

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE MANAGEMENT FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SPORTS-RELATED ICH TOURISM IN GUANGXI, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the current situation of the management for the Sustainable development of the Sports-related Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) tourism in Guangxi, China, to diagnose systemic obstacles and foundational challenges, thereby providing an evidence-based understanding of the present state, and in order to become a critical diagnostic foundation for subsequent research to construct and verify a targeted sustainable development management model.

This is qualitative research, through a stratified purposeful sampling strategy to identify and interview ten key informants with specialized knowledge and experience. The population and sample (10 experts) comprised four distinct strata: (1) Government administrators in sports and cultural tourism departments (2 experts); (2) Academic scholars in related fields including sports tourism, Sports-related ICH, and Guangxi ethnic cultures (4 experts); (3) Inheritors and practitioners of Guangxi Sports-related ICH (2 experts); and (4) Project managers or tourism planners with regional development experience (2 experts). The instrument used in this research is structured interviews, and using NVivo software for the content analysis.

The research identifies that the core obstacle is a mutually negative reinforcing syndrome. It comprises a broken tourism value chain, which has failed to effectively transform unique cultural resources into compelling tourist experiences and visitor loyalty, and a critical absence of an integrated, interest-synergizing multi-stakeholder governance platform. These two systemic bottlenecks lock the sector into a cycle of underperformance, indicating that future efforts for sustainable development must develop holistic models that simultaneously target collaborative governance and the experiential value delivery system.

Keywords: Sports-related ICH Tourism; Broken Value Chain; Multi-stakeholder Governance.

INTRODUCTION

Sports-related Intangible Cultural Heritage (Sports-related ICH) refers to the national, folk, and folk sports projects widely carried out in China, as well as the sports skills and techniques with game, education, and competitive characteristics that are regarded as important components of their cultural wealth by various groups or individuals, and the sum of various equipment, related physical objects, and spatial places used in the implementation of these skills and techniques (General Administration of Sport of China, 2013).

The development of tourism based on Sports-related ICH serves as a vital yet challenging avenue for balancing dynamic heritage utilization with sustainable development. National

policy in China encourages this through "productive protection" (General Administration of Sport of China, 2020) and sectoral integration (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, 2023). Regions like Guangxi have adopted localized activation strategies to support the development it, by the "Eight Entries" project (General Office of the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 2020). Notwithstanding this supportive framework, substantive implementation faces persistent challenges. Predominant development models exhibit overly simplified commodification, weak visitor engagement, and notable deficits in supporting infrastructure, skilled personnel, and cohesive governance (Liu & Pan, 2024; Zheng & Chen, 2025). Thereby, a significant gap endures between strategic policy intentions and effective on-the-ground management, creating a critical need to systematically examine current practices to inform more sustainable development pathways.

Consequently, this study aims to study the current situation of the Management for the Sustainable Development of Sports-related ICH Tourism in Guangxi, China, in order to provide a practical basis for subsequent analysis and verification of key factors affecting the Management Model for the Sustainable Development of Sports-related ICH Tourism in Guangxi, China.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the provided information, the literature presents a clear progression from global to local contexts in the study of sports ICH tourism. Internationally, research navigates the tension between commercialization and authenticity, focusing on stakeholder roles, digitalization, and integration challenges, ultimately pointing to a lack of empirically validated, context-specific sustainable development models (e.g., Takata, 2025; Alonso, 2020). In China, scholarship has advanced towards quantifying development models and spatial strategies for ethnic regions, while identifying persistent operational challenges like shrinking inheritor pools and weak community involvement that hinder sustainable implementation (e.g., Hu et al., 2022; Jie & Li, 2023).

Specifically for Guangxi, regional research diagnoses a core paradox between strong policy support and rich cultural resources on one hand, and profound structural deficiencies—including severe talent shortages, weak tourist engagement, and operational inefficiencies—on the other, leading to a disconnect between policy intent and practical outcomes (e.g., Zheng & Chen, 2025; Liu & Pan, 2024). Consequently, while existing studies at all levels effectively map the fragmented landscape and its challenges, they collectively lack an integrated analytical framework that can systematically address this policy-operation disconnect. This gap underscores the necessity for the current study to establish a more precise and holistic understanding of the sustainable management model for sports ICH tourism in Guangxi.

METHODOLOGY

This is qualitative research, using purposeful sampling surveys to conduct in-depth interviews to collect data, in which researchers identified "sports-related intangible cultural heritage tourism", "sustainable development of sports tourism", and "sports tourism management" as key elements.

