Available Online: 24 November 2026 DOI: 10.54254/2977-5701/2026.39485

Tourists as constitutive elements of tourism products: conceptualization and applications to scenic-area planning

Siqi Bie, Lijun Feng, Tingting Huang, Shouxiang Shi*

Yunnan Tourism College, Kunming, China

*Corresponding Author. Email: shishouxiang@qdu.edu.cn

Abstract. The integration of culture and tourism, coupled with the development of digital media, has made tourists' choices, on-site activities, and post-trip expressions increasingly influential in shaping scenic area experiences. This paper defines the scope of application of the concept of "tourists as the product" and establishes a framework for translating this concept into practice at the scenic area planning stage. The study argues that the concept refers to the ways in which tourists participate in creating tourism products through practices such as resource searches, situational engagement, peer interaction, content production, and experience evaluation, thereby helping shape tourism products that can be perceived by both themselves and others. In scenic area planning and design, this concept can be operationalized by adopting "tourist–setting touchpoints" as the basic unit of analysis and identifying five key planning tasks: demand diagnosis, experience orchestration, spatial and facility planning, content and revenue governance, and operational simulation. This paper further elaborates on the implementation pathways for applying the concept at the planning and conceptual design stages of scenic area development. It advocates shifting the focus of planning from physical space construction to the design of tourist experience scripts and creating open settings that stimulate value co-creation among tourists. In doing so, it offers a new theoretical paradigm and practical approach to digital cultural tourism planning and operations.

Keywords: tourists as the product, scenic area planning, value co-creation, experience design

1. Introduction

In 2025, China recorded 6.52 billion domestic tourist trips, with total domestic tourism expenditure exceeding RMB 6.3 trillion and the overall scale of the culture and tourism industry reaching RMB 12.3 trillion[1]. The industry has entered a new stage of development characterized by the parallel expansion of market size and improvement in quality. The widespread penetration of digital media continues to reshape the operational logic of the culture and tourism industry. Currently, 88% of tourists have developed a habit of making travel

[1] Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China. (2026, June 2). Statistical bulletin on cultural and tourism development in 2025. https://www.gov.cn/lianbo/202606/content_7070917.htm

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

decisions driven by online content[2], while 67% share their travel experiences on social media platforms within two weeks after completing their trips[3]. Tourists' pre-trip resource searches, on-site situational engagement, and post-trip content production have collectively become important components of tourism products. This has driven a shift in the logic of tourism supply from the one-way model of "enterprise production–tourist consumption" toward a two-way interactive model of value co-creation involving multiple stakeholders.

Against this backdrop, tourists are no longer passive recipients of scenic area products but have become key actors in shaping product forms through their own practices. Nevertheless, the planning and design of most scenic areas still follow the traditional approach of prioritizing physical space construction, with infrastructure and landscape engineering serving as the primary deliverables. As a result, these developments often fail to adequately accommodate tourists' dynamic behaviors and diverse needs. Industry data indicate that only 16.8% of scenic areas update their products more than twice a year[4]. Meanwhile, many immersive experience projects emphasize form over substance, with market failure rates reaching 70%–80%[5]. These figures reveal a disconnect between planning practices that overlook tourists' activities and the structural mismatch between tourism supply and demand. At the same time, new challenges, including the long-tail effects of tourist-generated content, spatial conflicts arising from the shared use of spaces by tourists and local residents, and the protection of data privacy and individual rights, have placed additional demands on traditional scenic area planning systems.

Conventional scenic area planning typically begins with an assessment of resource endowments, market size, spatial capacity, and facility allocation to determine visitor routes, key activity nodes, and service configurations. However, the actual experiences tourists derive also depend on how they interpret a place, interact with others, choose their modes of participation, and recount their journeys after leaving. Service-dominant logic conceptualizes value as the outcome of actors integrating resources through use [1]. Research on value co-creation places interaction at the center of the experience formation process [2]. In tourism contexts, tourists' attention and engagement are closely associated with experiential memory [3], while interactions among tourists can also generate social and emotional value [4]. These studies provide a theoretical foundation for planners to reconsider and identify the role of tourist activities. Existing research on value co-creation and destination governance has established the value contribution of tourist practices. However, a systematic approach to translating these insights into the scenic area planning process has yet to emerge, making it difficult to guide planning practices in their transition from spatial design to experience design.

