include residents, cultural custodians, Indigenous peoples, ethnic or religious minorities, local workers, small business owners, heritage practitioners, customary institutions, civil-society organisations, and other place-based actors. The phrase does not assume that communities are homogeneous or politically unified. Agrawal and Gibson (1999) warn against romanticising “community” as a natural unit of shared interest. Consequential heritage governance must therefore attend to internal inequalities, including gender, class, generation, ethnicity, migration status, land tenure, and proximity to decisionmaking power.

Third, “meaningful influence” is the central criterion. Influence is meaningful when participation can alter priorities, plans, resource allocation, implementation, interpretation, and accountability. A community meeting that produces no institutional obligation is weak. A consultation process that occurs after priorities have already been fixed is limited. A heritage festival that celebrates local culture without giving communities authority over interpretation or benefit distribution is symbolic. By contrast, participation becomes consequential when institutional actors must respond, justify, revise, share authority, or redistribute resources in light of community claims.

Fourth, the definition identifies six arenas of influence: heritage interpretation, climate adaptation, visitor management, resource allocation, benefit distribution, and long-term cultural survival. These arenas are included because heritage tourism under climate stress is not only a matter of conservation or economic development.

It concerns who controls meaning, who bears environmental risk, who decides visitor capacity, who receives tourism value, who pays for adaptation, and whether cultural practices can continue across generations.

5.2. What the Concept Adds Beyond Arnstein, Fraser, and Fung

Consequential heritage governance does not replace Arnstein’s ladder of participation, Fung’s participation cube, or Fraser’s justice framework. It depends on them. Its contribution lies in adapting and combining their insights for the specific problem of heritage tourism under climate stress.

Arnstein provides the foundational critique of tokenism. Her ladder remains indispensable because it distinguishes participation that merely informs, consults, or placates citizens from participation that redistributes power [13]. However, the ladder was not designed specifically for heritage-tourism systems exposed to climate stress. It does not directly address heritage interpretation, cultural survival, tourism value extraction, adaptation burden, or longterm institutional accountability. Consequential heritage governance builds on Arnstein by asking not only whether communities move upward from tokenism toward power, but whether their participation affects the particular governance arenas that matter in heritage-tourism systems.

Fung (2006) provides a more detailed account of participation design. His framework asks who participates, how participants communicate, and how participation connects to authoritative decisions [14]. This is crucial because participation cannot be judged only by its existence. It must be judged by institutional design. Yet participation design alone does not specify the substantive justice dimensions that matter in climate-stressed heritage tourism. A participatory process could be inclusive and deliberative, but still fail to redistribute tourism benefits, protect interpretive authority, address climate burden, or create enforcement mechanisms. Consequential heritage governance therefore extends Fung by linking participation design to justice outcomes and institutional accountability.

Fraser (2009) provides the normative architecture of redistribution, recognition, and representation [15]. This framework is essential because heritage-tourism injustice is economic, cultural, and political at once. Redistribution concerns tourism value, land, labour, adaptation finance, and public investment. Recognition concerns cultural authority, memory, identity, interpretation, and respect for local knowledge. Representation concerns political voice, institutional standing, and decision authority. Consequential heritage governance does not claim to improve upon Fraser at the level of political philosophy. Instead, it operationalises Fraser’s justice dimensions within a specific governance field: heritage tourism under climate stress.

The added value of consequential heritage governance is therefore synthetic and diagnostic. It brings together participation design, justice as redistribution, recognition and representation,

institutional accountability, climate burden, heritage interpretation, visitor management, and tourism value distribution. Its purpose is to prevent the evaluation of heritage-tourism governance from stopping at procedural participation or general sustainability language. The framework asks whether governance arrangements actually redistribute authority and create consequences for decisions.

5.3. Four Levels of Governance Participation

To evaluate whether participation is symbolic or consequential, this paper proposes a four-level typology: symbolic inclusion, procedural consultation, collaborative involvement, and consequential governance. This typology should not be read as a direct replication of Arnstein's ladder. It is narrower, sector-specific, and diagnostic. Its purpose is to assess participation in heritage-tourism governance under climate stress, especially where institutions invoke inclusion, sustainability, resilience, and adaptation without clearly redistributing authority.

The first level is symbolic inclusion. At this level, communities are displayed, mentioned, celebrated, photographed, or invited

into official language, but they have no meaningful influence over decisions. Symbolic inclusion may occur through tourism branding, cultural performances, stakeholder lists, ceremonial consultation, public relations materials, or policy statements that refer to "local communities" without granting decision authority. Symbolic inclusion is not the total absence of community presence. It is the presence of community imagery or language without institutional consequence.

The second level is procedural consultation. At this level, communities are asked for views, comments, preferences, or local knowledge, but institutions retain control over agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. Procedural consultation can be legitimate when it is early, transparent, inclusive, and linked to response obligations. However, it remains limited when participation occurs after priorities have already been set or when institutions are not required to explain how community input influenced outcomes. Procedural consultation is therefore stronger than symbolic inclusion, but it is not yet consequential governance.

