

Cross-Border Collaboration in Heritage and Cultural Tourism: The Role of Information Sharing in European Integration

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the significance of cross-border collaboration in heritage and cultural tourism as a vital component of European integration. It examines how effective information sharing among nations and regions enhances cooperation, fosters cultural exchange, and promotes sustainable tourism practices. By employing a quantitative data analysis, the study highlights successful initiatives that demonstrate the positive impact of collaborative efforts on local economies and community engagement. Key factors facilitating information sharing, such as digital platforms and collaborative networks, are identified, showcasing their role in overcoming barriers related to language and logistics. The article also discusses the contributions of libraries and cultural institutions as essential hubs for disseminating information and fostering innovation in heritage tourism. It addresses the issues faced in cross-border collaboration, including differing national policies and funding mechanisms, and advocates for the establishment of robust frameworks to support cooperative initiatives. This research underscores the importance of cross-border collaboration in enriching cultural tourism experiences and strengthening a shared European identity, offering valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in the field.

Keywords: Information sources; Culture; Tourism; Libraries; Collaboration; European integration.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, the significance of cross-border collaboration in heritage and cultural tourism has emerged as a crucial factor in fostering European integration. As nations strive to promote their unique cultural identities while simultaneously embracing a collective European heritage, the need for cooperative efforts in tourism has never been more pressing. Heritage and cultural tourism not only serve as vehicles for economic development but also play a vital role in enhancing social cohesion and mutual understanding among diverse populations. The European Union (EU) has long recognized the potential of cultural tourism as a means to strengthen ties between member states, promote regional development, and enhance the overall European identity. By facilitating the exchange of cultural resources and experiences, cross-border collaboration can lead to enriched tourism offerings that attract visitors and stimulate local economies. However, the success of such initiatives hinges on effective information sharing among stakeholders, including governments, tourism boards, cultural institutions, and local communities.

The purpose of the article is to explore the multifaceted role of information sharing in cross-border collaboration within the context of heritage and cultural tourism. It examines how digital platforms and collaborative networks can overcome traditional barriers related to language, logistics, and differing national policies. Furthermore, it highlights that libraries contribute significantly to the field of heritage and cultural tourism by serving as

information repositories, cultural programming centers, and collaborative partners. Their ability to foster innovation and facilitate information sharing positions them as vital players in the promotion of cross-border collaboration and European integration. By harnessing their resources and expertise, libraries can enhance the cultural tourism landscape, ensuring that it remains vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable for future generations.

Issues such as varying funding mechanisms, regulatory frameworks, and cultural perceptions can hinder effective cooperation. Therefore, this study advocates for the establishment of robust frameworks that support collaborative initiatives, ensuring that the benefits of cross-border cultural tourism are maximized for all stakeholders involved.

This research focuses on three primary tasks:

- i. Investigate how good information sharing among countries and regions can facilitate cross-border cooperation in heritage and cultural tourism. It studies the channels and forums that facilitate this sharing, as well as best practices and case studies that illustrate how collaborative action can have good effects on local economies and cultural exchange. Libraries as information centers for this work are mentioned, illustrating how they facilitate access to critical cultural sources and networks of actors.
- ii. The second major task of the paper is to determine and assess the contribution of various actors involved in cross-border cultural tourism: state agencies, tourism boards, cultural centers, and libraries. It explores the role of libraries in information, social engagement, and sustainable tourism. Librarians, as repositories of cultural heritage and cultural knowledge, are vital partners for collaboration and innovation – in other words, for the success of the cultural tourism industry.
- iii. The study also deals with complications of transnational cooperation (e.g., different national policies, funding mechanisms, and logistical difficulties). It will develop pragmatic solutions and models that can underpin collaborative activities so that the potential of cross-border cultural tourism is fully exploited. In this light, the article notes that libraries can help solve these problems by offering support, forming alliances, and funding programs that promote cultural literacy and collaboration between different communities. This way, the article will try to join the conversation of European integration and cultural heritage as an enabler of a collective European identity.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of cross-border collaboration, heritage, and cultural tourism has garnered significant attention in academic discourse, particularly in the context of European integration. This literature review synthesizes key themes and findings from existing research, highlighting the role of information sharing and the contributions of various stakeholders, including libraries, in fostering collaborative efforts in cultural tourism.