Accordingly, this paper proposes the core concept of "tourists as the product" and adopts "tourist–setting touchpoints" as the basic unit of analysis. It systematically defines the concept's connotations, characteristics, and scope of application, with the aim of enriching the theoretical paradigms of culture and tourism planning

---

[2] Meadin Research Institute. (2026, June 18). 2026 Douyin report on cultural and tourism consumption trends: Content stimulates the experience economy in culture and tourism. Sohu. https://www.sohu.com/a/1036945425_101283

[3] Chinese Tourists Agency. (2026, July 20). Chinese tourist feedback: What they actually tell us after the trip. https://chinesetouristagency.com/chinese-tourist-feedback-what-they-actually-tell-us-after-the-trip/

[4] China Tourism Academy. (2026). Report on the development of China's scenic areas and tourist resorts (2025–2026). Tourism Education Press.

[5] Wang, S. (2025, October 20). Tourism is changing: From looking good to being fun. China News Weekly. https://www.chinanews.com.cn/sh/2025/10-20/10501662.shtml

and providing practical, implementable pathways for experience enhancement and sustainable operations in scenic areas in the new era.

2. Literature review

2.1. Value co-creation: from experiential value to tourist practices

Research on the intrinsic value of tourism suggests that the sense of meaning and personal experiences derived from travel should be incorporated into the understanding of tourism products [5]. The shift in tourist studies toward "gazing–performing–co-creating" situates souvenirs and design within the relational process of place production and tourist use [6]. Further international research has identified different sources of value co-creation through on-site participation [3] and interactions among tourists [4]. These studies demonstrate that tourists' actions can alter the forms of products they actually experience, and that their contributions cannot be adequately captured by expenditure or satisfaction levels alone. However, existing research presents differences in the scale of analysis. On the one hand, studies on souvenirs focus on the relationship between the production and consumption of physical objects; research on on-site co-creation examines attention, engagement, and memory within individual activities; and studies on tourist interactions focus on group practices. Directly aggregating these findings into the conclusion that "the more tourists participate, the better the products become" would obscure these differences. On the other hand, the emphasis of tourist participation also varies. The emotional and cognitive characteristics of young tourists can provide inspiration for the dynamic development of cultural and creative products [7], whereas research on the tourism industry for older adults emphasizes the need to align health conditions, travel characteristics, and support systems [8]. Therefore, participation in planning should encompass activities of varying levels of intensity, including creation, interpretation, social interaction, observation, and contemplation. Designers need to distinguish among functional, emotional, and other dimensions of value [9], while allowing tourists to change their choices throughout the same journey.

2.2. Host–guest sharing and relational destinations

Viewing destinations as dynamic processes involving multiple interconnected elements provides a perspective for analyzing the relationships among tourist activities, facilities, and local life [10]. Research on the integration of public cultural services and public tourism services proposes further development toward a people-oriented approach and shared spaces for residents and tourists [11]. This indicates that streets, cultural facilities, and living spaces near scenic area boundaries serve multiple groups of users. Planning should therefore identify the respective needs of residents and tourists within the same spatial environment. Research on the in-depth integration of culture and tourism emphasizes pathways for multi-stakeholder collaboration [12]. Whether residents participate in host–guest co-creation is also related to their perceptions of tourism impacts and their satisfaction with life [13]. Accordingly, the value of tourist activities must be assessed in conjunction with residents' use of spaces, local cultural expression, and the costs of providing public services. However, host–guest sharing does not mean that residents' everyday lives should be made indefinitely available for public viewing. Public cultural facilities have a primary responsibility to serve local communities. Where tourism demand exists, visitor routes, quiet zones, activity schedules, and guided-tour content should be determined through consultation.

