

# Construction of a Suitability Evaluation System for Cultural Landscape Heritage Tourism Development Based on LAC Theory—A Case Study of Xingtai City, Hebei Province

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural landscape heritage carries profound historical and cultural value, and it is necessary to balance protection and utilization in the process of tourism development. Based on the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) theory, this paper constructs a suitability evaluation system for cultural landscape heritage tourism development and conducts an empirical study using Xingtai City, Hebei Province, as an example. The research employs methods such as literature analysis, expert consultation, and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to construct an evaluation indicator system and to conduct a suitability analysis of the study area. The results show that the cultural landscape heritage in this area requires comprehensive consideration of ecological carrying capacity, social carrying capacity, and tourist experience to achieve sustainable development. This research has provided a scientific basis for the tourism development of cultural landscape heritage.

**Keywords:** LAC theory; Cultural landscape heritage; Tourism development; Suitability evaluation; Hebei

## 1 Introduction

Cultural landscape heritage is both an important carrier of human civilization and a significant resource for tourism development. However, over-development can lead to resource destruction, environmental degradation, and cultural distortion. How to find a balance between protection and development is a core issue in the current tourism development of cultural landscape heritage. The Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) theory emphasizes setting acceptable ranges of environmental and social change during tourism development, providing a theoretical basis for the sustainable development of cultural landscape heritage tourism. Therefore, constructing a tourism development suitability evaluation system based on LAC theory is of great significance for achieving the rational development and effective

protection of cultural landscape heritage.

## 2 Literature Review

The LAC (Limits of Acceptable Change) theory was first proposed by the U.S. Forest Service to address the limitations of traditional carrying capacity theory in tourism management. Traditional carrying capacity theory focuses on managing tourism development by setting fixed ecological or social carrying limits, but in practice, this method has been found difficult to adapt to complex ecological environments and social changes. In contrast, LAC theory ensures a balance between development and protection by dynamically adjusting tourism management strategies. The core of LAC theory lies in setting an acceptable range of change and dynamically monitoring and adjusting the environmental, social, and cultural resources of a tourist destination through a series

of scientific assessments and management measures. Its basic framework consists of eight steps, including defining management objectives, selecting key indicators, assessing current conditions, determining acceptable ranges of change, formulating management strategies, implementing management measures, monitoring changes, and making adjustments based on feedback date. This method emphasizes that tourism development is not static but sustainable based on adapting to changes in the ecological environment and social needs.

Compared with traditional carrying capacity theory, LAC theory places more emphasis on the systematic and dynamic nature of tourism management. It not only focuses on the impact of environmental changes but also considers the influence of socio-cultural factors on tourism development. In cultural landscape heritage tourism, many traditional villages, historical buildings, and intangible cultural heritage sites face pressure from tourism development. Excessive commercialization can lead to a decline in the authenticity of cultural heritage, thereby affecting its long-term conservation value. The advantage of LAC theory is that it can help managers set reasonable tourism development goals through scientific evaluation and feedback mechanisms. For example, in the tourism development process of historical villages in Xingtai City, LAC theory can be used to set a range of change for tourist reception capacity, avoiding resource over-consumption caused by a large influx of tourists in a short period. At the same time, this theory also allows managers to dynamically adjust cultural display methods, such as optimizing interpretation services and cultural performances based on tourist feedback data, thereby enhancing tourist experience and cultural communication effects.

### **3 Research Methods**

#### **3.1 Construction of the Evaluation System**

In the process of developing of cultural landscape heritage tourism, a scientifically sound suitability evaluation system is key to ensuring sustainable tourism development. This study, based on LAC theory and combined with the characteristics of cultural landscape

heritage, proposes the following three core construction principles.