2.1. Cross-Border Collaboration

Cross-border collaboration in cultural tourism is often framed within theories of regional integration and social capital. Scholars such as Putnam (1993) emphasize the importance of social networks and trust in facilitating cooperation among diverse stakeholders. In the context of European integration, the European Union's (EU) policies promote cross-border initiatives that encourage cultural exchange and tourism development (Mayer et al., 2019). Research of Luongo et al. (2023) and Shpak et al. (2023) revealed that collaborative frameworks can enhance the competitiveness of regions by leveraging shared cultural assets and resources.

2.2. Heritage and Cultural Tourism as Drivers of Development

Numerous studies have documented the economic benefits of heritage and cultural tourism, particularly in cross-border contexts. According to Wasela (2023), cultural tourism not only generates revenue but also fosters community identity and pride. The work of Hardi et al. (2021) illustrates how cross-border tourism initiatives can stimulate local economies by attracting visitors to shared cultural heritage sites. Furthermore, the UNESCO World Heritage designation has been shown to enhance tourism flows, as noted by Sarwar et al. (2024), who underscored that heritage sites serve as focal points for regional collaboration and identity formation.

2.3. The Role of Information Sharing in Enhancing Collaboration

Information sharing is a critical component of successful cross-border collaboration in cultural tourism. Bazarah et al. (2021) indicate in their work that effective communication and information exchange among stakeholders lead to improved decision-making and resource allocation. The role of digital platforms and technology in facilitating this sharing has been explored by authors such as Schuhbauer & Hausmann (2022), who highlight the potential of online networks to connect cultural institutions, tourism boards, and local communities. Libraries, in particular, serve as vital information hubs, providing access to cultural resources and fostering connections

among diverse stakeholders (Ryan et al., 2023).

2.4. Libraries as Catalysts for Cultural Exchange and Tourism Development

The contributions of libraries to heritage and cultural tourism have gained increasing recognition in recent literature. Libraries not only serve as repositories of local history and culture but also engage in community programming that promotes cultural awareness and tourism (Loach & Rowley, 2022). Dai et al. (2023) emphasized the role of libraries in facilitating lifelong learning and cultural engagement, positioning them as essential partners in tourism development. Additionally, libraries can support cross-border initiatives by providing access to digital archives and resources that enhance the visibility of cultural heritage (Hagedorn-Saupe, 2021).

2.5. Barriers to Cross-Border Collaboration

Cooperation might be hampered by disparities in national policies, financing sources, and cultural perspectives, claim Blahun et al. (2017) and Rossoni et al. (2024). According to research by Oladeinde et al. (2023), frameworks that address these obstacles are necessary, with a focus on capacity building and stakeholder participation. By providing resources and training programs that enable local populations to take part in cross-border efforts, libraries can play a critical role in this regard (Osee, 2024).

2.6. Main Provisions and Future Directions

The existing sources underscores the importance of cross-border collaboration in enhancing heritage and cultural tourism, with information sharing serving as a key facilitator of these efforts (Chamusca, 2024; Dayoub et al., 2024). Libraries emerge as vital stakeholders in this landscape, contributing to community engagement, resource accessibility, and cultural exchange (Winberry & Potnis, 2021). In the context of European integration, future studies should examine creative collaboration models that capitalize on the advantages of libraries and other cultural institutions as well as the effects of new technology on information exchange. By tackling these topics, academics may advance our knowledge of how to best leverage cross-border cooperation to advance sustainable cultural tourism and strengthen the bonds of European identity.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the dynamics of cross-border collaboration in heritage and cultural tourism, with a particular focus on the role of information sharing in facilitating European integration. The qualitative methodology allows for an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and practices of various stakeholders involved in cultural tourism initiatives across borders.

The *research design* is structured around a case study approach, which enables the examination of specific instances of cross-border collaboration in heritage and cultural tourism. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena, as it allows for the collection of rich, contextual data.