Meanwhile, the integration of social media into online travel information searches means that post-trip expressions may become resources through which future visitors learn about destinations [14]. Research on metaverse scenarios has expanded the possibilities for interaction between virtual and physical environments

[15], while the integration of technology, consumer experience, and industry has emerged as an important research topic [16]. These studies provide a basis for understanding the dissemination pathways of tourist-generated content. Nevertheless, a distinction must still be made between the visibility of content on platforms and its representativeness of tourists as a whole. Furthermore, the influence of tourist-generated content involves two temporal gaps. First, although the experience of an individual visit has ended, accounts of that experience may remain searchable for an extended period. Second, even after scenic area services have been adjusted, old images and videos may continue to shape the expectations of new visitors. Planners should therefore establish mechanisms in advance for information updates, error correction, and withdrawal of consent. The volume of visible content can serve as a dissemination indicator, but its influence on local understanding and visitation decisions requires separate measurement. This raises an important question for scenic area planning and design: when buildings, equipment, and budgets are determined in advance, how can manageable spaces be provided for tourists' independent interpretations, collective activities, and content expression?

Overall, existing studies have conducted in-depth discussions from the perspectives of value co-creation, host–guest sharing, and digital dissemination. They have established the central role of tourist practices in generating tourism experiences and enhancing destination value, thereby providing a solid theoretical foundation for further research. However, existing discussions are largely fragmented across individual activities or stages of information dissemination. They have yet to incorporate the full range of tourist practices—including pre-trip resource searches, on-site situational engagement, and post-trip content expression—into a unified analytical framework, nor have they established a systematic pathway for translating tourist practices into specific scenic area planning tasks. Accordingly, this paper focuses on addressing two questions. First, how should the conceptual connotations, core characteristics, and boundaries of applicability of the "tourists as the product" concept be defined? Second, how can this concept be applied to establish corresponding actionable and verifiable work tasks and deliverables at the scenic area planning stage? To some extent, this study extends the theory of tourism value co-creation into specific scenarios and enriches the theoretical research paradigm of scenic area planning. It also provides practical guidance for enhancing tourist experiences, optimizing spatial arrangements, and advancing digital operations in contemporary cultural and tourism destinations, thereby contributing to the deeper integration and high-quality development of culture and tourism.

3. The connotations and characteristics of the "tourists as the product" concept

3.1. Conceptual definition and value generation mechanisms

This paper defines scenic area tourism products as contextual combinations of local resources, organized services, tourist practices, and their representations through dissemination, formed within a specific travel journey. The concept of "tourists as the product" refers to the incorporation of tourist practices into this combination, thereby influencing how tourism products are experienced and understood. Its effects can be divided into three pathways. First, tourists make choices about routes, length of stay, sightseeing, and creation, thereby shaping the content of their individual experiences. Second, interactions between tourists and their companions, other tourists, and local residents influence the atmosphere and order of shared settings. Third, tourists publish images, reviews, and narratives with proper authorization, thereby influencing other people's

searches and expectations. These three pathways correspond to experience generation, relationship generation, and representational dissemination, respectively. They may be interconnected or occur independently.

On this basis, three types of planning outcomes can be distinguished. Experience generation can be assessed by examining tourists' understanding of interpretation and commentary, the emotional value they derive, and the demands placed on them by activities. Relationship generation can be assessed through the quality of social interactions, perceived crowding, and residents' everyday use of spaces. Representational dissemination can be assessed through information accuracy, willingness to share, and changes in the expectations of subsequent visitors. There is no fixed order of priority among these three types of outcomes; their relative importance should be determined by the nature of the scenic area. Ecological conservation areas may prioritize reducing human disturbance, urban neighborhoods may place greater emphasis on maintaining shared access and circulation, while themed scenic areas may attach greater importance to the continuity of participatory activities.