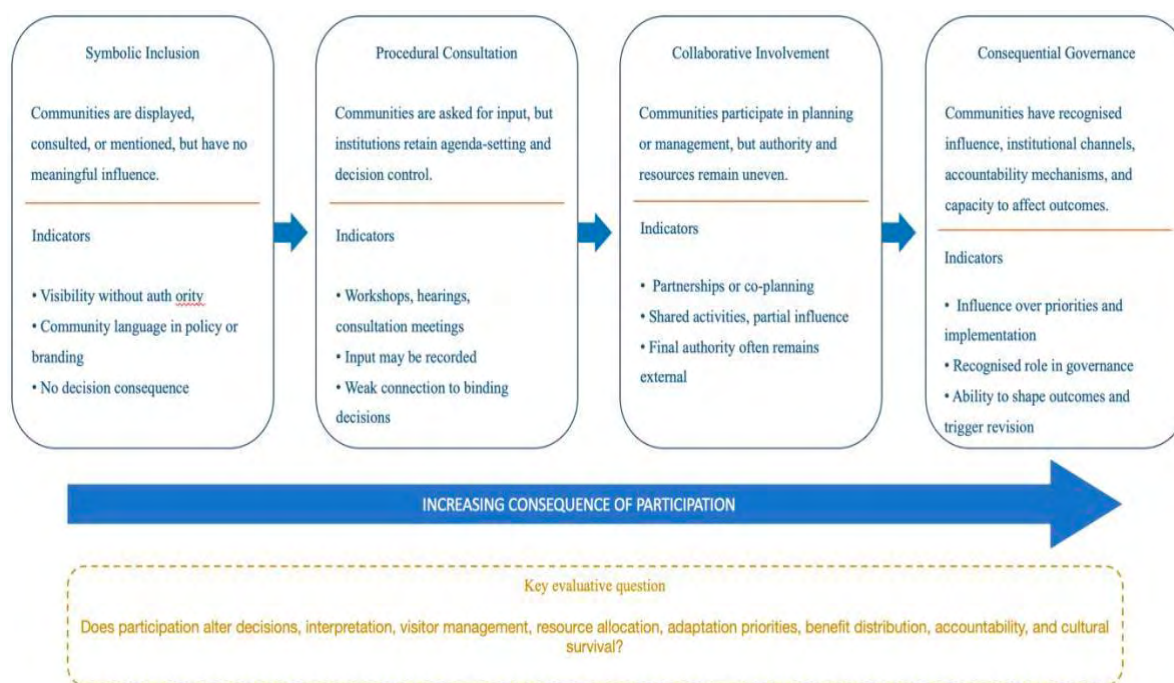


Figure 2: From Symbolic Participation to Consequential Governance A Diagnostic Continuum for Heritage-Tourism Governance Under Climate Stress

The third level is collaborative involvement. At this level, communities participate in planning, management, interpretation, conservation, or visitor-management activities. Collaboration may involve joint committees, community-based tourism initiatives, co-produced heritage narratives, local guide programmes, participatory monitoring, or stakeholder partnerships. Tourism and heritage studies have long recognised the importance of stakeholder collaboration, particularly in destination planning and heritage management [38]. Yet collaboration does not automatically equal

power-sharing. Communities may collaborate in implementation while strategic authority, funding, legal mandates, and final decisions remain elsewhere. Collaborative involvement is therefore an intermediate form: it may become consequential, but only when backed by authority, resources, and accountability.

The fourth level is consequential governance. At this level, communities have recognised influence, institutional channels, accountability mechanisms, and the capacity to affect outcomes.

Consequential governance does not require that communities control every decision unilaterally. Rather, it requires that affected actors have genuine capacity to shape priorities, contest decisions, influence resource allocation, participate in monitoring, and hold institutions answerable. It is defined by the relationship between participation and consequence. Communities are not merely present in governance, their claims can change governance.

5.4. Dimension 1: Decision Authority

The first diagnostic dimension is decision authority. The guiding question is: who decides?

Decision authority concerns the distribution of power over climate adaptation, conservation priorities, tourism development, infrastructure, land use, visitor management, emergency planning, and resource allocation. In many heritage-tourism systems, communities are consulted about decisions but do not share authority over the institutional choices that determine their future. This distinction matters. Being informed about a visitor-management plan is not the same as influencing visitor thresholds. Being invited to comment on conservation priorities is not the same as having authority over what is protected, how it is protected, and whose practices are restricted. Being consulted about climate adaptation is not the same as shaping adaptation finance, relocation planning, or risk-reduction priorities.

Possible indicators of decision authority include formal governance roles, voting power, co-management agreements, legal mandates, prior consultation requirements, consent procedures, documented policy influence, community review mechanisms, participatory budgeting, and institutional obligations to respond to community recommendations. These indicators are not exhaustive, and they will vary across legal and cultural contexts. Their analytical value lies in distinguishing influence from presence.

Decision authority is especially important under climate stress because adaptation decisions often involve trade-offs. Institutions may have to decide which infrastructure to protect, whether to limit visitor access, how to allocate adaptation funds, whether to restrict development in vulnerable zones, and how to manage emergency risks. These decisions have distributive effects. They determine whose livelihoods are protected, whose mobility is limited, whose cultural practices are prioritised, whose land becomes vulnerable, and whose losses are treated as acceptable. Consequential heritage governance therefore requires communities to have more than consultative voice. They must have institutional routes through which their priorities can affect decisions.

5.5. Dimension 2: Recognition and Interpretive Control

The second diagnostic dimension is recognition and interpretive control. The guiding question is: who controls the meaning of heritage?

Heritage tourism depends on representation. Destinations are interpreted through museums, guidebooks, visitor centres, walking tours, performances, signs, websites, social media, promotional campaigns, maps, festivals, rituals, and official narratives.

These forms of interpretation determine what visitors see, what histories are foregrounded, what memories are silenced, and how communities are positioned within the tourism economy. Recognition is therefore not only a matter of whether communities are positively represented. It is a matter of whether they can shape the meanings through which their own heritage, history, identity, and territory are interpreted.