(1) Scientificity principle. This emphasizes the theoretical basis of the evaluation system, ensuring that evaluation indicators can comprehensively and accurately reflect the development suitability of cultural landscape heritage. Cultural landscape heritage possesses multiple attributes such as ecology, history, society, and economy, and its tourism development needs to comprehensively consider resource carrying capacity, social acceptability, and cultural value inheritance. Therefore, the evaluation system should combine the dynamic management characteristics of LAC theory and set scientifically sound evaluation standards to ensure the reliability of data and the validity of results. For example, in terms of the ecological environment, scientific monitoring data should be used to evaluate indicators such as water resource utilization rate and vegetation coverage rate, while in terms of socio-culture, questionnaire surveys and expert evaluations can be used to quantify the uniqueness and social identity of cultural heritage.

(2) Systematicity principle. This requires the evaluation system to cover multiple key dimensions of cultural landscape heritage tourism development, including ecological environment, socio-culture, economic development, and management guarantee. These dimensions are interrelated and jointly affect the suitability of tourism development. For example, the sustainability of the ecological environment directly determines the long-term protection of cultural landscape heritage, while socio-cultural factors involve the support of local residents and the quality of tourist experience. At the same time, economic development and management guarantee are the driving forces for tourism development, and reasonable economic benefits and policy support can promote the effective protection of cultural heritage. Therefore, the evaluation system needs to construct a multi-level indicator system and ensure the comprehensiveness of the evaluation through a systematic analysis of the interactions between different dimensions.

(3) Operability principle. This emphasizes the practical application value of the indicator system,

ensuring that evaluation indicators can be quantified, monitored, and provide clear decision-making support for managers. Traditional tourism suitability evaluations often face the problem of difficult-to-quantify indicators. In constructing this system, priority is given to selecting indicators with clear measurement standards and data support, such as measuring land use change rates through remote sensing data and analyzing cultural display effects through tourist survey data. In addition, the evaluation system should also have dynamic adjustment capabilities, allowing for optimization and adjustment based on the feedback mechanism of LAC theory, so that the tourism development suitability evaluation system is not only applicable in the planning stage but can also play a monitoring and guiding role during operation.

### 3.2 Construction of the Evaluation Indicator System

Based on LAC theory, this study constructs a suitability evaluation system for cultural landscape heritage tourism development from four dimensions: ecological environment, socio-culture, economic development, and management guarantee, which are further refined into multiple primary and secondary indicators (see Table 1).

### 3.3 Evaluation Method

This study employs an Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to assign weights to each indicator within the suitability evaluation system for cultural landscape heritage tourism development, and then integrates these weights with field-survey data to conduct a comprehensive assessment. AHP is a decision-making method based on expert judgment and mathematical analysis, suitable for multi-criteria decision problems and capable of effectively handling weight allocation in complex systems. In this research, we first construct an evaluation framework—grounded in LAC theory and the characteristics of cultural landscape heritage—composed of four dimensions (ecological environment, socio-culture, economic development, and management assurance), each further subdivided into primary and secondary indicators. Next, experts in cultural heritage protection, tourism management, and environmental science are invited to make pairwise comparisons, building judgment matrices to determine the relative importance of each indicator. Consistency tests are performed to ensure that these matrices are logically coherent, and the final weight values for all indicators are calculated. Once the indicator weights have been established, this study combines them with data gathered from field surveys to conduct a comprehensive suitability evaluation of cultural landscape heritage tourism development. The

**Table 1 Suitability Evaluation Indicator System for Cultural Landscape Heritage Tourism Development**

Dimension	Primary Indicator	Secondary Indicator
Ecological Environment	Ecological Carrying Capacity	Water-Resource Utilization Rate; Vegetation Coverage Rate; Biodiversity Change Rate
Ecological Environment	Environmental Impact	Land-Use Change; Air Quality; Noise Pollution
Socio-Culture	Social Tolerance	Resident Satisfaction; Visitor Carrying Capacity; Cultural Tradition Maintenance
Socio-Culture	Cultural Value	Cultural Uniqueness; Historical Authenticity; Cultural Display Effectiveness
Economic Development	Economic Benefit	Proportion of Tourism Revenue; Employment Contribution Rate; Industry-Driven Effect
Economic Development	Infrastructure	Transportation Convenience; Service Facility Adequacy; Scenic-Area Carrying Capacity
Management Assurance	Policy Support	Improvement of Policies and Regulations; Financial Investment; Management System
Management Assurance	Monitoring & Feedback	Ecological Environment Monitoring; Visitor Feedback Mechanism; Emergency Management Capability