Due to the high professional threshold and limited number of people in this research, we adopt the population and sample(10 experts) as follow:(1) Administrators of government departments related to sports and cultural tourism (2 experts).(2) Experts and scholars (4 experts) related to sports tourism, Sports-related ICH, and Guangxi local ethnic cultures, who have no less than 5 years of research experience.(3) Inheritor of Sports-related ICH and

tangible risk of transmission failure. Although there are some campus transmissions, the coverage is small, the effectiveness is low, and the scale and mechanism have not been formed. The experience activation dimension is severely underdeveloped, primarily due to two interconnected deficiencies: the high technical barrier of the skills themselves, which lacks simplified or graded pathways for tourist participation, and an insufficient capacity to interpret and narrate the profound cultural meanings embedded within these practices, which reduces engagement to a superficial level. Ultimately, these factors lead to a narrow value conversion channel, where resources function as decorative elements in scenic areas rather than as core, revenue-generating tourism products.

In summary, the current state of Sports-related ICH tourism resources in Guangxi is characterized by a disconnect between latent value and realized potential. This establishes the primary challenge for sustainable development: not merely preserving these resources, but innovatively activating them within a viable tourism framework.

2.2 The current situation of Tourism Supporting Factors and Resources in Guangxi

In this dimension, while certain enabling conditions exist, such as the comprehensive highway network connecting cities and counties, the overall support infrastructure fails to meet the demands of integrating unique cultural resources into a viable and accessible tourism market. This imbalance creates a primary barrier that magnifies the challenges faced in resource transformation and visitor experience.

The most acute issue is destination accessibility. The concentration of rich Sports-related ICH in remote, mountainous regions like Hechi and Baise is accompanied by a severe deficiency in public transportation, making these destinations heavily reliant on self-driving. This increases the time and economic costs for visitors, directly limiting the potential market scale. Concurrently, infrastructure availability and service quality are inconsistent and often inadequate. Accommodation options in these areas are limited, and more critically, there is a marked lack of professional service personnel. Tour guides and coaches frequently lack deep cultural knowledge and the skills for multilingual service, cultural interpretation, or interactive guidance, resulting in superficial visitor experiences. Finally, industrial synergy is weak; the underdeveloped economic environment in this area deters the necessary flow of capital and talent into product development and marketing, and mechanisms to systematically integrate resources across the various industries sectors are absent.

In conclusion, this support system does not facilitate but rather actively constrains the sustainable development of Sports-related ICH tourism, rendering even the most valuable resources difficult to access and experience meaningfully.

2.3 The current situation of Sports Tourism Experiential Marketing in Guangxi

The current application of experiential marketing is nascent, fragmented, and largely fails to create the deep, multidimensional engagements necessary for sustainable visitor loyalty and value generation.

A limited number of positive practices were concentrated within established scenic areas acting as demonstration sites. In these locations, rudimentary forms of interactive participation, such as photo opportunities with performers or try-on sessions of traditional attire, are occasionally offered. Furthermore, some promotional materials are beginning to evoke emotional engagement through visual storytelling, hinting at the deeper narratives that underpin the heritage.

However, those efforts are still isolated and lack coherence, and the general reality is that there are significant shortcomings in the core dimensions of experiential marketing. The approach remains overwhelmingly stage-centric, treating performances as detached spectacles

rather than inviting encounters. This results in a severe lack of meaningful interactive participation, and the high technical barrier of the skills is rarely addressed with accessible, guided participation models. Consequently, opportunities for relational co-creation are virtually absent. The superficiality of engagement leads to weak emotional attachment, as tourists struggle to connect with the cultural significance behind the activities. The experience is often reduced to a fleeting observation, failing to deliver the deep cognitive value that comes from understanding and narrative immersion.

In summary, the state of sports tourism experiential marketing acts as a weak link, failing to effectively bridge the gap between the intrinsic value of Sports-related ICH resources and the perceived value of the tourist experience. This inadequacy in crafting compelling, participatory, and emotionally resonant encounters directly undermines the potential to build strong visitor loyalty and justify sustainable economic returns, thereby stalling the progress of the entire tourism system.

2.4 The current situation of Multi-stakeholder Collaboration in Guangxi

An assessment of multi-stakeholder collaboration for Sports-related ICH tourism in Guangxi highlights a system characterized by positive policy foundation but lacking effective, integrated governance.