Smith's critique of authorised heritage discourse is central here. Heritage institutions often privilege expert, monumental, material, and state-centred forms of heritage, while marginalising living cultural practices, difficult histories, minority memories, and community-based meanings [2]. In tourism, this problem can be intensified by market demand. Heritage may be simplified, aestheticised, depoliticised, or packaged for visitor consumption. Cultural practices may become performances detached from community authority. Sacred sites may become attractions. Painful histories may be softened to protect destination image. In these cases, representation can exist without recognition.

Interpretive control does not mean that communities must produce a single uncontested narrative. Communities themselves are internally diverse, and heritage meanings are often debated. Rather, interpretive control means that affected communities have recognised authority to participate in shaping, contesting, revising, and governing heritage narratives. Possible indicators include community approval of interpretive materials, co-curation, local guide authority, protection of sacred or restricted knowledge, inclusion of difficult histories, recognition of intangible heritage, community language use, narrative review mechanisms, and benefit-sharing arrangements for cultural labour.

The justice question is direct: can communities shape how their own heritage, history, and identity are represented? If culture is used in branding while interpretive authority remains external, governance remains symbolic. If communities can shape narratives, determine boundaries of disclosure, contest misrepresentation, and receive value from cultural interpretation, governance becomes more consequential.

5.6. Dimension 3: Climate Burden and Adaptation Justice

The third diagnostic dimension is climate burden and adaptation justice. The guiding question is: who bears the risks and costs of climate stress?

Climate stress affects heritage-tourism systems through physical, ecological, economic, and cultural pathways. These may include livelihood disruption, relocation risk, ecosystem degradation, conservation restrictions, infrastructure vulnerability, water stress, heat exposure, wildfire risk, coastal erosion, flooding, loss of access to cultural sites, and weakening of cultural practices tied to place. Yet these burdens are not distributed equally. Political ecology and climate justice scholarship show that vulnerability is shaped by social power, land use, development decisions, historical inequality, and uneven adaptive capacity [24,33].

In heritage tourism, climate burden must be analysed relationally. Who benefits from tourism development in climate-exposed

zones? Who pays for protective infrastructure? Who loses income when visitor access is restricted? Who is asked to relocate? Who absorbs conservation restrictions? Who has insurance, savings, legal title, or political access? Who can diversify livelihoods when climate stress affects tourism flows? These questions show that adaptation is not only technical planning. It is a distributive and procedural justice problem.

UNESCO, UNEP, and Union of Concerned Scientists have shown that climate change threatens World Heritage properties and tourism-dependent communities, and ICOMOS has emphasised the cultural dimensions of climate action [5,6]. These policy interventions support the claim that heritage and climate governance are increasingly intertwined. However, they do not by themselves resolve the justice problem. Adaptation still requires decisions about finance, priority, authority, and acceptable loss.

Possible indicators of adaptation justice include community participation in risk assessment, transparent allocation of adaptation funding, protection for climate-vulnerable livelihoods, recognition of cultural loss, support for locally defined adaptation priorities, equitable relocation procedures where relocation is unavoidable, community access to climate information, and mechanisms for contesting adaptation decisions. Consequential heritage governance requires that climate risk not be shifted downward onto communities while authority and resources remain concentrated elsewhere.

5.7. Dimension 4: Redistribution of Tourism Value and Costs

The fourth diagnostic dimension is redistribution of tourism value and costs. The guiding question is: who benefits and who pays?

Heritage tourism generates value through landscapes, buildings, rituals, memory, cultural labour, place identity, hospitality, and visitor experience. Yet the value generated from heritage does not necessarily remain with the communities who sustain it. Tourism revenue may be captured by external investors, hotel chains, tour operators, platform intermediaries, state agencies, or urban elites. Local communities may receive limited employment while bearing congestion, housing pressure, environmental degradation, cultural commodification, seasonal instability, and rising costs of living. Under climate stress, this imbalance becomes more severe if adaptation burdens remain local while profits are externalised.

Redistribution therefore concerns more than income. It includes employment quality, ownership, procurement, land value, taxation, conservation finance, cultural labour, resident costs, public infrastructure, training, adaptation funding, and institutional capacity. A heritagetourism destination may appear economically successful while reproducing extractive relations. The question is not whether tourism produces revenue, but how that revenue is distributed, who controls the assets that generate it, and whether tourism value strengthens local capacity and cultural survival.

Bianchi's political-economic critique of tourism is important because it challenges the tendency to treat tourism development as an apolitical growth strategy [34]. Similarly, argue that sustainable

tourism must be understood within global development inequalities and market power [9]. Scheyvens (2011) shows that tourism's pro-poor or empowering potential depends on concrete mechanisms of benefit, participation, and control. These insights are directly relevant to heritage tourism, where communities may supply the cultural and spatial value of the destination without receiving durable economic or institutional benefit.

Possible indicators of redistribution include local ownership, fair wages, decent work, local procurement, community enterprise support, transparent revenue-sharing, conservation finance that benefits local actors, taxation or fee systems linked to community needs, compensation for visitor impacts, investment in public infrastructure, and adaptation funds targeted toward affected communities. The core principle is that tourism value should not be extracted from heritage communities while adaptation burdens remain local.

5.8. Dimension 5: Institutional Accountability and Long-Term Enforcement

The fifth diagnostic dimension is institutional accountability and long-term enforcement. The guiding question is: who monitors promises and corrects failures?

Accountability is essential because participation without enforcement can easily return to symbolism. Institutions may promise community benefit, cultural respect, sustainable tourism, climate adaptation, or participatory management without creating mechanisms to evaluate whether these promises are fulfilled [39]. A consultation process may produce recommendations that disappear. A management plan may include community language without reporting outcomes. A benefit-sharing agreement may exist without audit. A climate-adaptation strategy may identify risks without allocating resources. In such cases, the problem is not only weak participation. It is weak accountability.

