



Collaborative governance in heritage tourism management: lessons from Lasem, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines how collaborative governance operates in heritage tourism management in Lasem, Indonesia, a historically layered town shaped by multicultural interactions and the marginalization of Chinese Indonesian heritage. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were collected through participant observation during heritage walking tours, in-depth interviews, house and temple visits, and document analysis involving tourism awareness groups, heritage communities, homeowners, religious caretakers, and local officials. The findings reveal that heritage tourism in Lasem is governed through informal and practice-based collaboration embedded in everyday spaces. Collaborative governance enables the co-production of tourism activities, heritage narratives, and spatial access through negotiated roles and situational consent. However, collaboration is uneven, as tourism organizers and guides exercise greater influence over site selection and narrative framing, while local actors participate selectively in granting access and sharing personal histories. Heritage narratives tend to emphasize coexistence and hybridity, while politically sensitive histories are carefully moderated. This study contributes to collaborative governance theory by demonstrating that governance in socially sensitive heritage contexts operates through negotiated role differentiation rather than deliberative equality, highlighting the role of informal practices, selective participation, and power asymmetries in sustaining socially embedded tourism systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

Heritage tourism is increasingly conceptualised as a management and governance challenge rather than solely as a cultural or economic activity. This shift reflects the recognition that heritage destinations involve multiple stakeholders, including local communities, cultural custodians, tourism organisations, and public authorities, whose interests often diverge with regard to conservation priorities, economic utilisation, and cultural representation (Fabbricatti et al., 2020; Geçikli et al., 2024; Nair et al., 2023; Smith, 2022). Consequently, the sustainability of heritage tourism depends not only on market performance or technical conservation measures but also on governance arrangements that structure participation, mediate power relations, and coordinate decision-making among heterogeneous actors (Harrison, 2012; Poullos, 2014; Tian, 2024).



Recent scholarship has emphasised that heritage tourism management requires coordination across institutional and social boundaries, particularly in destinations characterised by cultural diversity and historical sensitivities (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; García-Hernández et al., 2017). Studies on heritage governance show that heritage tourism development often prioritises economic growth and destination branding, while community-based heritage values are grounded in everyday cultural practices and local meanings (Fabbricatti et al., 2020; Poullos, 2014; Robertson, 2012). These different orientations frequently lead to tensions over how heritage should be used, interpreted, and managed for tourism purposes (Harrison, 2010; Nair et al., 2023; Smith, 2022).

As a result, heritage governance increasingly relies on collaborative and participatory management approaches to mediate these differences and to balance development objectives with the recognition of community-based heritage values (Fabbricatti et al., 2020; Smith, 2022). In this context, heritage tourism is shaped not only by visitor demand but also by negotiated practices through which heritage meanings, access to resources, and managerial responsibilities are collectively produced (Chhabra, 2021; Harrison, 2012; Tian, 2024).

These governance challenges are particularly relevant in contexts where heritage is intertwined with social diversity and historical marginalisation, such as in Indonesia. Indonesia provides a relevant context for examining these challenges. Many of its heritage destinations are embedded in socially diverse communities shaped by long histories of migration, segregation, and political change (Cribb & Coppel, 2009; Hoon, 2008). Lasem, a small heritage town on Java's northern coast, exemplifies this condition. Historically associated with Chinese heritage, Lasem has long been inhabited by Chinese-Indonesian and Javanese communities whose interactions have evolved through periods of trade, assimilation, and cultural revival (Aziz, 2014; Gondodiprojo, 2013).

In recent years, heritage tourism initiatives have transformed domestic houses, temples, and batik workshops into tourism assets. In particular, Lasem's Chinese architectural heritage and *peranakan* houses have been adaptively repurposed as homestays, museums, and batik workshops, effectively balancing visitor engagement with conservation priorities (Kwanda, 2020). In addition to these tangible heritage assets, the town's cultural tourism includes batik traditions, religious sites, and festivals, which necessitate governance mechanisms to ensure the sustainable management of heritage alongside economic development (Mandaka et al., 2025; Manifesty, 2025). Collectively, these dynamics position Lasem not only as a repository of historical architecture but also as a living heritage tourism destination, where coordination among government authorities, local communities, and businesses is crucial for addressing tourism pressures and mitigating social impacts (Mandaka et al., 2025).

Previous studies of heritage tourism have primarily focused on issues of authenticity, commodification, and visitor experience (Zhu, 2015; Chhabra, 2021), while research on destination management has emphasized stakeholder participation and community involvement in achieving sustainable tourism outcomes (Bui et al., 2020; Fabbricatti et al., 2020). However, these studies tend to prioritise economic performance and formal governance arrangements, offering limited insight into how governance processes shape social outcomes, particularly in heritage tourism contexts characterised by social diversity and historical sensitivity (Smith, 2022; Tian, 2024). Furthermore, existing studies linking heritage tourism and collaborative governance have predominantly focused on stakeholder

coordination and destination development (Barandiarán et al., 2019; Basyar et al., 2025; Bichler & Lösch, 2019) with limited attention to its application in heritage tourism contexts involving marginalised communities. This study addresses this gap by applying collaborative governance theory to analyse the management of heritage tourism associated with a marginalised community. This study thus examines how collaborative governance structures heritage tourism management in Lasem, Indonesia, and how such governance practices generate social outcomes related to intergroup relations and social sustainability.