field-survey work includes ecological environment monitoring, visitor satisfaction questionnaires, resident interviews, and evaluations of policy implementation; data are obtained via remote-sensing monitoring, surveys, interview transcripts, and government statistical reports. For ecological-environment indicators—such as water-resource utilization rate, vegetation coverage rate, and biodiversity change rate—quantitative assessment is performed using remote-sensing data and on-site sampling analysis. For socio-cultural indicators—such as resident satisfaction, visitor carrying capacity, and cultural display effectiveness—data are collected through questionnaires and interviews. For economic-development indicators—such as the proportion of tourism revenue, employment contribution rate, and industry-driven effect—government statistics and market-survey data are analyzed. Finally, for management-assurance indicators—such as the soundness of policies and regulations, levels of financial investment, and completeness of management systems—information is obtained from government reports and expert interviews. After completing data collection, a weighted composite-scoring method is applied to calculate the overall suitability score for tourism development of cultural landscape heritage in the study area. Based on these scores, the area is categorized as highly suitable, relatively suitable, moderately suitable, or unsuitable. Finally, leveraging LAC theory's feedback mechanism, the study proposes tailored management strategies for areas of different suitability levels—for example, optimizing tourism infrastructure in highly suitable areas, strengthening ecological protection measures in moderately suitable areas, and implementing restrictive development policies in unsuitable areas.

## **4 Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Research Results**

This study, based on the current resource status of cultural landscape heritage in Xingtai City, Hebei Province, constructed a suitability evaluation model centered on LAC theory and incorporating AHP weight analysis. It comprehensively considered four

dimensions: economic development, management guarantee, ecological environment, and socio-culture, systematically evaluating the suitability of cultural landscape heritage tourism development in this area. The research results show that the overall suitability score for cultural landscape heritage tourism development in Xingtai City is 0.72, placing it at a "relatively suitable" level. This score, to a certain extent, reflects that the local area has a relatively solid foundation and conditions for tourism development, especially against the backdrop of recent vigorous promotion of cultural and tourism integration by national and local governments, where cultural landscape heritage has gradually become an important pillar for regional development. Among these, the economic development dimension scored 0.78, demonstrating good tourism industry support. With the continuous improvement of tourism infrastructure and the strengthening of cultural tourism brand building, the comprehensive benefits of cultural tourism have steadily grown, providing a solid economic foundation for the development of cultural landscape heritage. Concurrently, the management guarantee dimension scored 0.81, ranking highest among the four dimensions, indicating that significant achievements have been made in policy support, project investment, and management mechanism construction. The government has introduced a series of policies supporting the integration of cultural heritage protection and tourism development, promoting the institutionalization, standardization, and informatization of scenic area management, and establishing a relatively complete tourism safety supervision and tourist feedback mechanism. These positive factors collectively contribute to Xingtai City's strong development potential and operational feasibility in cultural landscape heritage tourism development, laying a good foundation for achieving resource-protective development.

Although the overall score leans towards "relatively suitable," the scores for the ecological environment and socio-cultural dimensions indicate the presence of certain constraints and potential risks. The ecological environment dimension scored 0.66, slightly below the overall average, reflecting significant ecological

protection pressure during tourism development, with some cultural landscape areas having weak ecological carrying capacity. With the increase in tourist numbers, the originally fragile ecosystem faces multiple challenges such as water resource scarcity, changes in land use structure, and declining vegetation coverage. Some popular tourist areas have even experienced soil erosion and a decline in biodiversity. Although measures such as restricting tourist flow, establishing ecological buffer zones, and implementing ecological restoration have been taken, overall ecological environment governance still requires more scientific and systematic plans for support. Furthermore, the socio-cultural dimension scored 0.63, the lowest among the four dimensions, indicating a low level of local resident participation and recognition of tourism development. On one hand, some residents believe that tourism development interferes with daily life and impacts traditional lifestyles and cultural expressions; on the other hand, the display methods of cultural landscapes suffer from a rather severe commercialization tendency, with traditional cultural elements being simplified or even distorted to cater to market demands, leading to the undermining of cultural authenticity and integrity. The low resident participation and the phenomenon of excessive cultural consumption coexist, indicating that cultural landscape heritage faces dual dilemmas of social identity and cultural inheritance in its development process. Therefore, to further enhance the suitability of cultural landscape heritage tourism development, it is imperative to address the deep-seated issues at the ecological and cultural levels. This goal can be achieved by optimizing resource management mechanisms, increasing public participation, improving cultural protection and display methods, and realizing the coordinated development of culture, ecology, and economy.