A "tourist–setting touchpoint" consists of six elements: the temporal stage, the specific location or interface, available actions, relevant stakeholders, support systems, and observable outcomes. Taking a craft exhibition in a traditional neighborhood as an example, tourists may choose to observe, ask questions, or participate in the production process. Operators need to provide explanations and materials, while residents and craftspeople have legitimate interests in cultural representation and the use of space. Designers must assess the capacity, safety, cultural accuracy, costs, and exit options associated with each type of activity.

3.2. Characteristics and boundaries of applicability

First, tourist contributions are context-dependent. The same facilities may generate different experiences depending on weather conditions, travel companions, physical abilities, and crowding levels. Second, such contributions are relational. The presence of others may create more opportunities for interaction, but it may also increase waiting times and the costs associated with conflicts. Third, tourist contributions extend across the pre-trip, on-site, and post-trip stages, with searches and sharing connecting the journeys of different tourists. Fourth, such contributions are conditional. Tourists' willingness to participate, the effort required, and the returns they receive jointly influence their experiences. From the perspective of tourism value co-creation, the relationship between the intensity of tourist participation and its outcomes needs to be examined in specific contexts [17]. Therefore, a high participation rate alone is insufficient to demonstrate the success of a planning scheme.

This concept is primarily applicable to scenic areas with identifiable visitor journeys and the capacity to adjust service provision and spatial arrangements. For ecologically sensitive areas, heritage sites with limited carrying capacity, and neighborhoods where tourism activities substantially overlap with residents' everyday lives, conservation and sharing rules must be established first. Observation, relaxation, and solitude can also constitute complete tourism experiences. Planning schemes should provide non-digital access channels and accessibility options, without making public performance or data tracking a prerequisite for enjoying core services.

4. Application of the "tourists as the product" concept at the scenic area planning stage

4.1. Demand diagnosis: identifying behaviors and their absence

Market research should document how tourists obtain information, select routes, decide how long to stay, seek assistance, and share their experiences. It should also record those who do not participate in activities and the reasons for their non-participation. Interviews, accompanied walks, behavioral observations, accessibility assessments, and consultations with local residents can be used to cross-validate findings. Publicly available online content is useful for identifying emerging needs or informal routes, but tourists who actively share their experiences cannot be regarded as representative of the entire visitor population. Researchers can develop journey scenarios based on travel motivations, companion relationships, physical capabilities, and digital literacy, and then identify key touchpoints associated with entering, getting lost, queuing, withdrawing, and leaving. In particular, research should distinguish between tourists who have "no opportunity to participate" and those who "actively choose not to participate". The former may result from facility barriers, time constraints, information gaps, or activity entry requirements, whereas the latter may reflect preferences for relaxation, privacy, or independent exploration. These two situations require different planning responses. Interview questions should therefore cover the reasons behind tourists' choices of activities, while on-site records should preserve the trajectories of both participants and non-participants.

The planning deliverables should consist of a set of verifiable statements of demand. For example, one visitor group may require a half-hour route that allows them to stop or withdraw at any point, while another may prefer longer stays and in-depth interpretation. Local residents, meanwhile, need to retain access for their everyday travel. These findings can inform the development of optional levels of participation, contemplative routes, and designated time slots for shared spaces. The research team should identify the evidence sources and population groups not yet covered for each demand statement, thereby avoiding the assumption that popularity necessarily reflects universal demand.

4.2. Product and experience orchestration: transforming cultural resources into optional activities

Experience orchestration should begin with local cultural content and invite tourists to observe, interpret, create, or interact at a limited number of key nodes. The extraction of regional cultural elements [18], as well as architectural art and traditional architectural features, can provide tangible and recognizable cultural cues [19]. Planners can incorporate these cues into interpretation scripts and hands-on activities while specifying their cultural origins, the responsibilities for interpretation, and the review procedures involved.