This study contributes to tourism management literature by rethinking collaborative governance in heritage tourism contexts, particularly in sensitive context. First, it extends collaborative governance theory to the context of heritage tourism management. Second, it demonstrates how collaborative governance produces not only tourism outputs but also social outcomes relevant to destination sustainability. Third, it provides empirical insights for destination managers and policy actors seeking to design inclusive and participatory governance arrangements in heritage tourism destinations.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

Heritage Tourism as a Contested Space

Heritage tourism is more than visiting historical sites or artefacts. It is a practice through which the past is made present, actively shaping cultural meaning, identity, and social relations (Harrison, 2012). The selection, interpretation, and presentation of heritage are never neutral but reflect broader power structures that determine whose histories are highlighted and whose experiences are acknowledged. Dominant institutions often privilege national, monumental, or elite narratives, while local and marginalized voices remain peripheral, producing curated experiences that reinforce institutional priorities even as community practices continue to shape heritage on the ground (Smith, 2006; Zhu, 2025).

This political dimension raises challenges for inclusion and equity. Communities may find their knowledge, practices, and memories overlooked, limiting their ability to shape how heritage is interpreted, presented, and commodified (Byrd, 2007; Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008; Robertson, 2012). While participatory approaches are often promoted as a solution, empirical evidence suggests that participation is neither uniform nor inherently empowering. Community actors engage in diverse and negotiated roles, ranging from initiators and coordinators to selective contributors, reflecting uneven capacities and influence (Putri, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2023). This indicates that heritage tourism should be understood not simply as a space of participation, but as a contested field where power, representation, and inclusion are continuously negotiated.

Heritage tourism also involves affective and embodied engagement. Sites, performances, and rituals evoke belonging, memory, and identity, yet these experiences are mediated by institutional hierarchies (Dicks, 2000). Community-led initiatives demonstrate how local knowledge can be embedded into visitor experiences, creating spaces where meaning is co-constructed. However, such co-construction does not necessarily imply equal authority, as narrative control and visibility remain unevenly distributed.

Collaborative Governance in Heritage Tourism

In response to these challenges, collaborative governance offers a framework for managing tourism more inclusively and sustainably. Collaborative governance is commonly defined as a process in which multiple actors including government agencies, private companies, and civil society groups work together to make decisions, share responsibilities, and build consensus (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Provan & Kenis, 2008). Within heritage tourism, this approach allows stakeholders to balance conservation goals, community needs, and economic objectives, thereby preventing the dominance of commercial or institutional priorities (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Graham et al., 2016; Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

Early formulations of collaborative governance emphasize structured and deliberative interactions, in which face-to-face dialogue, trust-building, and the development of shared understanding are central to resolving conflicts (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) further conceptualize collaborative governance as a dynamic regime composed of sustained engagement, shared motivation, and the capacity for collective action. This perspective allows collaborative governance to be applied beyond formal decision-making arenas, including everyday heritage management and tourism practices.

Despite its potential, collaborative governance is not without limitations. Powerful stakeholders can dominate decision-making, accountability may be unclear, and differences in capacity or resources can constrain meaningful participation (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Scholars also caution that collaborative spaces can reproduce existing hierarchies rather than challenge them, and that participation does not necessarily correspond to influence (Purcell, 2013; Vangen & Huxham, 2013). In heritage contexts, this aligns with the concept of authorised heritage discourse, where expert and institutional actors maintain control over the meaning of cultural heritage even within participatory frameworks (Smith, 2006). Critical perspectives further note that governance may operate through informal coordination, selective participation, or strategic silences, particularly in contexts marked by historical marginalization or socio-political sensitivity (Afandi et al., 2023; Ansell et al., 2020). In this sense, collaborative governance should not be understood as a neutral or inherently inclusive process, but as a context-dependent arrangement shaped by power relations, selective participation, and negotiated forms of influence.

Empirical studies reflect these dynamics. Research on heritage settlements shows that participatory governance and co-created tourism initiatives enable stakeholders to integrate local histories and knowledge into tourism offerings while balancing multiple interests (Gocer et al., 2024; Juliana et al., 2025). At the same time, informal networks, personal trust, and tacit negotiation often play key roles in day-to-day governance, increasing flexibility but sometimes limiting transparency and accountability (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Nunkoo, 2017). In other words, collaborative governance in heritage tourism relies on both inclusive coordination and informal, trust-based practices, which enhance flexibility but may also obscure transparency and accountability.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on collaborative governance theory and critical heritage perspectives to examine heritage tourism in socially sensitive contexts. Collaborative governance provides a lens to understand how multiple actors coordinate, share responsibilities, and

negotiate decision-making processes (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). However, rather than assuming equal participation, this study adopts critical perspectives that highlight how governance processes are shaped by power asymmetries, selective participation, and informal interactions. At the same time, critical heritage perspectives conceptualise heritage not as a neutral object of management but as a socially constructed and contested process shaped through practices such as site selection, access negotiation, and narrative construction (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2012). Bringing these perspectives together, this study understands collaborative governance in heritage tourism as a process through which actors not only coordinate tourism activities but also negotiate the meaning, representation, and accessibility of heritage.