#### 4.2 Discussion

This study, relying on LAC theory, constructed a multi-dimensional suitability evaluation model. It systematically evaluated the suitability of cultural landscape heritage tourism development in Xingtai City, Hebei Province, from four aspects: economic

development, management guarantee, ecological environment, and socio-culture, clarifying its advantages and shortcomings in tourism development. The research results show that Xingtai City's cultural landscape resources are diverse and concentrated, possessing high historical and aesthetic value, and good potential for tourism development. Especially at the economic and policy levels, with the advancement of the cultural and tourism integration development strategy, the local government has continuously increased investment and support for the cultural tourism industry, and related infrastructure is increasingly improving, providing a solid guarantee for the development of the tourism industry. However, the scores for the ecological environment and socio-cultural dimensions are relatively low, reflecting that the current cultural landscape heritage tourism development still faces issues such as insufficient ecological carrying capacity and weakening cultural authenticity. Therefore, how to effectively coordinate economic benefits with ecological and cultural protection in development has become key to achieving sustainable development.

Regarding ecological environment issues, the development concept of "ecology first" must be adhered to, making ecological protection a prerequisite for cultural landscape heritage tourism development. It is recommended to further improve the ecological environment supervision mechanism, establish a sound ecological risk assessment and early warning system, especially for ecologically sensitive areas. Tourist carrying capacity should be scientifically set, and dynamic monitoring of densely populated periods should be strengthened to prevent environmental overload and resource destruction. At the same time, the dissemination and practice of green and low-carbon tourism concepts should be actively guided, such as promoting low-carbon travel methods, advocating leave-no-trace tourism, and encouraging the application of renewable energy in scenic areas, to achieve a positive interaction between tourism development and the ecological system. At the socio-cultural level, the dominant role of community residents in tourism development should be strengthened,

enhancing their participation and sense of gain, making residents not only inheritors of culture but also sharers of tourism benefits. Through benefit-sharing mechanisms, cultural participation projects, etc., residents' identification with and enthusiasm for tourism development can be enhanced. Concurrently, attention should be paid to the systematic protection and living inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, avoiding the superficialization and entertainment-oriented transformation of cultural resources, and respecting its authenticity and historical connotation. In the future, the tourism development of cultural landscape heritage in Xingtai City should always adhere to the basic principles of "protection first, rational utilization, scientific planning, and sustainable development," promote the organic integration of culture, ecology, and economy, build high-quality tourism development paths rich in regional characteristics and cultural depth, and comprehensively enhance the comprehensive competitiveness and influence of regional cultural tourism.

#### 4.2.1 Optimizing Ecological Environment Management

In the process of cultural landscape heritage tourism development, ecological environment management is crucial. Reasonable ecological protection measures can effectively alleviate the impact of tourism activities on the environment and ensure the sustainable development of cultural landscape heritage. Firstly, vegetation restoration work should be strengthened, and ecological restoration measures should be implemented for areas with frequent tourism activities, such as replanting with native plants to reduce soil erosion and maintain the original ecological characteristics of the landscape. Secondly, tourism routes should be rationally planned, and tourist flow directions should be optimized to reduce trampling and interference in core cultural landscape areas, especially in ecologically fragile areas, where diversion measures should be taken to guide tourists into areas with stronger carrying capacity. In addition, environmental monitoring mechanisms should be strengthened, using technologies such as UAV patrols and remote sensing monitoring to monitor the ecological changes in tourist areas in real-time, ensuring that environmental quality is not excessively affected by

tourism development. At the same time, the concept of low-carbon tourism should be promoted, encouraging tourists to choose public transportation or green travel methods, such as walking or cycling, to reduce carbon emissions and environmental pollution. Government and management departments also need to strengthen environmental protection publicity, raise tourists' environmental awareness, for example, by setting up ecological education exhibition areas within scenic spots, to enhance tourists' understanding of the importance of ecological environment protection, so that they can consciously protect the environment while enjoying the cultural landscape.