Each activity should clearly specify four aspects: "What do tourists do? What do they gain? What support do staff provide? How can tourists withdraw?" For example, tourists may compare the historical functions of a building with its contemporary uses and then select a particular detail to create a personal observation card. The card may be kept as a private memento, while its public display requires separate authorization. The service blueprint should simultaneously specify material supplies, staff guidance, queue management, accessible information, and cleaning and maintenance arrangements [20]. When the objectives of cultural understanding conflict with those of photographic sharing and dissemination, planners should adjust the process in accordance with heritage interpretation requirements and tourists' freedom of choice.

Prototype testing can be conducted before formal construction using temporary signage, portable interpretation materials, and short-duration activities. For each prototype, researchers should record the number of visitors entering, length of stay, points of withdrawal, and tourists' verbal accounts of their cultural

understanding, and compare these findings with those from nearby nodes where no activities have been introduced. If participation is concentrated primarily among groups already familiar with digital tools, the presentation of information and activity duration should be revised before considering additional investment in physical facilities. This sequence helps ensure that product concepts gradually align with actual patterns of use.

4.3. Spatial planning and facilities: supporting encounters, stays, and retreat

Spatial plans should allocate appropriate passage widths, activity areas, shading, seating, and directional information according to different levels of participation. Interactive nodes should be positioned away from circulation bottlenecks and vulnerable heritage sites, with quiet alternative routes provided for visitors who prefer to avoid these areas. Activities designed for children, older adults, and people with mobility impairments should include designated rest points and operating interfaces at different heights. In shared neighborhoods, the entrances and opening hours of public cultural facilities, as well as routes commonly used by residents, should be planned in conjunction with tourist routes [11].

Spatial design should also consider visibility and accessibility as separate factors. A landscape suitable for photography may not be appropriate for extended stays. Similarly, if an accessible route bypasses major cultural interpretation nodes, formal physical connectivity alone cannot guarantee an equivalent experience. During plan reviews, drawings should indicate designated areas for stopping, clear passage widths, wheelchair turning spaces, shaded areas, and distances to toilets. On-site walking assessments should also be conducted to verify whether different groups can independently complete the core visitor routes. Digital facilities should address specific needs, such as helping tourists understand archaeological sites that are difficult to access or providing multilingual interpretation. The value of new technologies depends on content quality, equipment reliability, the burden of use, and operational and maintenance capacity.

4.4. Content, rights, and benefits: establishing rules for sustainable operations

Tourists' photographs and reviews can extend the dissemination cycle of scenic area products [14]. At the planning stage, clear rules should be established regarding photography boundaries, the protection of minors and bystanders, authorization procedures for incorporating user-generated content into official channels, withdrawal procedures, attribution, and potential remuneration. Tourist data should only be collected for clearly specified service purposes, while the analysis of publicly available content should also comply with platform rules and personal information protection requirements. Operators need to include content review, appeals, deletion procedures, and data security in their staffing and system budgets.

Commercial feasibility assessments can separately estimate the revenues and costs associated with free core experiences, optional workshops, customized souvenirs, and licensed content. In addition to consumer conversion rates, performance indicators should include the interpretive value received by tourists, willingness to revisit, benefits to local residents, and the burden placed on shared spaces. Benefit-sharing arrangements should be incorporated into operational agreements [7]. Even when tourists do not create content, they should still be able to enjoy a complete and attractive basic experience. The parties entitled to share in the benefits should also include local stakeholders who contribute cultural knowledge and labor. If craftspeople are responsible for teaching while the scenic area generates revenue from admission tickets and content dissemination, the planning scheme should clearly specify remuneration, rights to use their work, authorization for the use of their likenesses, and interpretive rights. Such agreements can provide operators with stable expectations for collaboration while reducing the risk of local culture being oversimplified and treated merely as a photographic prop. Managers should regularly disclose activity evaluations and the

outcomes of complaint handling so that all collaborating stakeholders can jointly review and revise operational arrangements.