Institutional accountability requires that governance decisions be visible, reasoned, monitored, and revisable. Possible mechanisms include public reporting, participatory monitoring, grievance systems, benefit-sharing audits, conservation accountability, climate-risk indicators, community review boards, independent evaluation, mandated institutional responses, and periodic revision of plans. These mechanisms make participation durable. They prevent community involvement from ending at the moment of consultation [40]. Accountability is also temporal. Heritage-tourism governance concerns long-term cultural survival, not only short-term project delivery. Climate stress unfolds over decades. Tourism markets fluctuate. Political administrations change. Conservation priorities evolve. Cultural practices adapt. For this reason, consequential governance requires long-term enforcement mechanisms capable of surviving beyond individual projects, donor cycles, or policy announcements. Institutions must remain answerable over time.

This dimension is where institutional theory becomes especially important. Weak participation may persist not because institutions openly reject justice, but because accountability mechanisms

are absent. New participatory language can be layered onto old governance structures without altering enforcement. Consequential heritage governance therefore requires more than formal inclusion. It requires mechanisms that allow affected communities to monitor commitments, contest failures, and demand revision.

5.9. Representation and Digital Visibility as A Secondary Governance Arena

Digital visibility is a secondary but increasingly relevant governance arena. Digital platforms, websites, search rankings, online maps, booking systems, travel blogs, review platforms, social media, and destination-management technologies affect who becomes visible, visitable, marketable, and profitable. In heritage tourism, digital visibility can shape visitor flows, interpretive authority, destination image, and the distribution of tourism value.

This paper does not treat digital visibility as an independent theoretical pillar, because doing so would require a fuller engagement with platform studies, digital tourism, data governance, and algorithmic visibility. However, digital visibility should be recognised as part of representation and value distribution. work on platforms shows that digital intermediaries are not neutral channels, they organise visibility, access, and legitimacy [41]. similarly show that smart tourism depends on information and communication technologies that transform data into value propositions [42]. demonstrate that collaborative and platform economies in tourism involve political

and policy questions, not merely innovation [43]. For heritage-tourism governance, the implication is straightforward. If external platforms define what is visible, searchable, attractive, and bookable, they may also influence which heritage narratives circulate and which actors capture value. A community may formally participate in heritage interpretation while digital platforms amplify different narratives. A destination may promote local benefit while booking systems and platform intermediaries redirect value elsewhere. Digital visibility therefore belongs within the framework, but as a secondary arena connected to interpretive control and tourism value distribution.

Possible indicators include community control over official digital narratives, consent for cultural imagery, correction mechanisms for inaccurate representation, visibility of locally owned enterprises, fair platform access, digital benefit-sharing, and accountability for online heritage interpretation. The central question is whether digital representation is accountable to local actors or whether external platforms define visibility without community authority.

5.10. The Consequential Heritage Governance Matrix

The following matrix summarises the diagnostic framework. It should be read as an analytical tool rather than a scoring instrument. Its purpose is to help identify whether heritage-tourism governance arrangements remain symbolic or become consequential across key dimensions.

Governance dimension	Symbolic version	Consequential version
Decision authority	Communities are consulted after priorities are set.	Communities influence priorities, plans, implementation, and revision.
Interpretive control	Culture is used in branding, promotion, or visitor experience without community authority over meaning.	Communities shape narratives, interpretation, representation, and the boundaries of cultural disclosure.
Climate burden and adaptation justice	Local actors absorb risk, livelihood disruption, adaptation costs, and cultural loss with limited authority or support.	Risks, costs, responsibilities, adaptation finance, and decision authority are fairly distributed.
Tourism value and costs	External actors capture most benefits while local communities bear congestion, cultural labour, environmental pressure, and resident costs.	Local actors receive durable economic, cultural, and institutional value through ownership, procurement, revenue-sharing, fair work, and investment.
Institutional accountability	Participation ends after consultation, and institutional promises are weakly monitored or unenforced.	Institutions monitor, report, justify, revise, and remain answerable through grievance systems, audits, participatory indicators, and review mechanisms.
Digital visibility	External platforms, algorithms, and destination intermediaries define visibility, marketability, and representation.	Digital representation and platform visibility are accountable to local actors and connected to fair value distribution.

The matrix makes three conceptual moves.

First, it shifts evaluation from the existence of participation to the consequences of participation. Second, it expands heritage-tourism governance beyond visitor management and conservation to include authority, interpretation, climate burden, value distribution, and accountability.

Third, it connects climate stress to institutional design. Climate change is not treated as an external pressure that heritage tourism must simply endure. It is treated as a governance test: a condition under which unequal authority, unequal vulnerability, and unequal benefit become more visible and more consequential. The framework does not claim that every governance system will fit neatly into one category. In practice, a destination may be consequential in one dimension and symbolic in another. A community may have interpretive control but limited influence over adaptation finance. A management authority may conduct strong visitor monitoring but weak benefit redistribution. A destination may support local enterprises while excluding communities from climate-risk planning. The value of the framework lies precisely in making these uneven patterns visible.

Consequential heritage governance therefore offers a diagnostic vocabulary for evaluating justice in climate-stressed heritage tourism. It asks whether participation is connected to authority, whether recognition includes interpretive control, whether resilience redistributes adaptation burden, whether sustainability addresses value and cost, and whether institutions remain accountable over time. The next section translates these diagnostic principles into policy and institutional-design implications.