#### 4.2.2 Enhancing Cultural Protection Efforts

The core value of cultural landscape heritage lies in its unique historical and cultural connotations. Therefore, cultural protection efforts must be strengthened to ensure the authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage. Firstly, a cultural display center should be established to centrally showcase the cultural background, historical evolution, and folk customs of the area, thereby enhancing tourists' cultural experience and awareness, enabling them not only to appreciate the external form of the cultural landscape during their visit but also to deeply understand its historical value. Secondly, cultural display methods should be optimized. Through digital technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), tourists can immersively experience historical and cultural scenes, enhancing the vividness and interactivity of cultural dissemination. In addition, commercial development should be strictly controlled to avoid damaging the authenticity of cultural heritage due to excessive commercialization. For example, excessively modernized commercial facilities should be restricted from entering cultural heritage protection areas to ensure that the landscape and style are not compromised. At the same time, the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage should be strengthened. Through regular displays of traditional skills, folk performances, and other activities, tourists can experience the unique charm of culture through participation. Through the development of cultural industries, the economic value of cultural heritage

can be enhanced, forming a virtuous cycle of mutual promotion between cultural protection and economic development.

#### 4.2.3 Promoting Community Participation

The community is an important component of cultural landscape heritage, and the identification and participation of local residents are crucial for the sustainable development of cultural landscapes. Therefore, a more open community participation mechanism should be established to allow residents to play an active role in the tourism development process. Firstly, a community co-construction model should be promoted, encouraging local residents to participate in the protection and operation of cultural heritage and tourism, such as serving as cultural interpreters, participating in the production and sales of traditional handicrafts, etc., so that residents can directly benefit from tourism development and enhance their willingness to participate. Secondly, cultural training for residents should be strengthened to enhance their cultural communication skills, making the community an important carrier of cultural inheritance. For example, through government support or social enterprise cooperation, intangible cultural heritage skills training can be carried out, enabling residents to master traditional crafts and achieve self-development in a market-oriented environment. In addition, a community feedback mechanism should be established, regularly holding resident forums to listen to the community's opinions on tourism development, and continuously adjusting development strategies based on feedback to reduce social conflicts caused by tourism development and improve social carrying capacity. By strengthening community participation, not only can residents' happiness be improved, but also the protection and vitalization of cultural landscape heritage can be promoted, achieving sustainable development of cultural heritage tourism.

#### 4.2.4 Improving the Management System

The tourism development of cultural landscape heritage involves multiple management entities and requires the establishment of a sound management system to ensure the standardization and sustainability of