The positive foundations for collaboration are present in a formal, albeit top-down, sense. National and regional policies, such as those outlining the “cultural and tourism integration” framework, provide a legitimate mandate for multi-departmental cooperation. There have been initial, project-specific attempts at coordination, which demonstrate a recognition that the development of Sports-related ICH tourism cannot be siloed within a single administrative department and requires the involvement of cultural, tourism, sports, and local government entities.

However, these nascent efforts are severely undermined by persistent and deep-seated challenges. The governance structure is often ad hoc and lacks permanent, empowered coordinating bodies with clear authority. Consequently, stakeholder dynamics are dominated by sectoral interests and competition for limited resources, rather than by a shared vision for sustainable heritage tourism. There is a palpable lack of goal alignment; conservation authorities may prioritize purity, tourism departments seek visitation numbers, and local communities focus on economic benefits, with no effective mechanism to reconcile these divergent priorities. Furthermore, while general policy support exists, it frequently translates into ambiguous directives without the detailed operational plans, dedicated funding, or accountability metrics needed to compel genuine, sustained collaboration.

In conclusion, the current state of multi-stakeholder collaboration is a critical systemic weakness. The absence of a formalized, dynamic, and resource-backed collaborative management framework means that the various supporting factors operate in isolation. This failure to harness collective action and align objectives prevents the creation of a cohesive value chain, ultimately stalling the translation of individual sectoral efforts into a synergistic and sustainable development model for Guangxi’s Sports-related ICH tourism.

3. Interconnections Among Identified Problems

The analysis of the expert data reveals that the challenges confronting Sports-related ICH tourism in Guangxi are not compartmentalized within the four analytical dimensions but form a deeply interconnected and mutually negative reinforcing network of systemic issues. The problems are bound by two primaries, interacting chains of causality, which together create a complex web of constraints on sustainable management.

A foundational chain originates from fragmented Multi-stakeholder Collaboration and cascades through the Tourism Supporting Factors. The data consistently identifies a lack of an integrated Governance Structure and misaligned Goal Alignment among stakeholders (government, enterprises, communities, inheritors) as a primary root cause. This defect results in uncoordinated policy implementation and inconsistent investment, directly leading to deficiencies in Infrastructure Availability and Service Quality. Furthermore, it stifles Industrial Synergy, preventing the tourism ecosystem from functioning cohesively. These shortcomings in the supporting environment directly constrain the Experience Activation potential of the Sports-related ICH Resources. Without reliable infrastructure and high-quality service, even well-intentioned experiential marketing efforts are undermined at the point of delivery, failing to translate into a coherent and satisfying tourist journey.

Concurrently, a critical feedback loop exists between the Sports-related ICH Resources themselves and the Sports Tourism Experiential Marketing outcomes. Interview record indicates that insufficient Heritage Vitality and a failure to fully communicate profound Cultural Value restrict the authentic material available for creating deep experiences. This results in shallow, formulaic offerings that fail to generate significant Cognitive Value or foster Relational Co-creation for the tourist. Consequently, marketing efforts remain superficial, incapable of building strong Tourism Loyalty. The weak market feedback and low visitor engagement that follow fail to generate the necessary revenue and social capital to incentivize sustained investment in heritage revitalization, thus perpetuating a cycle of declining Resource Endowment and vitality.

Crucially, these two primary chains interact and amplify each other. The ineffective collaboration and poor supporting environment hinder the coordinated planning and pooled resources needed to enhance Heritage Vitality and enrich Experience Activation. In turn, the low tourist loyalty and mediocre market performance resulting from weak experiential value diminish the shared economic benefits and perceived returns on investment. This erosion of potential common gain further dampens incentives for robust Stakeholder Dynamics and goal alignment, reinforcing the fragmented governance. Thus, constraints in one domain systematically propagate and intensify difficulties in others, creating a systemic challenge where problems are mutually dependent and collectively resistant to piecemeal solutions.

DISCUSSION

1. The Broken Value Chain from Resource to Market

The first fundamental problem is not a shortage of cultural resources or tourism infrastructure per se, but a systemic rupture in the value chain that connects Sports-related ICH Resources to the tourist market.