Context of the Case Study

Lasem has recently emerged as an illustrative example of how small towns with layered histories and multicultural legacies can be mobilized within the framework of heritage tourism. Heritage tourism, broadly understood as travel centered on historically and culturally significant sites, has grown significantly since the mid-2000s as visitors increasingly seek immersive experiences that provide narrative depth and cultural authenticity rather than generic sightseeing. This shift opens opportunities for places such as Lasem, whose historical significance resides not only in preserved architectural forms but in the dense social, cultural, and economic interactions that have shaped its identity over centuries.

Lasem is a sub-district town situated in Rembang Regency, 110 km east of Semarang in the north coast of Java. Historically, Lasem functioned as an important coastal port from the Majapahit period through the colonial era (Widodo, 2004). Chinese merchants arrived as part of these maritime networks and, through processes of settlement and intermarriage, established Peranakan lineages that anchored Chinese presence within the local social order. The town's cosmopolitan profile intensified in the aftermath of the 1740–1743 Sino-Dutch War, when large numbers of ethnic Chinese refugees fleeing anti-Chinese violence in Batavia (now Jakarta) resettled in Lasem, transforming the town into an important node of Chinese migration and diaspora consolidation (Gondodiprojo, 2013). The arrival of these migrants left visible traces across the urban and cultural landscape, from Chinese settlement clusters and temples to batik workshops and hybrid architectural typologies. These features position Lasem not as a peripheral Javanese coastal settlement, but as a multi-ethnic and historically entangled port town shaped by commerce, migration, artisanal production, and religious plurality.

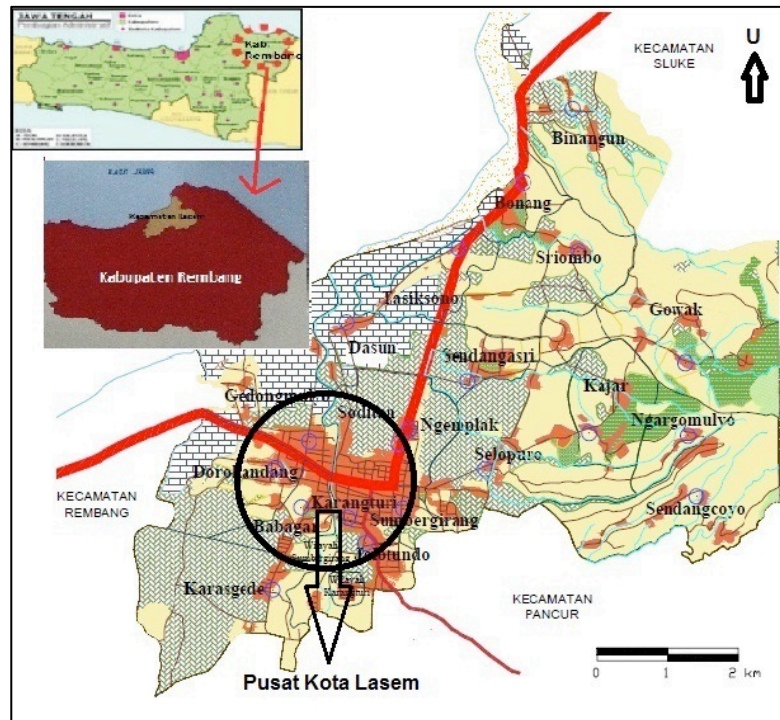


Figure 1. Map of Lasem
(Source: Sakinah, 2013)

Lasem comprises four main Chinese settlement clusters (Dasun/Soditan, Karangturi, Babagan, and Sumber Girang) distributed along the Lasem River and connected through a network of local roads. These settlements reflect the historical development of Lasem as a multicultural trading town, where Chinese Indonesian communities established residential, economic, and religious spaces that continue to shape the town's spatial structure.

However, heritage tourism activities are primarily concentrated in three of these settlements, Dasun/Soditan, Karangturi, and Babagan which function as the core tourism landscape. In these areas, visitors are guided through a network of ancestral houses, batik workshops, and temples embedded within everyday residential environments. Dasun/Soditan, located near the northern section of the river, represents one of the earliest and most prominent heritage zones, while Karangturi and Babagan, situated in the central and western parts of the town, further support tourism through interconnected walking routes linking domestic spaces, production sites, and religious landmarks.