development activities. Firstly, policy guidance should be strengthened, and laws and regulations consistent with the needs of cultural heritage protection and tourism development should be formulated, clarifying the boundaries and restrictions of scenic area development to prevent negative impacts caused by disorderly development. For example, a tourism development access system should be established to ensure that all development projects comply with cultural heritage protection requirements, and existing projects should be regularly evaluated to ensure they meet sustainable development goals. Secondly, a dynamic monitoring mechanism should be established, utilizing information technology such as big data analysis and artificial intelligence recognition to monitor tourist flow, ecological environment changes, and tourist feedback in real-time, and adjust management measures based on data results to improve the precision and efficiency of management. In addition, collaboration between the government, enterprises, and communities should be strengthened, and a multi-party governance system should be constructed to ensure benefit sharing and responsibility sharing in tourism development. Management departments should also strengthen training for tourism service personnel, improve the cultural literacy and service quality of tour guides, merchants, and related personnel, ensuring that tourists have a good experience during their visit. By improving the management system, not only can the scientificity and standardization of tourism development be enhanced, but also strong support can be provided for the long-term protection and sustainable utilization of cultural landscape heritage. This research can provide a scientific reference for the tourism development of cultural landscape heritage and offer decision-making support for governments and managers in formulating relevant policies. Future research can further integrate big data technology to improve the accuracy and dynamism of the evaluation system, providing more advanced technical support for the rational development and protection of cultural heritage.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper, based on LAC theory, constructed a suitability evaluation system for cultural landscape heritage tourism development. It set evaluation indicators from four dimensions: ecological environment, socio-culture, economic development, and management guarantee. Using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) for weight assignment, it conducted an empirical study on the suitability of cultural landscape heritage tourism development in Xingtai City, Hebei Province. The research results show that the area generally has good potential for tourism development, with an overall suitability score of 0.72, which indicates a "relatively suitable" level. This suggests that under current conditions, cultural landscape heritage tourism development is feasible, but ecological environment protection and cultural inheritance management still need to be strengthened to achieve sustainable development. Analyzing by dimension, economic development and management guarantee performed relatively well, with scores of 0.78 and 0.81 respectively. This indicates that the government's recent emphasis on and support policies for the cultural tourism industry have promoted the development of local tourism. The growth in tourism revenue has a significant driving effect on the local economy, infrastructure construction is continuously improving, transportation convenience and service facility levels are steadily rising, and the scenic area management system is relatively sound, with robust tourist feedback mechanisms and emergency management capabilities. However, in the ecological environment and socio-cultural dimensions, the area still faces certain challenges, with scores of 0.66 and 0.63 respectively, reflecting problems in ecological environment carrying capacity and cultural protection during tourism development. Firstly, regarding the ecological environment, the water resource utilization rate is high, vegetation coverage has declined in some areas, and tourism activities may exacerbate the fragility of the local ecosystem. Although the government and relevant departments have taken certain environmental protection measures, such as restricting

tourist flow, strengthening garbage classification management, and implementing vegetation restoration projects, ecological protection policies still need to be further optimized, and a more complete environmental monitoring and feedback mechanism needs to be established to ensure that tourism development does not cause irreversible damage to the ecosystem. Secondly, in terms of socio-culture, some residents are cautious about tourism development. Survey results show that some residents believe that the development of tourism has, to a certain extent, affected their traditional lifestyles, and the commercialization of some historical and cultural landscapes may lead to a weakening of cultural authenticity, affecting the originality and integrity of cultural heritage. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen community participation mechanisms and enhance local residents' sense of identity with development, making them important participants in cultural heritage protection and tourism development, thereby promoting the sustainable utilization of cultural landscape heritage. Furthermore, to further enhance the suitability of cultural landscape heritage tourism development in this area, it is necessary to adopt measures from multiple aspects to optimize tourism management strategies, such as strengthening environmental protection efforts, promoting low-carbon tourism models, adopting stricter tourist flow management policies, encouraging eco-friendly tourism methods; optimizing cultural display methods, avoiding excessive commercial development, enhancing tourists' cultural experience quality, while strengthening the educational function of cultural heritage, and raising public awareness and protection consciousness of cultural landscape heritage; promoting collaboration among government, enterprises, and communities, forming a multi-party co-construction and shared governance mechanism for cultural heritage protection and tourism development, ensuring that tourism development can both drive economic growth and achieve cultural protection and ecological balance. In summary, LAC theory has strong application value in the suitability evaluation of cultural landscape heritage tourism development. It can not only scientifically evaluate the comprehensive impact

of tourism development on ecology, society, and economy, but also provide guidance for dynamic adjustment and management optimization, offering scientific support for the sustainable utilization of cultural heritage. Future research can further integrate GIS technology, remote sensing monitoring, big data analysis, and other methods to improve the accuracy and timeliness of evaluation, and explore more suitable sustainable development paths for different types of cultural landscape heritage, thereby promoting the coordinated development of cultural heritage protection and the tourism industry.

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