Specifically, the chain is broken at two key junctures. First, the Experience Activation capability is severely underdeveloped. Due to a combination of factors, of both low Heritage Vitality to poor Service Quality and inadequate Interactive Participation design, tourism offerings fail to translate the latent Cultural Value of the heritage into profound Cognitive Value and Emotional Engagement for tourists. The experiences remain at a demonstrative or superficial level. Second, the Sports Tourism Experiential Marketing efforts are consequently misaligned and ineffective. Marketing focuses on promotion rather than facilitating Relational Co-creation, and cannot compensate for the weak on-site experience.

This broken chain creates a vicious cycle. The lack of loyalty and consequent weak market performance starves the system of the revenue and feedback needed to justify investment in revitalizing Resource Endowment and improving Infrastructure Availability. Thus, the

bottleneck is not a single point failure but a systemic.

2. The Absence of an Integrated, Interest-Synergizing Governance Platform

The second, and arguably more root, bottleneck diagnosed is the lack of an effective collaborative governance mechanism. The problem extends beyond mere poor coordination; it is the absence of a formal institutional structure capable of aligning diverse stakeholder interests and orchestrating concerted action across the entire system.

Fragmented Multi-stakeholder Collaboration directly leads to misaligned Goal Alignment and inconsistent Policy Support, which in turn cripples Industrial Synergy and results in haphazard development of Tourism Supporting Factors. More critically, this governance deficit prevents the system from addressing the broken value chain. For instance, revitalizing Heritage Vitality requires synchronized efforts from culture departments, community inheritors, and tourism enterprises. Deepening Experience Activation requires collaboration between marketers, service providers, and resource custodians. Without an integrated governance platform that can balance preservation, commercial, and community interests, and allocate resources strategically, these necessary synergies cannot be realized.

This bottleneck creates a state of systemic inertia. Individual stakeholders act in silos or in conflict, leading to duplicated efforts, wasted resources, and missed opportunities for innovation. The governance vacuum is the primary reason why the interconnected problems identified persist and reinforce each other, making the system resilient to change but fragile in its performance.

3. Interdependence of Bottlenecks and the Challenge to Sustainable Management

The two systemic bottlenecks diagnosed are not independent pathologies. Rather, they are mutually interreact and mutually negative reinforcing system that traps Guangxi's Sports-related ICH tourism in a state of low-level equilibrium, fundamentally challenging its transition to sustainable management.

The absence of an integrated governance platform is the primary cause of the broken value chain. Without a governance structure capable of aligning goals, orchestrating resources, and enforcing standards, efforts to enhance Heritage Vitality, deepen Experience Activation, and improve Service Quality remain fragmented and ineffective. Stakeholders operate in silos, preventing the synergies needed to transform raw cultural resources into coherent, high-value tourism products. The resulting broken chain, with its failure to generate tourist loyalty and robust revenue, in turn, provides no compelling economic incentive or shared vision to motivate stakeholders to invest in building the very collaborative governance platform they lack. Weak performance reinforces the perception that collaboration yields little benefit, perpetuating the inertia.

Consequently, the interconnected problems identified in the analysis are not merely linked, but stabilized. The bottlenecks are systemic, meaning the constraints are embedded in the relationships and structures of the management system itself. Attempts to address single dimensions in isolation are likely to fail or yield only marginal and temporary improvements.

Therefore, it necessitates a strategic intervention designed to break this double-lock. The solution must be holistic, simultaneously targeting the institutional root cause and the core operational failure, and fostering the positive feedback loops between them.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the current state of Sports-related ICH tourism in Guangxi, China. Through an integrated analysis of expert narratives and secondary data, the research has

mapped the management landscape, identified core challenges, and diagnosed their systemic nature.

The key finding is that the obstacles to effective management are not a collection of discrete issues but a self-reinforcing system of interconnected problems. This system is anchored in two fundamental, interdependent bottlenecks: first, a broken value chain that fails to convert unique cultural resources into compelling tourist experiences and sustained market loyalty; and second, the absence of an integrated, interest-synergizing governance platform, which prevents coordinated action among stakeholders to repair that chain.

These bottlenecks create a mutual restraint, where fragmented governance perpetuates operational inefficiencies, and poor market performance further dampens collaborative incentives. Consequently, the sector is trapped in a cycle of underperformance, limiting its developmental potential.

The primary implication for practice is that piecemeal interventions are unlikely to succeed. Addressing the stagnation of Sports-related ICH tourism in Guangxi requires strategic, systemic solutions that simultaneously target institutional coordination and the experiential value chain. Future efforts must prioritize building a management model for the sustainable development that align stakeholder goals and enable the integrated development of resources, experiences, and supporting infrastructure.

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