In recent years, these historical layers have been actively mobilised and made legible to broader audiences through community-led heritage tourism initiatives. In Babagan Village, for example, the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) collaborates with heritage movements "Swarga Lasem" and "Kesengsem Lasem" to curate the historical walking tour branded as "Kisah Lambah Mbagan," which links temples, ancestral houses, batik workshops, former cemeteries, and remnants of colonial infrastructure into a coherent interpretive route (Wijaya et al., 2023). Rather than presenting heritage as static built artifacts, local guides accompany visitors through domestic spaces, artisanal workshops, and ritual sites while narrating histories of migration, kinship, occupation, and trade. Through this modality, heritage becomes a dialogical practice in which meaning is co-

constructed through encounters between visitors and custodians of local memory rather than through passive observation.

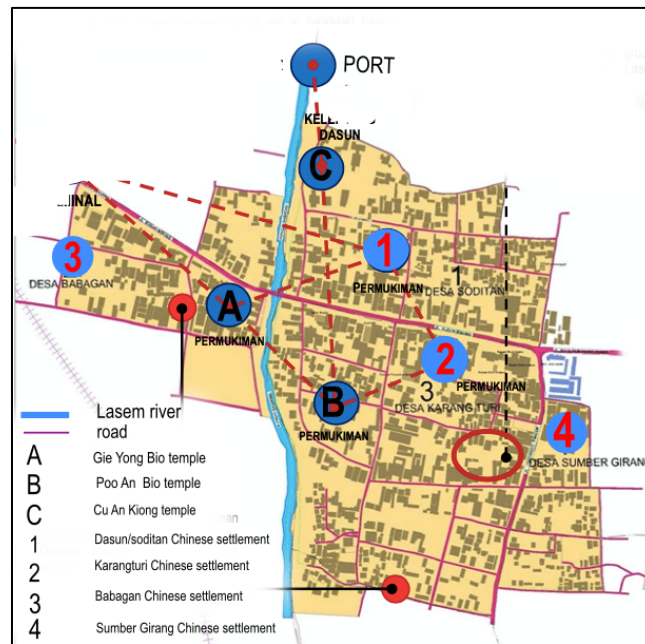


Figure 2. Map of Chinese Settlements and Temples
(Source: Adapted from Google Maps (2018), modified by the author)

The significance of Lasem's heritage takes on an additional layer when viewed in relation to the broader history of discrimination and socio-political stigmatization experienced by Chinese Indonesians. Throughout the New Order period (1966–1998), the Indonesian state sought to suppress public expressions of Chinese cultural identity through the banning of Chinese-language media, the closure of Chinese schools, restrictions on religious festivities, and the encouragement of name changes as a marker of assimilation (Coppel, 2008; Suryadinata, 1997). These policies framed Chineseness as a cultural identity that had to be rendered invisible in order to be tolerated within the national space. Despite holding formal citizenship, ethnic Chinese were discursively positioned as perpetual outsiders whose loyalty had to be continuously demonstrated (Hoon, 2006). The precarious nature of this belonging became violently visible during the May 1998 riots, when ethnic Chinese bodies, properties, and sexualities became targets of violence across Indonesian cities (Purdey, 2006). Although Lasem did not experience large-scale attacks, the psychological reverberations deeply shaped Chinese Indonesian communities nationwide, reinforcing anxieties regarding vulnerability and the conditionality of their citizenship (Setijadi, 2017).

In the post-Reformasi period, the loosening of bans and the recognition of Chinese-rooted cultural practices enabled the re-emergence of lion dance, temple festivals, and Chinese-language education, signaling a partial reopening of public cultural space (Hoon, 2008). However, this newfound visibility has been accompanied by ambivalent recognition, as social stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes persist despite formal legal reforms (Setijadi, 2017). It is within this socio-political landscape that Lasem's heritage tourism acquires a reparative dimension. The revival of Chinese Indonesian temples, ancestral houses, and batik production not only generates economic opportunities but also restores

historical visibility to communities whose cultural identities were previously marginalized or silenced.

In Lasem, heritage tourism is predominantly organized in the form of walking tours that guide visitors through Chinese Indonesian ancestral houses, batik workshops, small museums, and temples. The houses typically visited are traditional ones, usually featuring *ngan shang* style roofs, central courtyards, and walls surrounding wooden gates, which sometimes still bear Chinese inscriptions. Other houses visited include Indies houses, which are built in colonial architectural styles..

During these tours, visitors are introduced to the historical presence of Chinese Indonesians in the town through architectural features, domestic layouts, religious and ritual objects, as well as the spatial organization of Peranakan settlements. The tours also enable visitors to observe batik production processes and artisanal practices that are still carried out within family-based workshops. In addition to material culture and architecture, tourists encounter everyday practices such as domestic arrangements, household shrines, and culinary activities, which provide contextual insights into how Chinese Indonesian communities have lived, worked, and interacted within Lasem over time.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative design with an ethnographic approach. Ethnography was selected because it allows the study to capture not only formal narratives but also informal interactions, lived experiences, and nuanced cultural negotiations, which are essential for addressing the research questions.