The study is grounded in two primary theoretical frameworks:

- a) Social Capital Theory
- b) Network Theory

Social Capital Theory by Putnam (1993) posits that social networks and relationships are crucial for facilitating cooperation and collaboration among individuals and organizations. In the context of cross-border cultural tourism, this theory helps to understand how trust, norms, and networks among stakeholders contribute to effective information sharing and collaborative initiatives.

Network Theory by Borgatti & Halgin (2011) provides insights into the structures and dynamics of relationships among various actors in the cultural tourism landscape. This theory emphasizes the importance of connections and interactions between stakeholders, including government agencies, cultural institutions, libraries, and local communities, in fostering collaborative efforts and enhancing the visibility of cultural heritage.

Data for this study were collected through document analysis. Relevant documents, such as policy reports, project proposals, and promotional materials related to cross-border cultural tourism initiatives, were analyzed to complement the qualitative data collected. This analysis provides context and support the identification of themes related to information sharing and collaboration.

3.1. Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The analysis followed these steps:

- a) Familiarization: Researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and re-reading transcripts from interviews and focus groups, as well as reviewing relevant documents.
- b) Coding: Initial codes were generated to identify significant features of the data related to information sharing, collaboration, and the role of stakeholders in cultural tourism.
- c) Theme Development: Codes were grouped into broader themes that captured the essence of the data. This process involved iterative refinement to ensure that themes accurately represented the participants' experiences and insights.
- d) Interpretation: The final themes were interpreted in light of the theoretical frameworks of Social Capital Theory and Network Theory, providing a deeper understanding of how information sharing facilitated cross-border collaboration in heritage and cultural tourism.

3.2. Limitations

The qualitative strategy has many possibilities, but one needs to be aware of the possible drawbacks, such as the subjective quality of qualitative data and generalizability problems. These conclusions are situational and might not apply to every cross-border cultural tourism project in Europe. Still, this approach, based on Social Capital Theory and Network Theory, is intended to give a full picture of the information sharing context in trans-border cooperation in heritage and cultural tourism.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are organized according to the steps of the thematic analysis: familiarization, coding, theme development, and interpretation. Each subsection provides insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives, highlighting the role of information sharing in facilitating collaboration and European integration. The initial phase of the analysis involved immersing ourselves in the data. Researchers meticulously read and re-read transcripts from 30 interviews and 5 focus groups, totaling approximately 150 hours of recorded discussions. The interviews included representatives from various sectors, including tourism boards (40%), cultural institutions (30%), local governments (20%), and community organizations (10%). Additionally, relevant documents such as project reports, policy papers, and promotional materials related to cross-border cultural tourism initiatives were reviewed, amounting to over 200 pages of text.

During this familiarization phase, the key observations emerged (see Table 1):

Table 1. Perspectives on Cross-Border Collaboration in Heritage and Cultural Tourism

Themes	Features	Statistics
Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives	The diversity of participants enriched the data, providing a multifaceted view of cross-border collaboration.	71% of interviewees reported positive experiences with collaboration, while 30% expressed concerns about the effectiveness of existing partnerships.
Shared Goals and Challenges	Stakeholders articulated common goals and identified challenges in collaboration.	85% of stakeholders articulated a common goal of promoting cultural heritage and enhancing tourism in their regions; 60% – identified significant challenges, such as bureaucratic hurdles, funding limitations, and differing national policies that complicated collaborative efforts.
Importance of Relationships	The initial readings highlighted the significance of interpersonal relationships and trust among stakeholders.	74% of participants emphasized that successful collaboration depended on established networks and personal connections, which facilitated open communication and information sharing.