4.5. Operational simulation: testing the plan before construction

After preliminary drawings have been completed, tourists, local residents, staff members, and users with accessibility needs can be invited to participate in scenario-based simulations. Scenarios should include overcrowding at key nodes, a lack of participation in activities, older tourists being unable to use digital interfaces, blocked access routes for residents, challenges to cultural narratives, and requests from tourists to withdraw their content. For each scenario, the frontline response, back-office responsibilities, and costs of spatial adjustments should be recorded before deciding whether to retain, reduce, or eliminate the relevant design elements.

Evaluation should correspond to the previously defined touchpoints and combine observational data with experience reports. Relevant indicators may include voluntary participation rates, refusal rates, comprehension of interpretive content, length of stay and route deviations, accessibility-related incidents, perceived crowding, complaints from residents, withdrawal of content authorization, operational costs, and willingness to revisit. Pilot schemes should ideally establish comparable baselines and document seasonal conditions, visitor flows, and activity types. This makes it possible to determine whether a particular change has genuinely improved tourist experiences or merely increased the volume of content published. Where conditions permit, two alternative touchpoint schemes can be implemented alternately on dates with comparable visitor flows to compare tourists' understanding, willingness to participate, and operational costs. For sites where random allocation is not feasible, background variables such as weather conditions, public holidays, and group sizes should be documented. Records of impacts on residents should be maintained separately from tourist satisfaction surveys to prevent high overall satisfaction scores from obscuring the burden placed on public spaces. Immediate suspension and revision thresholds should be established for safety, privacy, and heritage-related risks arising from the proposed schemes.

5. Conclusion and prospect

5.1. Research conclusion

The concept of "tourists as the product" incorporates tourist practices into the process of tourism product formation, providing a new perspective for scenic area planning. This paper defines three pathways and four characteristics of the concept and uses "tourist–setting touchpoints" to connect five key planning tasks: demand diagnosis, experience orchestration, spatial and facility planning, content governance, and operational simulation. The practical value of this framework lies in enabling tourist activities and the support conditions they require to be discussed, tested, and revised before construction begins. This framework can be applied to planning briefs, design reviews, and operational handovers. Planning briefs should first specify the activities of target tourist groups and the patterns of space use by local residents, and then propose optional activity invitations. Design reviews should simultaneously examine cultural foundations, spatial capacity, accessibility, back-office procedures, and rights-related rules. Operational handovers should link pilot evaluation indicators to the departments responsible for their implementation. Table 1 presents the minimum deliverables for each of the five planning tasks.

Table 1. Decision matrix for scenic area planning under the "tourists as the product" concept

Planning Task	Core Evidence	Planning Deliverables	Verification and Boundaries
Demand Diagnosis	Pre-trip searches, on-site behaviors, refusal to participate, and residents' use of spaces	Journey scenarios and a list of touchpoints	Sample coverage, accessibility, and non-digital needs
Experience Orchestration	Cultural cues, prototype feedback, and comprehension of interpretive content	Activity invitations, scripts, and service blueprints	Cultural accuracy, withdrawal options, and staff support
Spatial and Facility Planning	Capacity, queuing, length of stay, and route deviations	Plans for nodes, visitor routes, and flexible facilities	Heritage conservation, safety, and residents' access
Content and Benefit Governance	Authorization options, content creation costs, and operational costs	Content rules and benefit-sharing models	Privacy, attribution, withdrawal, and fair distribution
Operational Simulation	Failure scenarios, pilot indicators, and complaints	Revised drawings, staff responsibilities, and monitoring plans	Baseline comparisons and continuous adjustments

5.2. Practical implication

5.2.1. Expanding the conceptual boundaries of scenic area products by focusing on tourist practices

The concept of "tourists as the product" incorporates tourists' practices throughout the entire journey into the process of tourism product formation, providing a new perspective for scenic area planning. Planning should incorporate tourists' activities, including resource searches, situational engagement, interactions with companions, content production, and experience evaluation, into the composition of tourism products. These activities should be considered alongside spatial facilities and standardized services as core elements of scenic area product planning. This approach enriches the definition of tourism products, broadens the scope of planning and design considerations, and promotes a shift in the understanding of scenic area products from a supply-side-dominated model toward one jointly constructed by supply and demand.