Data collection combined participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were essential for capturing the perspectives of stakeholders involved in heritage tourism, including house owners, community members, and tour guides. Their flexible, open-ended nature allowed the researcher to explore informal interactions, decision-making processes, and selective storytelling practices, often revealing insights that might not have emerged through more structured methods. Participants were initially selected using purposive sampling to capture key stakeholders involved in heritage tourism governance, followed by snowball sampling to identify relevant actors. Sixteen interviews were conducted with diverse stakeholders, including Chinese-Indonesian community leaders, regional planning officials, members of local tourism awareness groups (*pokdarwis*), homeowners who open their properties for tours, and tourism practitioners.

Observations were conducted during both group and private heritage tours, house visits in Chinese settlements (Babagan, Dasun and Karangturi), temple visits, and community events, including the Chinese parade celebrating the birthday of a deity at Cu An Kiong temple in Lasem. The researcher also participated in private and group tours. To complement these observations and validate the interview data, planning documents, promotional materials, and media reports were analyzed. Using multiple types of data in this way allowed for triangulation in order to strengthen the reliability of the findings.

Data were thematically analysed using NVivo through inductive coding to identify patterns in governance practices, participation, and narrative construction. Reflexivity was applied to account for the researcher's positionality as an outsider, which may have

influenced access, interpretation, and participants' willingness to share sensitive narratives. This was addressed through prolonged engagement, informal interactions, and iterative reflection throughout the research process, as well as through the use of data triangulation to enhance validity (Rumangkit et al., 2023). Ethical clearance was obtained, and all participants provided informed consent, with anonymity ensured where requested.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Heritage tourism in everyday spaces

Heritage tourism in Lasem is embedded in everyday spaces rather than in formally designated tourist sites. Tourism activities take place in residential houses, batik workshops, and temples that continue to function as part of daily domestic, productive, and religious life. Many heritage houses remain inhabited by families, while others have been adapted for tourism purposes, including conversion into guesthouses or homestays. Despite these functional shifts, the buildings retain architectural features associated with Chinese and colonial heritage, such as traditional Chinese *ngan shang* roof forms with wooden walls and enclosed courtyards, and tropical colonial styles. These architectural features serve as visual and material references through which heritage is identified and interpreted during tours.

In addition to these spaces, visitors are also taken to Nyah Lasem Museum, a privately owned museum curated by a Chinese Indonesian family. The museum displays family archives, furniture, decorative objects, photographs, and other material cultures that document the lineage and everyday life of the family across multiple generations. Although referred to as a museum, its displays are situated within a former domestic setting rather than a purpose-built institutional venue. This situation allows visitors to encounter Chinese Indonesian heritage in a context that retains traces of domesticity.

These findings indicate that heritage tourism in Lasem operates through the incorporation of ordinary environments into tourism practices, rather than through the creation of purpose-built heritage sites. Batik workshops located within or behind residential compounds become part of tour routes, allowing visitors to observe production processes alongside architectural features. Temples are included as sites of worship and as material representations of Chinese Indonesian religious heritage. Guesthouses converted from traditional houses function both as accommodation facilities and as heritage attractions, where tours focus primarily on public areas of the building rather than on private rooms. These guesthouses occupy an intermediate position between domestic space and tourist facility, illustrating how everyday environments are adapted for tourism without being fully transformed into institutional heritage sites. These spaces are not formally converted into curated heritage facilities but are temporarily integrated into tourism activities through arrangements among house owners, workshop owners, temple caretakers, tour guides, heritage community members, and representatives of the Tourism Awareness Group (*pokdarwis*). Such practices reflect forms of collaborative governance that operate beyond formal institutional design and rely on interpersonal relations, trust, and repeated interaction rather than codified rules (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015)

Notably, neither house nor temple was prepared specifically for tourism, and Nyah Lasem Museum also maintained a domestic genealogical character rather than adopting

the curatorial conventions of state museums. Furniture remained in place, personal belongings were visible in domestic interiors, and signs of everyday routines and ritual practices were present. These domestic and religious environments were not staged as formal heritage displays but remained embedded in ordinary social and spiritual life. Access to these spaces was organised through everyday arrangements between house owners, temple caretakers, and tour guides, allowing visits to take place while maintaining the continuity of domestic and ritual activities. *Pokdarwis* and heritage community actors facilitated the inclusion of these houses and temples within tour itineraries but did not transform them into institutional heritage sites.

This mode of incorporation both departs from and partially reproduces what Smith (2006) terms Authorised Heritage Discourse. Houses and temples in Lasem were not designated as heritage sites through state institutions or expert-led conservation frameworks, nor were they converted into curated exhibition spaces. However, the initial identification of which houses and temples were included in tour routes was undertaken by tour organisers, *Pokdarwis*, and heritage organisations, who selected particular buildings as representative of Chinese heritage. In this sense, heritage was authorised through organisational practices embedded within collaborative arrangements rather than through formal institutional procedures. While house owners and temple caretakers retained the right to permit or refuse access, the framing of these spaces as heritage sites emerged through coordination between tourism organisers and local actors. Heritage meaning was therefore shaped through a combination of organisational selection and everyday negotiation, reflecting a form of collaborative governance in which authorisation was locally enacted rather than imposed by a singular institutional authority.