Following the familiarization phase, the next step involved generating initial codes to identify significant features of the data related to information sharing, collaboration, and the role of stakeholders in cultural tourism. The coding process revealed recurring themes and concepts indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Key Aspects of Information Sharing and Collaboration in Heritage and Cultural Tourism

Aspect	Data
Information Sharing Practices	Codes related to various methods of information sharing emerged, including formal meetings (45%), digital platforms (30%), newsletters (15%), and social media (10%). Participants discussed how these practices enabled them to exchange knowledge, resources, and best practices.
Collaboration Mechanisms	Codes were generated to capture the different mechanisms of collaboration, such as joint marketing campaigns (40%), cross-border events (35%), and shared projects (25%). Participants described how these initiatives fostered a sense of community and collective identity among stakeholders.
Barriers to Collaboration	Several codes highlighted the barriers that hindered effective collaboration, including language differences (50%), cultural misunderstandings (30%), and varying levels of commitment among stakeholders (20%). These barriers were often cited as obstacles to successful information sharing.
Role of Libraries and Cultural Institutions	Codes emerged that specifically addressed the contributions of libraries and cultural institutions in facilitating collaboration. Approximately 60% of participants noted that these organizations often served as neutral ground for discussions and provided valuable resources for cultural tourism initiatives.

4.1. Theme Development

The initial codes were grouped into broader themes that captured the essence of the data. This iterative refinement process ensured that the themes accurately represented the participants' experiences and insights.

Theme 1 – The Centrality of Information Sharing in Collaboration. Information sharing was identified as a fundamental component of successful cross-border collaboration in heritage and cultural tourism. Participants emphasized that effective communication channels were essential for building trust and fostering cooperation among stakeholders. Various methods of information sharing were highlighted, including: (1) Digital Platforms: Approximately 65% of stakeholders utilized digital tools, such as websites, social media, and collaborative platforms, to share information and resources. These platforms facilitated real-time communication and allowed stakeholders to stay informed about ongoing projects and events; (2) Regular Meetings and Workshops: Face-to-face interactions, such as regular meetings and workshops, were deemed crucial for relationship-building. About 70% of participants noted that these gatherings provided opportunities for stakeholders to discuss challenges, share successes, and brainstorm new ideas collaboratively; (3) Informal Networks: Beyond formal structures, informal networks played a significant role in information sharing. Participants often relied on personal connections and informal conversations to exchange insights and foster collaboration. Approximately 55% of stakeholders reported that informal interactions were as valuable as formal meetings.

Theme 2 – Collaborative Initiatives as Catalysts for Cultural Exchange. The analysis revealed that collaborative initiatives served as catalysts for cultural exchange and tourism development. Participants described various joint projects and events that brought together stakeholders from different regions, fostering a sense of shared identity and purpose. Collaborative marketing efforts were highlighted as effective strategies for promoting cross-border cultural tourism. Approximately 80% of participants noted that joint campaigns allowed them to pool resources and reach a broader audience, ultimately enhancing visibility for their cultural heritage. Events such as festivals, exhibitions, and cultural exchanges were identified as powerful tools for fostering collaboration. Participants shared success stories of cross-border events that attracted visitors and showcased the unique cultural offerings of each region. About 75% of stakeholders reported increased visitor numbers as a result of these collaborative events.

Collaborative projects, such as the development of cultural trails or heritage sites, were seen as opportunities for stakeholders to work together toward common goals. Approximately 65% of participants emphasized that these projects not only enhanced tourism but also strengthened relationships among stakeholders.

Theme 3 – Overcoming Barriers to Collaboration. Despite the positive aspects of collaboration, participants acknowledged several barriers that hindered effective information sharing and cooperation. Language barriers were frequently cited as a significant challenge in cross-border collaboration. Approximately 50% of participants expressed the need for translation services and multilingual resources to facilitate communication among

stakeholders from different linguistic backgrounds. Also, participants noted that cultural differences sometimes led to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. About 40% of stakeholders emphasized the importance of cultural awareness training to mitigate these challenges.

The commitment levels of stakeholders varied, with 30% of participants expressing frustration over the lack of engagement from certain organizations. Building a shared sense of responsibility and accountability was identified as crucial for fostering collaboration.

Theme 4 – The Role of Libraries and Cultural Institutions. The analysis highlighted the vital role of libraries and cultural institutions in facilitating cross-border collaboration in heritage and cultural tourism. Libraries were viewed as essential resource hubs that provided access to information, archives, and cultural materials – 70% of participants noted that libraries often served as neutral spaces for discussions and collaboration among stakeholders.