6. Policy Implications: Designing Just Heritage-Tourism Governance under Climate Stress

The framework developed in the previous section has direct implications for policy and institutional design. If heritage tourism under climate stress is evaluated only through sustainability language, visitor management, or procedural consultation, governance may remain symbolic. A justice-oriented approach requires institutions capable of distributing authority, recognising cultural meaning, allocating climate burdens fairly, redistributing tourism value, and remaining accountable over time. This section translates consequential heritage governance into six policy implications: linking tourism planning with climate adaptation, institutionalising community authority, protecting cultural survival rather than only physical heritage, distributing costs, benefits, and responsibilities fairly, managing visitors through accountable destination capacity, and creating monitoring, grievance, and revision mechanisms.

These implications should not be read as a universal policy template. Heritage destinations differ in law, administrative capacity, cultural history, community structure, conservation status, climate exposure, and tourism intensity. The purpose is therefore not to prescribe identical instruments everywhere, but to clarify the institutional questions that policy design must confront if participation is to become consequential.

6.1. Linking Tourism Planning with Climate Adaptation

The first implication is that tourism planning and climate adaptation must be integrated. In many destinations, tourism development, heritage conservation, infrastructure planning, and climate-risk management are handled through separate institutional processes. Tourism authorities may focus on marketing, visitor flows, and revenue. Conservation agencies may focus on heritage values and physical protection. Climate-adaptation authorities may focus on risk mapping, infrastructure, emergency planning, and vulnerability assessment. Local communities may be asked to participate in each process separately, but without an integrated framework linking visitor pressure, environmental risk, conservation priorities, and livelihood security.

Consequential heritage governance requires these fields to be planned together. Visitor access, transport infrastructure, accommodation growth, marketing strategy, conservation limits, ecosystem vulnerability, resident life, local livelihoods, and climate adaptation should not be treated as separate policy domains. Climate stress alters the conditions under which tourism is possible. It affects water demand, coastal access, heat exposure, wildfire risk, conservation needs, infrastructure vulnerability, and the viability of place-based cultural practices. Tourism planning that ignores these risks may intensify vulnerability. Climate adaptation that ignores tourism may underestimate the pressures generated by visitor demand, land conversion, infrastructure expansion, and external investment.

The policy implication is that heritage-tourism plans should include climate-risk assessment, and climate-adaptation plans should include tourism impacts. Visitor strategies should be evaluated not only in terms of economic contribution, but also in terms of climate exposure, conservation capacity, resident vulnerability, and cultural continuity. For example, marketing campaigns that increase visitation to climate-vulnerable coastal heritage sites should be assessed against infrastructure capacity, emergency planning, ecological sensitivity, resident needs, and adaptation costs. Similarly, adaptation infrastructure should be assessed not only for technical effectiveness, but also for its effects on access, cultural practices, landscape meaning, and community livelihoods. This integration also requires institutional coordination. Tourism departments, heritage agencies, climate-adaptation bodies, local governments, community representatives, and private-sector actors must have mechanisms for shared planning. Without coordination, institutions may displace responsibility onto one another. Tourism authorities may claim climate adaptation is outside their mandate. Heritage authorities may claim tourism pressure is a destination-management issue. Climate agencies may treat heritage as a secondary cultural asset rather than a living social system. Consequential governance requires joint responsibility.

6.2. Institutionalizing Community Authority

The second implication is that community participation must be built into formal governance structures. Consultation alone is insufficient if institutions are not required to respond to community priorities or incorporate them into decisions. The policy problem

is not simply the absence of participation, but the weakness of participation when it lacks authority, resources, and accountability. Institutionalizing community authority means creating durable channels through which affected actors can influence decisions. These channels may include co-management arrangements, community seats on heritage or destination-management boards, advisory bodies with defined powers, consent procedures for culturally sensitive development, participatory budgeting, community review panels, mandated response mechanisms, or legal requirements for early-stage consultation. The appropriate instrument will vary by context. The central criterion is whether participation is connected to decisions, not merely whether communities are invited into discussion.

Co-management may be appropriate where communities have recognised custodial, customary, or place-based authority over heritage landscapes, sacred sites, intangible heritage, or local cultural practices. Advisory boards may be useful when they have agenda-setting powers, access to information, and institutional response requirements. Participatory budgeting may help connect tourism revenue to community priorities. Consent procedures may be necessary when development affects Indigenous peoples, sacred heritage, land rights, or culturally sensitive knowledge. Community review mechanisms may help ensure that interpretation, marketing, visitor rules, and adaptation plans remain responsive to local concerns.

However, institutionalising community authority also requires caution. “Community” should not be treated as homogeneous. Local elites, tourism entrepreneurs, customary authorities, resident groups, workers, women, youth, migrants, Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, and informal-sector actors may have different interests and unequal access to representation. Policy design must therefore ask who speaks for the community, how representatives are selected, how internal disagreement is handled, and whether marginalised groups have independent channels for voice. Otherwise, community authority may reproduce internal hierarchy. The basic policy principle is that participation should have institutional consequences. Affected communities should be able to shape priorities, contest decisions, receive explanations, monitor commitments, and trigger revision. Without such mechanisms, participation remains vulnerable to symbolic use.

6.3. Protecting Cultural Survival, Not Only Physical Heritage

The third implication is that climate-stressed heritage-tourism governance must protect cultural survival, not only physical heritage. Heritage policy has often focused on monuments, buildings, archaeological sites, historic districts, landscapes, and material conservation. These remain important. Yet heritage tourism also depends on practices, memory, ritual, language, craft, ecological knowledge, livelihoods, foodways, oral history, place attachment, and cultural authority. If climate adaptation protects physical sites while weakening the living communities and practices that give them meaning, heritage governance remains incomplete.

UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines intangible cultural heritage as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, and associated cultural spaces that communities, groups, and in some cases individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage [44]. This definition matters for heritage tourism because tourism often depends on precisely these living dimensions. Cultural survival therefore cannot be reduced to preserving buildings or maintaining visitor access. It requires conditions under which communities can continue to practise, transmit, interpret, and govern their heritage. Climate stress sharpens this issue. Rising seas, heat, drought, ecosystem degradation, fire, and extreme weather may threaten cultural practices tied to specific places, seasons, materials, species, routes, or ritual calendars. Tourism pressure may add further strain by commodifying practices, redirecting labour toward visitor demand, increasing land values, or transforming everyday cultural spaces into visitor environments. In such contexts, cultural survival requires more than adaptation infrastructure. It requires protection of the social, ecological, and institutional conditions through which heritage remains meaningful.

Policy design should therefore include cultural-impact assessment alongside environmental and economic assessment. Heritage-tourism strategies should ask whether tourism and adaptation plans protect language, ritual, knowledge transmission, sacred access, cultural labour, and community authority. Interpretation policies should recognise difficult histories and community-defined meanings rather than only marketable narratives. Climate-adaptation planning should identify forms of cultural loss, not only physical damage. Where relocation, access restriction, or landscape transformation becomes unavoidable, affected communities should be involved in defining what continuity, memory, and repair require.

The policy implication is clear: just heritage tourism must protect heritage as lived relation, not only heritage as site.

6.4. Fair Distribution of Costs, Benefits, And Responsibilities

The fourth implication is that justice must be translated into distributive design. Heritage tourism often generates economic value, but the distribution of that value is uneven. Benefits may accrue to external investors, hotel chains, tour operators, platform intermediaries, or central authorities, while costs are localised through congestion, housing pressure, low-paid labour, cultural commodification, environmental degradation, infrastructure strain, and climate vulnerability. Under climate stress, these distributive questions become sharper because adaptation requires money, land, technical capacity, and institutional coordination.

Policy design should therefore ask a sequence of distributive questions: who earns, who pays, who adapts, who is displaced, who decides, and who is protected? These questions convert justice from an abstract principle into a governance test. If tourism revenue is extracted from heritage communities while adaptation costs remain local, governance is unjust. If residents bear the effects of visitor pressure while external actors capture profit, sustainability

claims are incomplete. If conservation restrictions limit local livelihoods without compensation or codesigned alternatives, heritage protection becomes socially fragile. If adaptation finance protects tourist infrastructure while resident vulnerability remains unaddressed, climate policy reproduces inequality.

Possible instruments include local procurement rules, fair-work standards, community enterprise support, transparent tourism-tax allocation, conservation funds linked to community benefit, benefit-sharing agreements, resident-impact compensation, local ownership support, adaptation funds for vulnerable households and cultural practitioners, and public reporting on tourism revenue distribution. These mechanisms do not eliminate conflict, but they make distribution visible and contestable.

The redistribution of responsibility is equally important. Communities should not be made responsible for resilience without receiving authority and resources. Private tourism actors who profit from heritage destinations should contribute to conservation, public infrastructure, climate adaptation, and community benefit. Public authorities should not use community participation as a way to transfer unpaid labour or moral responsibility to local actors. International bodies and donors should avoid funding heritage and tourism projects that require local legitimacy without creating mechanisms for local influence and accountability.

The central policy principle is that tourism value should support the communities and cultural systems from which that value is drawn.

6.5. Accountable Visitor Management and Destination Capacity

The fifth implication concerns visitor management and destination capacity. Overtourism is often discussed as a problem of excessive visitor numbers, but this framing is incomplete. Visitor pressure becomes unjust when institutions fail to align tourism demand with resident life, conservation capacity, infrastructure, housing, mobility, public space, ecological limits, and cultural continuity. Overtourism is therefore not only excess demand. It is a governance failure.

Accountable visitor management requires a broader understanding of destination capacity. Capacity is not merely the number of visitors a site can physically accommodate. It includes the capacity of residents to maintain everyday life, the capacity of public infrastructure to absorb visitor pressure, the capacity of ecosystems to withstand disturbance, the capacity of heritage materials to endure use, the capacity of cultural practices to remain meaningful, and the capacity of institutions to monitor and enforce limits. In climate-stressed contexts, capacity must also include heat risk, water availability, evacuation routes, flood exposure, wildfire vulnerability, and adaptation infrastructure.

Visitor-management policies may include timed entry, reservation systems, visitor caps, zoning, differential pricing, dispersal strategies, restrictions on high-impact activities, cruiseship regulation, transport controls, accommodation limits, cultural-

protocol guidelines, and investment in public infrastructure. Yet such tools must be evaluated through justice criteria.

Visitor caps may protect heritage but reduce local income if compensation or diversification measures are absent. Dispersal strategies may reduce pressure in one area while shifting impacts to less prepared communities. Pricing policies may generate revenue but exclude certain publics or privilege high-income visitors. Destination-capacity policies must therefore be accountable to both conservation and community justice.

Accountable visitor management also requires transparent indicators. These may include resident satisfaction, housing affordability, public-space pressure, transport congestion, water use, waste generation, ecosystem stress, heritage-condition monitoring, cultural-practice disruption, local employment quality, and distribution of tourism revenue. Visitor numbers alone are insufficient. A justice-oriented destination-capacity framework asks whether tourism remains compatible with resident life, cultural survival, ecological resilience, and climate risk.

The policy implication is that visitor management should be treated as an institutional responsibility, not a technical adjustment to demand.

6.6. Monitoring, Grievance, And Revision Mechanisms

The final implication is that just heritage-tourism governance requires mechanisms for monitoring, grievance, and revision. Without these mechanisms, participation and sustainability commitments can remain rhetorical. Institutions may promise community benefit, cultural respect, climate adaptation, or responsible visitor management without creating ways to verify whether promises are fulfilled. Accountability requires that governance be observable, contestable, and revisable.