Batik workshops were incorporated into tourism in a similar manner. Production activities continued during visits, with workers carrying out their daily tasks while visitors observed. Workshop owners allowed access to certain areas while continuing routine work practices. These workshops functioned simultaneously as workplaces and tourism sites, blurring the distinction between economic production and heritage display. Heritage in this context was embedded in ongoing labour and practice rather than separated into a distinct representational domain (Harrison, 2012).

These findings indicate that heritage tourism in Lasem is grounded in lived environments rather than in purpose-built tourism facilities. From the perspective of collaborative governance, tourism activities are sustained through coordination among multiple actors without formalised management structures (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). From the perspective of heritage theory, the use of domestic, productive, religious, and semi-domestic display spaces highlights heritage as a lived and ongoing practice rather than as a static object of display (Harrison, 2010; Smith, 2006). However, collaboration does not remove processes of authorisation. The selection of houses, workshops, museum, and temples for tour routes reflects a locally enacted form of Authorised Heritage Discourse shaped by tour organisers, *Pokdarwis*, and heritage organisations, while access depends on the consent of Chinese Indonesian owners and caretakers. This combination of collaborative coordination and local authorisation is enabled by the embedding of heritage tourism in everyday spaces.

Narrating Heritage: Mediation, Authority, and Selective Storytelling

Heritage tourism is produced not only through spatial practices but also through narrative work that mediates how history, identity, and interethnic relations are presented to visitors. Narratives circulating during tours are not standardized through formal guidelines or institutional scripts; instead, they emerge from informal collaboration among tour guides, heritage community members, house owners, and organizers. Empirical studies indicate that heritage interpretation is often shaped through community initiatives and organizational networks rather than centralized heritage authorities (Putri, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2023). This reflects a form of collaborative governance in which interpretive authority is distributed across multiple actors, although participation does not automatically confer equal influence (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Vangen & Huxham, 2013).

Tour guides occupy a central mediating role, drawing on personal knowledge, community memory, and situational judgment. They adjust storytelling in response to audience composition, simplifying narratives for general visitors while offering more layered explanations to heritage practitioners or researchers. This relational authority emphasizes performative competence and contextual sensitivity over formal mandate (Juliana et al., 2025; Nunkoo, 2017). Member of community also collaborate in designing interpretive experiences, co-producing heritage narratives through walking tours and storytelling practices rather than formal museum-style interpretation (Putri, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2023).

Field observations and interviews reveal that tour narratives consistently foreground themes of coexistence, tolerance, and interethnic resilience. Accounts of Chinese Indonesian and Javanese relations focus on everyday encounters, shared economic activities, and cultural exchange, while episodes of discrimination or political tension are acknowledged only briefly. One interviewee reflected on this narrative gap:

“Part of the story told during the tours do not really align with the history that we hear from our families. Many parts of Chinese history are left out.” (Interviewee #1)

This indicates that heritage narratives privilege continuity and social harmony over historical rupture. Storytelling practices appear oriented toward maintaining coherence and visitor comfort, reflecting broader trends in tourism where sensitive or politically charged histories are selectively filtered (Göçer et al., 2024; Harrison, 2010, 2012; Smith, 2006).

House owners and temple caretakers, particularly from Chinese Indonesian backgrounds, contribute selectively and strategically. Tour contributions emphasize family history, architectural features, and daily routines, while broader political or historical issues are addressed cautiously. At the museum, family artifacts communicate identity and lived experience indirectly. This illustrates that selectivity does not equate to absence of voice but rather a careful negotiation of visibility and risk:

“During the Chinese parade, all the parade equipment is carried by Chinese people. Then there are accusations that this is only a show, or that it accuses us of exploitation of natives. But it burdens my heart.” (Interviewee #2)

Material culture and public events thus serve as mediums of mediated expression which allow Chinese Indonesian in Lasem to assert voice through selectively shared narratives. Heritage becomes a space of negotiation, resilience, and controlled self-representation, where narratives are moderated to maintain social comfort and safety (Robertson, 2012; Smith, 2006; Zhu, 2007).

Narrative boundaries are also evident in the selection of sites included in tours. Houses are often chosen for architectural hybridity and visual appeal, while politically sensitive or emotionally charged elements receive less emphasis. Storytelling functions as a mechanism of framing and containment, reproducing familiar interpretations while limiting overt contestation (Juliana et al., 2025; Gocer et al., 2024). Collaborative governance is reflected in how multiple actors, such as guides, community members, and heritage or tourist organizers, coordinate narratives. However, authority over content remains uneven. Participation is situational, strategically managed, and shaped by historical experience, emotional exposure, and social constraints (Putri, 2023).

Boundary-making as practical agreement

The findings show that boundary-making within collaborative governance is enacted through the selective inclusion of houses and other heritage spaces in tourism routes. Not all houses in the heritage area are incorporated into these tours. As previously noted, heritage tours emphasize both traditional houses and Indische houses. Although some houses visually suggest a Chinese identity, this selectivity reflects deliberate choices made by governance actors. Collaboration thus shapes not only how access is regulated within individual buildings but also which domestic and religious spaces are recognized as suitable for heritage tourism.