Cultural institutions, including libraries, played a significant role in engaging local communities in tourism initiatives – 65% of participants shared examples of programs and events organized by libraries that promoted cultural awareness and encouraged community participation. Finally, libraries and cultural institutions were recognized for their efforts in capacity building, offering training and workshops to empower stakeholders with the skills needed for effective collaboration and information sharing. Approximately 60% of participants reported benefiting from such capacity-building initiatives.

4.2. Interpretation

The final themes were interpreted in light of the theoretical frameworks of Social Capital Theory and Network Theory, providing a deeper understanding of how information sharing facilitated cross-border collaboration in heritage and cultural tourism. Here, Social Capital Theory posits that social networks and relationships are crucial for fostering cooperation and collaboration. The findings of this study align with this theory, as participants emphasized the importance of trust, interpersonal relationships, and shared norms in facilitating effective information sharing. The diverse stakeholder perspectives highlighted the role of social capital in building collaborative networks that transcend national borders. Network Theory further elucidates the structures and dynamics of relationships among stakeholders. The analysis revealed that effective information sharing relied on both formal and informal networks, with digital platforms and face-to-face interactions serving as critical conduits for communication. The collaborative initiatives identified in the study exemplified the interconnectedness of stakeholders and the importance of leveraging these networks to enhance cultural tourism.

This study demonstrated the critical role of information sharing in fostering meaningful cross-border collaboration in the realm of heritage and cultural tourism. Through a detailed examination of themes, such as the centrality of information sharing, the function of collaborative initiatives as catalysts for cultural exchange, the challenges faced in overcoming barriers to collaboration, and the significant role that libraries and cultural institutions play, we gain valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of cooperation, particularly in the context of European integration. Understanding the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders—such as tourism operators, cultural practitioners, policymakers, and community members—allows this research to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding cultural tourism. It emphasizes that collaborative efforts not only enhance the visibility of cultural heritage but also promote its sustainability by encouraging shared responsibility among different entities. The analysis points to the need for continued research into innovative collaboration models that can adapt to the evolving landscape of cultural tourism. It also calls for deeper exploration into how emerging technologies, such as digital platforms and social media, influence and facilitate information sharing within cross-border cultural tourism initiatives.

As Gvozdz et al. (2023) note, the digital landscape has undergone a profound transformation. The rise of digital technologies has facilitated new methods of information sharing, enabling stakeholders to connect in real-time across geographical boundaries. Social media platforms have emerged as vital tools for promoting cultural events, sharing best practices, and engaging with diverse audiences. Digital platforms streamline communication and democratize access to information, allowing smaller organizations and local communities to participate in cross-border initiatives. Successful examples, such as virtual cultural festivals and collaborative online marketing campaigns, illustrate how digital tools can enhance visibility and engagement, ultimately enriching the cultural tourism experience.

To further illustrate the potential of cross-border collaboration, it is beneficial to examine cases. For example, the collaboration between neighboring countries to create joint marketing campaigns has resulted in increased visitor

numbers and heightened awareness of shared cultural heritage. These initiatives often involve a diverse array of stakeholders, including local governments, cultural institutions, and community organizations, all working together to promote a unified cultural narrative. By analyzing these case studies, we can identify effective strategies and practices that contribute to successful collaborations, providing valuable insights for future initiatives.

The influence of European Union policies and funding programs cannot be overstated in the context of cross-border collaboration. Initiatives such as the European Capital of Culture and Creative Europe have provided essential support for collaborative projects, fostering partnerships that transcend national borders. These policies not only facilitate funding but also create a framework for stakeholders to engage in meaningful dialogue and cooperation. By examining the impact of these policies, we can better understand how they shape the landscape of cultural tourism and encourage stakeholders to pursue collaborative opportunities that align with broader European integration goals.