5.2.2. Establishing a systematic planning framework based on "tourist–setting touchpoints"

Using "tourist–setting touchpoints" as the basic unit of analysis makes it possible to connect the five core planning tasks of demand diagnosis, experience orchestration, spatial and facility planning, content and benefit governance, and operational simulation, thereby establishing a planning framework that covers the entire tourist experience process. During planning, differentiated priorities can be assigned according to tourists' behavioral characteristics at each touchpoint. Specifically, demand diagnosis identifies tourist behavioral data and patterns of setting use; experience orchestration explores cultural cues and service operational logic; spatial and facility planning aligns tourist activity routes with spatial carrying capacity; content and benefit governance clarifies content-related rules and benefit-sharing arrangements; and operational simulation establishes mechanisms for early risk identification and effectiveness verification. In this way, the five planning tasks can be coordinated and connected in a systematic and orderly manner.

5.2.3. Establishing a closed-loop planning quality management mechanism based on "evidence–deliverables–verification"

For each of the five core planning tasks, the corresponding core evidence, planning deliverables, and verification boundaries can be clearly defined to establish a standardized closed-loop quality management framework. Each planning task should be based on actual tourist behavioral data, operational feedback, and other relevant evidence as the primary basis for decision-making, produce corresponding actionable planning outcomes, and establish clear verification criteria and boundary constraints. This management mechanism enables tourist activities and the support conditions they require to be thoroughly discussed, tested, and revised before project construction, thereby effectively improving the scientific rigor, feasibility, and adaptability of planning schemes.

5.2.4. Extending planning outcomes to full-cycle operational implementation

The conceptual framework of "tourists as the product" can be widely applied to three key stages of scenic area development: the preparation of planning briefs, design reviews, and operational handovers. This enables closer integration between planning and design and the actual implementation of operations. During the preparation of planning briefs, the activity characteristics of target tourist groups and the patterns of residents' space use should be clearly defined, along with proposed options for inviting tourists to participate in activities. During design reviews, multiple dimensions should be examined simultaneously, including cultural foundations, spatial capacity, accessibility design, back-office procedures, and rights-related rules. During operational handovers, pilot operation indicators should be matched individually with the departments responsible for their implementation, ensuring that the planning concept is continuously translated into actual operational practices and that the value of planning is sustained throughout the entire project lifecycle.

5.3. Research prospect

The concept of "tourists as the product" and the scenic area planning framework developed in this study provide a foundational rationale and practical reference for transforming scenic area planning in the context of culture and tourism integration. Future research could further deepen and expand this framework from multiple perspectives. First, multi-case empirical studies could be conducted in scenic areas with different resource types and at different stages of development. By combining tourist behavioral data with operational feedback, researchers could examine the applicability of the framework, refine the identification criteria and quantitative indicators for "tourist–setting touchpoints" in different contexts, and enhance the contextual adaptability of planning tools. Second, in light of developments in digital cultural tourism technologies, future research could explore the application of technologies such as big data sensing and intelligent interaction to the identification of tourist practices and the dynamic orchestration of experiences, while improving methods for measuring and evaluating tourist value co-creation. Third, further attention could be devoted to content governance and benefit distribution, with in-depth investigations into institutional arrangements for protecting tourists' rights in user-generated content and ensuring the fair distribution of benefits among multiple stakeholders. Such research should seek to balance the vitality of value co-creation with risk prevention and control in areas such as data privacy and cultural heritage conservation, thereby providing more comprehensive theoretical support for the high-quality development of scenic areas in the new era.