Monitoring mechanisms should track both heritage and justice outcomes. Traditional indicators such as visitor numbers, revenue, conservation condition, and infrastructure use are necessary but insufficient. Consequential heritage governance also requires indicators for community influence, benefit distribution, cultural representation, adaptation burden, resident well-being, livelihood security, climate risk, and institutional responsiveness. Participatory indicators may be especially useful because they allow affected communities to define what matters, rather than relying only on expert or administrative categories.

Grievance mechanisms are equally important. Affected communities need accessible channels to challenge misrepresentation, exclusion, unequal benefit distribution, environmental harm, visitor impacts, or adaptation failures. These mechanisms should be visible, affordable, culturally appropriate, and connected to institutional response. A grievance system that records complaints but produces no obligation to respond is weak. A stronger system requires timelines, public reporting, corrective action, and appeal procedures.

Revision mechanisms complete the accountability cycle. Heritage-tourism governance must be able to learn from failure. Climate conditions change, visitor flows fluctuate, infrastructure ages, cultural practices evolve, and community priorities shift. Management plans should therefore include periodic review, public reporting, community evaluation, benefit-sharing audits, climate-risk updates, and revision triggers. If resident pressure worsens, if adaptation burdens become unequal, if cultural representation is contested, or if tourism benefits fail to reach affected communities, institutions should be required to revise policy.

The policy section can therefore be summarised in one proposition: just heritage tourism under climate stress requires institutional design that makes participation consequential. This means linking tourism with climate adaptation, embedding community authority in governance structures, protecting cultural survival, redistributing costs and benefits, managing visitors through accountable destination capacity, and creating mechanisms through which affected actors can monitor, contest, and revise institutional decisions. Without these design principles, heritage-tourism governance may continue to use the language of participation, sustainability, resilience, and adaptation while leaving the underlying distribution of power unchanged.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This paper has developed consequential heritage governance as a diagnostic framework for analysing whether participation in heritage-tourism governance becomes institutionally meaningful under climate stress. The framework is intended to clarify the conditions under which affected communities can influence heritage interpretation, climate adaptation, visitor management, benefit distribution, and long-term cultural survival. However, the paper's contribution is conceptual rather than empirical. This section therefore states the limits of the argument directly and identifies future research directions through which the framework can be tested, revised, and applied.

7.1. Conceptual and Desk-Based Scope

The first limitation is the paper's conceptual and desk-based scope. The writing does not present new fieldwork, interviews, surveys, ethnography, participatory research, or quantitative evidence. It does not claim to measure community influence in any specific heritage-tourism destination. It also does not claim to provide a full systematic review or formal scoping review. Instead, it uses systematic literature engagement, policy-document analysis, and conceptual synthesis to develop an analytical framework.

This limitation is important because the framework should not be mistaken for an empirically validated index. Consequential heritage governance identifies dimensions that should matter for justice-oriented heritage-tourism governance under climate stress: decision authority, interpretive control, climate burden and adaptation justice, redistribution of tourism value and costs, institutional accountability, and digital visibility as a secondary arena.

The value of the paper therefore lies in conceptual clarification.

Conceptual papers can contribute to scholarship by reorganising existing theories, identifying conceptual gaps, and developing new analytical vocabularies for under-specified problems [25,26]. In this case, the under-specified problem is the gap between participation as procedure and participation as consequence in heritage-tourism governance under climate stress.

7.2. Limits of Non-Fieldwork Analysis

Because the paper is desk-based, it cannot determine how consequential participation operates in specific heritage-tourism sites. It cannot establish whether a community genuinely influenced a climate-adaptation decision, whether a co-management arrangement redistributed authority in practice, whether benefit-sharing mechanisms reached marginalised groups, or whether heritage interpretation was controlled by local actors rather than external institutions. These questions require empirical evidence. This limitation is especially important because heritage communities are not homogeneous. Internal differences of class, gender, age, ethnicity, customary status, land tenure, occupation, political access, and proximity to tourism markets may shape who benefits from participation and who remains marginal. A desk-based framework can identify this problem, but it cannot resolve it empirically. Future research must therefore examine not only whether "the community" participates, but which community actors participate, under what conditions, with what resources, and with what consequences.

7.3. Need for Empirical Testing

Future research should apply the framework to concrete heritage-tourism contexts under climate stress. Suitable cases include climate-stressed cultural landscapes, historic urban centres, island destinations, postcolonial heritage places, Indigenous or ethnic heritage sites, coastal settlements, sacred landscapes, and World Heritage destinations facing visitor pressure. These contexts are appropriate because they involve the intersection of tourism value, heritage meaning, climate vulnerability, and institutional decision-making. Empirical testing could use qualitative case studies, comparative case studies, institutional analysis, participatory research, document tracing, interviews, focus groups, or mixed-method designs. Case-study research is particularly relevant because it allows researchers to examine governance processes in context, including formal rules, informal power, institutional histories, community claims, and policy outcomes [45]. also argues that case studies can contribute to social-scientific knowledge by generating context-dependent insight and challenging overly abstract assumptions [46].

A first empirical application could examine whether the hypotheses dimensions are observable in practice. For example, researchers could ask whether local actors have formal roles in adaptation planning, whether community narratives shape official interpretation, whether tourism revenue supports adaptation and cultural survival, whether visitor-management decisions incorporate resident concerns, and whether institutions provide grievance, monitoring, and revision mechanisms. A second empirical application could examine causal pathways. Future

studies might ask which institutional conditions are most likely to produce consequential participation. Possible factors include legal recognition of community authority, secure land tenure, availability of adaptation finance, strength of local civil society, decentralisation, participatory budgeting, comanagement agreements, tourism ownership patterns, and the presence of enforceable accountability mechanisms.