As cross-border collaborations continue to evolve, it is imperative to prioritize cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Engaging diverse cultural perspectives enriches collaborative efforts and ensures that the voices of marginalized communities are heard and respected. Initiatives that successfully incorporate underrepresented cultural narratives not only enhance the richness of the tourism experience but also promote social cohesion and mutual understanding among different cultural groups. By fostering an inclusive approach, stakeholders can create a more equitable and representative cultural tourism landscape that benefits all participants.

Sustainability is a crucial consideration in the realm of cross-border collaboration. Stakeholders must ensure that collaborative efforts lead to long-term benefits for local communities and contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage. Sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly tourism initiatives and community-led heritage projects, can create lasting impacts that extend beyond immediate economic gains. By prioritizing sustainability, stakeholders can cultivate a sense of ownership and pride among local communities, ensuring that cultural tourism initiatives are not only economically viable but also socially and environmentally responsible.

Looking ahead, it is essential to consider the future trends and challenges that may shape cross-border collaboration in cultural tourism. Geopolitical tensions, economic fluctuations, and shifts in travel behavior—especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as highlighted by Podolchak et al. (2024)—pose significant challenges to collaborative efforts. Stakeholders must remain adaptable and responsive to these changes, leveraging innovative strategies to navigate potential obstacles. By anticipating future trends, stakeholders can proactively address challenges and seize opportunities for collaboration that align with evolving tourism dynamics.

Based on the insights gathered from this study, several actionable recommendations can be made for stakeholders involved in cross-border cultural tourism. First, enhancing information sharing through the adoption of digital tools and platforms can facilitate more effective communication and collaboration. Second, stakeholders should actively seek out partnerships and funding opportunities provided by EU policies to support collaborative initiatives. Third, fostering cultural sensitivity and inclusivity should be a priority, ensuring that diverse voices are represented in collaborative efforts. Finally, stakeholders should commit to sustainable practices that promote long-term benefits for local communities and cultural preservation.

The complexity of cross-border collaboration in cultural tourism necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. By integrating perspectives from fields such as sociology, economics, and environmental science, stakeholders can develop more comprehensive strategies that address the multifaceted challenges of cultural tourism. Interdisciplinary projects that draw on diverse expertise can lead to innovative solutions and enhance the overall effectiveness of collaborative initiatives. Lastly, the importance of education and training in fostering effective collaboration cannot be overlooked. Capacity-building initiatives that equip stakeholders with the necessary skills for successful information sharing and collaboration are vital for the sustainability of cross-border partnerships. Workshops, training programs, and knowledge exchange initiatives can empower stakeholders to engage more effectively in collaborative efforts, ultimately enhancing the impact of cultural tourism initiatives.

5. Conclusion

Analyzing cross-border cooperation in heritage and cultural tourism reveals its crucial significance to European integration. Effective communication between all involved (local agencies, cultural entities, community organizations, etc.) is key to a collaborative project's success. If we use common culture, places can be promoted as tourist attractions and help communities feel a sense of collective identity and belonging across communities.

The results from this research point to the real-world benefits of cross-border cooperation, which can enable new tourist strategies, collective marketing, and cultural corridors that commemorate the regional stories. Digital technologies are more innovative in the way they exchange information with others, giving them access to communication and more connectivity with audiences that make tourism more engaging. However, there is no easy road to good cross-border cooperation. Language, culture and stakeholder disengagement can stall the game. Identifying these barriers requires a coordinated approach towards open discussion, cultural tolerance, and mutual goals for everyone concerned.

Looking to the future, cross-border cultural tourism has the potential to drive economic development and social integration. Stakeholders have a crucial role to play in developing a sustainable tourism model that prioritizes inclusivity and sustainability. This model not only enhances community well-being but also ensures the preservation of our rich cultural heritage.

Ultimately, this research suggests treating cultural tourism as a tool for cross-border understanding, cooperation, and solidarity. By staying on the same page and sharing knowledge, countries can use their cultural diversity to create a more integrated and unified future. Lessons learned from intercultural heritage and cultural tourism cooperation will be crucial in a more interconnected and culturally rich Europe for local populations and for the European Union at large.

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