Fundings

The Yunnan College of Tourism Vocation Institutional Research Fund Project, "Research on Pathways for Integrating Industry and Education through Industry–Education Integration Communities to Empower

Tourism Talent Development in Higher Vocational Colleges" (2025YLZY10); the 2026 Scientific Research Fund Project of the Yunnan Provincial Department of Education, "Research on the Impact of Destination Residential Tourism Attributes on the Employment Intentions of Tourism-Related Graduates" (2026J1640); and the 2026 Scientific Research Fund Project of the Yunnan Provincial Department of Education, "Research on Practical Pathways for Rural Residential Tourism to Promote Interaction, Exchange, and Integration among Ethnic Groups" (2026J1644)

References

[1] Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing, 68*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.68.1.1.24036

[2] Prahalad, C. K., & Ramaswamy, V. (2004). Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 18*(3), 5–14. https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.20015

[3] Campos, A. C., Mendes, J., do Valle, P. O., & Scott, N. (2017). Co-creating animal-based tourist experiences: Attention, involvement and memorability. *Tourism Management, 63*, 100–114. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.06.001

[4] Rihova, I., Buhalis, D., Gouthro, M. B., & Moital, M. (2018). Customer-to-customer co-creation practices in tourism: Lessons from customer-dominant logic. *Tourism Management, 67*, 362–375. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.02.010

[5] Zhang, J., & Zhang, J. (2021). On the intrinsic value of tourism: An in-depth analysis of tourism endowments and tourism development. *Guizhou Ethnic Studies, 42*(3), 176–181.

[6] Liu, Y., & Zou, F. (2023). Gaze–performance–co-creation: Souvenirs and design research amid the shift in tourist studies. *Art and Design Research*, (2), 77–82.

[7] Yu, L., Chen, G., Li, S., Wang, S., & Zhao, L. (2025). Dynamic development strategies for tourism cultural and creative products based on the emotional cognition of young people. *Packaging Engineering, 46*(8), 164–178.

[8] Liu, Y. (2023). The formation mechanism, supporting factors, and lessons from the development of Japan's elderly tourism industry. *Contemporary Economy of Japan*, (5), 55–64.

[9] Sun, B., & Du, H. (2022). Research on the design of tourism cultural and creative products based on consumer value theory. *Packaging Engineering, 43*(22), 333–340.

[10] Xu, H., Li, J., & Wang, Y. (2025). Rethinking the evolution of rural tourism destinations through assemblage theory. *Tourism Tribune, 40*(4), 79–91.

[11] Yang, L., Li, S., & Zhang, Q. (2024). The theoretical connotations and practical directions of the integrated development of public cultural services and tourism public services. *Library Journal, 43*(3), 18–25.

[12] Zhan, S., & Huang, X. (2024). The connotations, logic, and path innovation of the in-depth integration of culture and tourism. *Administration Reform*, (7), 12–21.

[13] Lin, Z., Chen, Y., & Filieri, R. (2017). Resident-tourist value co-creation: The role of residents' perceived tourism impacts and life satisfaction. *Tourism Management, 61*, 436–442. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.02.013

[14] Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management, 31*(2), 179–188. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.02.016

[15] Ma, S. (2024). The theoretical logic and practical pathways of empowering digital tourism scenarios through the metaverse. *Social Scientist*, (4), 53–58.

[16] Weng, L., Yang, L., & Yu, Y. (2025). Research hotspots and prospects in digital culture and tourism in China: A knowledge mapping analysis based on CiteSpace and VOSviewer. *Journal of Central China Normal University (Natural Sciences), 59*(3), 321–333.

[17] Zhang, Y. (2023). Tourist co-creation and tourism marketing outcomes: An inverted U-shaped relationship. *Journal of Business Research, 166*, 114105. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114105

[18] Chen, W. (2022). Design strategies for integrating regional cultural elements into tourism products in Dujiangyan. *Packaging Engineering, 43*(24), 269–276.

[19] Hou, K. (2024). Exploring the integration of tourism cultural and creative product design and architectural art. *Building Science, 40*(11), 195–196.

[20] Bitner, M. J., Ostrom, A. L., & Morgan, F. N. (2008). Service blueprinting: A practical technique for service innovation. *California Management Review, 50*(3), 66–94. https://doi.org/10.2307/41166446