7.4. Comparative Research Possibilities

The framework is also suitable for comparative research. Comparative analysis would allow scholars to examine how consequential heritage governance varies across different institutional, cultural, and ecological settings. It would also help prevent the framework from becoming overly shaped by one region, one type of heritage, or one model of tourism governance. One possible comparison is between high-capacity European heritage destinations and small-island tourism economies. High-capacity destinations may have stronger planning institutions, heritage-management systems, and climate-adaptation resources, but may also face overtourism, housing pressure, commercialisation, and resident resistance. Small-island tourism economies may face acute climate exposure, limited fiscal capacity, tourism dependency, and vulnerability to external ownership structures. Comparing these settings could reveal how institutional capacity and climate exposure interact.

A second comparison is between postcolonial urban heritage sites and coastal cultural landscapes. Postcolonial urban heritage sites often involve contested memory, unequal development, state-led conservation, tourism branding, and questions of whose history is authorised. Coastal cultural landscapes may involve sea-level rise, erosion, livelihood disruption, ecosystem vulnerability, and adaptation trade-offs. Comparing these contexts would test whether interpretive control and climate burden operate differently across heritage types.

A third comparison is between World Heritage destinations and community-based heritagetourism systems. World Heritage properties may benefit from international recognition, conservation norms, monitoring systems, and global visibility, but they may also be shaped by expert authority, state control, and tourism pressure. Community-based systems may offer stronger local control, but they may face resource constraints, market dependency, and limited adaptation finance. Such comparison would help examine whether international recognition strengthens or weakens consequential community influence.

Comparative work should also attend to governance scale. Heritage-tourism decisions are often made across local, regional, national, and international levels. Climate adaptation may involve national funding, municipal planning, international heritage obligations, private investment, and community practice. Future research should therefore examine how authority moves across scales, and whether affected communities can influence decisions beyond the local level.

7.5. Future Research on Digital Visibility

Digital visibility should be treated as a future research frontier rather than a central pillar of the present paper. This paper has recognised that websites, online maps, social media, booking platforms, review systems, search rankings, and destination-marketing technologies shape who becomes visible, visitable, marketable, and profitable. However, a full analysis of digital visibility would require deeper engagement with platform studies, data governance, algorithmic visibility, digital tourism, and the political economy of online intermediation.

Future research could examine how digital platforms affect heritage interpretation and value distribution. For example, studies could ask whether platform rankings privilege certain heritage narratives, whether locally owned enterprises are visible in digital tourism markets, whether community-defined cultural protocols are respected online, whether sacred or sensitive heritage is overexposed, and whether digital intermediaries capture value from heritage destinations without contributing to conservation or community benefit.

This line of research would extend the framework without displacing its central argument. Digital visibility matters because representation and value distribution increasingly occur through digital infrastructures. Yet the paper's core concern remains institutional: participation must become consequential in the governance of heritage interpretation, climate adaptation, visitor management, benefit distribution, and cultural survival. Digital platforms should therefore be analysed as part of representation and redistribution, unless future research develops them as a separate theoretical field.

8. Conclusion

This work has argued that heritage tourism under climate stress should be understood as a justice problem, not only as a sustainability-management problem. Tourism recovery, visitor pressure, climate vulnerability, conservation demands, and cultural survival now intersect in ways that make procedural participation insufficient. Heritage-tourism governance cannot be evaluated only by asking whether policies refer to sustainability, resilience, consultation, or stakeholder inclusion. It must be evaluated by asking who decides, who benefits, who bears risk, who controls heritage meaning, and who can hold institutions accountable.

The paper's central claim is that participation must become consequential. Communities may be consulted, represented, celebrated, or displayed while remaining weakly positioned in the institutions that shape their futures. Symbolic participation produces visibility without influence. Procedural consultation may collect community views without altering decisions. Collaborative involvement may include communities in planning or management while leaving authority and resources unevenly distributed. Consequential governance requires more: recognised influence, institutional channels, accountability mechanisms, and the capacity to affect outcomes.

To develop this claim, the paper brought together four theoretical traditions. Participation theory clarifies the distinction between tokenism and power. Justice theory, especially the framework of redistribution, recognition, and representation, explains why tourism value, cultural authority, and political voice must be evaluated together. Institutional theory explains why symbolic arrangements persist even when policy language becomes more inclusive. Political ecology shows that climate stress is not merely an environmental background condition, but a power-laden mechanism that redistributes risk, intensifies vulnerability, and exposes institutional asymmetry.

The paper's main contribution is the concept of consequential heritage governance. The framework evaluates heritage-tourism governance across five primary dimensions: decision authority, interpretive control, climate burden and adaptation justice, redistribution of tourism value and costs, and institutional accountability. It also recognises digital visibility as a secondary governance arena connected to representation and value distribution. The framework does not claim to solve all problems of heritage tourism, nor does it provide empirical measurement in this paper. Its contribution is diagnostic: it offers a vocabulary for distinguishing symbolic inclusion from institutional arrangements that give affected communities meaningful influence over heritage futures. The policy implications are clear.

Just heritage-tourism governance under climate stress requires integrating tourism planning with climate adaptation, institutionalising community authority, protecting cultural survival rather than only physical heritage, distributing costs and benefits fairly, managing visitor pressure through accountable destination capacity, and creating mechanisms for monitoring, grievance, and revision. These requirements will vary across contexts, but the underlying principle remains constant: participation should be judged by its consequences. Just heritage tourism under climate stress requires more than adaptation and sustainability. It requires institutions capable of transforming participation into consequential authority over heritage futures.

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