Access to these spaces remains conditional on the consent of those who control them, including house owners, workshop managers, and temple caretakers. Even when a building or site is regarded as architecturally or historically significant, it is not automatically incorporated into tour routes. In several cases, visitors are allowed to enter only the batik workshop rather than the main residential building. These workshops are usually located in additional structures at the back of the house and can be accessed through a separate door from the terrace. After house tours, interaction between visitors and homeowners typically takes place on the terrace rather than inside interior living spaces. The terrace thus operates as an intermediate zone that enables social exchange while maintaining a boundary between tourism and private domestic life. This pattern reflects how participation in heritage tourism in Lasem is organised through locally negotiated practices rather than formal institutional designation (Putri, 2023).

Similar patterns of conditional access were observed in temples and other heritage spaces. During a private tour attended by the researcher, the guide explained that he intended to bring the visitor to a heritage house that also contained a former tile factory. Entry, however, depended on the approval of the caretaker:

"The caretaker said we can go to the tile house. We will go there now." (Tour Guide #1)

This section illustrates that access is not determined solely by tour itineraries but must be continuously negotiated on site. While guides and organisers propose routes and destinations, final authority rests with owners and caretakers who decide whether and how

visitors may enter. Boundary-making therefore emerges through situational consent and interpersonal coordination rather than through fixed rules or formal permits, reflecting a form of collaborative governance grounded in everyday interaction (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Wijaya et al., 2023).

Boundary-making is also evident in houses that have been converted into guesthouses or homestays. Although these buildings are included in heritage tours because of their traditional architectural features, access is usually limited to public areas such as lobbies, corridors, and halls where ancestral altars are still located. Private rooms and domestic areas remain excluded from tours. In these cases, heritage interpretation focuses primarily on architectural elements such as building structure, columns, beams, roof forms, and decorative ornaments rather than on everyday domestic practices. Functional transformation therefore does not remove boundary-making but reconfigures it through new distinctions between public and restricted spaces. This pattern aligns with observations that adaptive reuse in Lasem enables tourism participation while preserving spatial separation between tourism and daily life (Mandaka et al., 2025; Putri, 2023).

These arrangements demonstrate that collaborative governance operates through informal and practice-based agreements rather than through formal zoning or written regulations. The selection of houses and temples, the restriction of access to residential interiors, and the designation of specific areas for interaction are coordinated through mutual understanding among homeowners, caretakers, guides, and community organisers. Such coordination reflects broader patterns of heritage governance in Lasem, where community groups and tourism organisations organise heritage activities through negotiated practices rather than centralised heritage authorities (Putri, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2023).

The selective opening of houses and the regulation of accessible areas further show that heritage is shaped through local spatial practices rather than solely through institutional designation. By defining which spaces can be entered and which remain restricted, community members actively organise how their heritage is encountered. Heritage is thus produced not only through narrative framing but also through embodied and spatial practices that regulate visibility and movement. Tours typically follow implicit routes through semi-public areas such as main halls and courtyards, while more intimate spaces, particularly bedrooms, remain excluded. These boundaries are enacted through everyday practices, including hosts positioning themselves near doorways, redirecting visitor movement, or subtly regulating the pace of visits. Such practices resonate with critical heritage scholarship that conceptualises heritage as a socially regulated and negotiated process rather than a transparent act of display (Harrison, 2010, 2012; Smith, 2006).

Overall, these findings indicate that boundary-making functions as a practical agreement within collaborative governance, shaping how heritage tourism is organised in the absence of formal regulatory instruments. Governance is enacted through routine decisions and shared expectations rather than codified rules, consistent with process-oriented accounts of collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). In Lasem, this coordination is carried out by community groups and tourism organisations that curate routes and negotiate access in situ (Putri, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2023). Collaborative governance in this context is therefore sustained not only through dialogue and participation but also through continuous negotiation of limits that render tourism

compatible with everyday life and socially acceptable for local residents, echoing broader concerns in heritage tourism management about balancing access, conservation, and community needs (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Uneven Collaboration

Prior discussions reveal that heritage tourism governance in Lasem can be viewed as a form of uneven collaboration. Heritage tourism is organised through cooperation among tour organisers, community groups, house and batik workshop managers, and temple caretakers. However, their roles and influence differ across spatial, narrative, and organisational practices. Tour routes and interpretive frameworks are primarily shaped by tourism organisations and guides, while house owners and caretakers participate mainly through granting access and narrating their own spaces. This configuration reflects that collaborative governance in Lasem heritage tourism is involving multiple actors but Brainfluence over agenda setting and framing remains differentiated (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Rather than a fully deliberative or symmetrical process, collaboration in Lasem operates through practical coordination and role differentiation, consistent with process-oriented accounts of governance emphasising interaction and mutual adjustment over formal authority (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

Uneven collaboration in heritage-making in Lasem can be understood through both everyday practices and the organisational structures of tourism. Heritage is not only constituted through expert designation or formal conservation frameworks but also through routine local practices, such as opening domestic spaces, sustaining batik production, and recounting family histories. These practices demonstrate that local actors actively participate in producing heritage meanings grounded in lived experience (Harrison, 2012; Robertson, 2012). However, this participation is not unconstrained: house owners and temple caretakers articulate their perspectives selectively, often emphasising architecture, family history, and daily practices while treating politically sensitive histories with caution.

At the same time, the politics of heritage tourism shape which houses, temples, and workshops are included in tour routes, and which narratives are foregrounded, influencing how Chinese Indonesian heritage becomes visible in public tourism settings. While formal state heritage institutions may not drive these processes, tourism organisations and community groups exercise acts of selection and authorisation that structure recognition and representation (Wijaya et al., 2023). The emphasis on architectural hybridity, harmony, and everyday coexistence illustrates how heritage is curated to be socially acceptable and intelligible to visitors, whereas more contentious historical experiences are narrated indirectly or left implicit. In this way, heritage tourism in Lasem is political not through overt conflict but through routine organisational practices that mediate local expression and public visibility (Göçer et al., 2024; Zhu, 2015, 2025)

Importantly, uneven collaboration does not indicate the failure of collaborative governance. Rather, it reveals how collaboration becomes workable under conditions of historical marginalisation and social sensitivity. Tour organisers and guides translate heritage into coherent narratives for visitors, while house owners and caretakers retain control over access and over how their histories are disclosed. This division of roles allows heritage tourism to function without formalised governance structures, consistent with observations that community-based heritage tourism often relies on informal networks and

situational consent (Putri, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2023). Collaboration is therefore sustained not through equal participation in all decisions, but through complementary roles that stabilise interaction between tourism actors and local residents.

This configuration has broader social implications for Chinese Indonesian–Javanese relations. By embedding heritage tourism in everyday spaces and framing narratives around coexistence and hybridity, collaboration contributes to the public articulation of a shared local history while avoiding direct confrontation with divisive pasts. Such practices can be read as a form of social resilience, enabling heritage to be made visible in ways that are culturally acceptable and emotionally manageable for both hosts and visitors. Rather than resolving historical tensions, heritage tourism in Lasem provides a platform for maintaining social continuity through carefully mediated representation. Uneven collaboration thus functions not only as a governance arrangement but also as a social strategy through which heritage tourism becomes compatible with everyday interethnic relations and with the lived realities of Chinese Indonesian communities in Lasem (Mandaka et al., 2025; Zhu, 2025).

Clearly, uneven collaboration in heritage tourism in Lasem demonstrates how collaborative governance and the politics of heritage tourism intersect in practice. Heritage is produced through everyday participation but selectively articulated through tourism networks that stabilise particular narratives and spatial choices. This configuration enables marginalised histories to gain public visibility while remaining carefully framed. Uneven collaboration therefore constitutes a practical condition through which heritage tourism is sustained in a historically layered and socially sensitive context, rather than a deviation from collaborative governance ideals.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Heritage tourism is no longer regarded solely as a cultural or economic activity, but is increasingly framed as a complex governance and management challenge. In this context, this study shows that heritage tourism in Lasem operates through informal everyday collaboration where tour organisers, community members, house owners, and temple caretakers coordinate practices to sustain local heritage. Heritage emerges not from formal institutional structures but through repeated interaction, negotiated access, and shared responsibility in ordinary spaces. This demonstrates that collaborative governance can function effectively even in historically marginalised contexts by relying on practical coordination rather than rigid rules, and that the visibility and continuity of heritage often depend on these everyday lived practices.

At the same time, collaboration is uneven. Decisions about which sites are included in tours and which narratives are emphasised are largely shaped by tourism organisers while community members contribute primarily by granting access and sharing personal stories. Heritage narratives emphasise coexistence and hybridity while politically sensitive histories are carefully managed. Collaborative governance in this context unfolds less as equal deliberation and more as negotiated role differentiation, balancing participation with selective influence over space and story. This suggests that the ideals of the theory, such as shared authority and deliberative equality, are adapted in practice to fit local social, cultural, and historical realities.

This study contributes to collaborative governance theory by challenging its normative assumptions of structured interaction and shared authority. It demonstrates that in socially sensitive heritage contexts, governance is sustained through informal coordination, selective participation, and embedded power asymmetries. Uneven collaboration should therefore be understood not as a failure of governance, but as an adaptive configuration that enables coordination under conditions of historical marginalisation and social risk. From a policy perspective, heritage tourism governance should move beyond formal participation frameworks and recognise the importance of informal practices and everyday spaces. Governance interventions should focus on enabling more inclusive narrative representation, strengthening the capacity of local actors beyond access provision, and creating safe conditions for expressing historically sensitive perspectives without imposing rigid institutional control. Future research should examine how these forms of informal and uneven collaboration evolve over time, particularly in relation to interethnic relations, trust-building, and social resilience. Comparative studies across different heritage contexts would further clarify whether negotiated and uneven collaboration represents a broader pattern in marginalised tourism settings, and how such governance arrangements can be supported without undermining their flexibility.

6. REFERENCES

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