

# **The Custodians: Profiling Professional Roles in Management and Marketing for Cultural Heritage Tourism**

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## **Abstract**

Heritage is a vibrant tapestry of culture, history, and tradition that shapes our identity, fosters unity, and inspires future generations. Professionals in cultural heritage management and tourism play a crucial role in preserving, interpreting, and facilitating access to these invaluable assets, ensuring their continued relevance and appreciation. This research focuses on the United States and examines the essential skills and competencies required for professionals in this field. By employing a big data analysis methodology, the study identifies critical employability skills, highlighting digital literacy and community engagement as pivotal. The research underscores how these skills are evolving with technological advancements and offers practical guidance for professionals. Unlike traditional frameworks which use standardized methods, this study's use of big data provides a dynamic, real-time assessment of skill requirements. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the professional landscape and stress the importance of multidisciplinary skills in addressing the challenges of preserving and promoting cultural heritage.

## **Keywords**

Cultural Heritage Management, Cultural Heritage Marketing, Cultural Tourism, Employability Skills, Profiling.

## **Introduction**

Cultural heritage (CH) is more than a reflection of days of old; it is a vibrant tapestry of human history and tradition that shapes our identity and fosters unity. UNESCO defines CH as “our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations” (2024), highlighting its critical role in connecting cultures across time. In an era of rapid globalization, the preservation and celebration of these heritage assets are increasingly important yet complex.

Despite the acknowledged significance of CH, there is a notable gap in understanding the specific skills required for professionals in cultural heritage management (CHM) and tourism. This research addresses this gap by focusing on the United States, examining the essential competencies needed for effective CHM and promotion. By analysing current job descriptions and employing a big data analysis methodology, the study explores real-time employer demands and profiles critical employability skills (Smaldone et al., 2022).

The findings highlight a growing need for competencies such as digital literacy and community engagement, reflecting trends towards using digital tools and fostering genuine community involvement in this sector. This approach not only fills a critical void in the current literature but also offers practical guidance for enhancing professional practices in CHM heritage. By equipping CHM professionals with these essential skills, this research supports their role as custodians of culture, entrusted with preserving and nurturing our shared heritage.

## **Theoretical Background**

CHM refers to the strategic and operational processes involved in preserving, protecting, and promoting CH assets. These encompass tangible artifacts such as monuments, buildings, and ruins, as well as intangible elements like traditions, languages, and practices (Silva & Roders, 2012; UNESCO, 2003). The primary objective of CHM is to ensure that CH is not only safeguarded for future generations but also integrated into contemporary society in meaningful and sustainable ways (Pereira Roders & Van Oers, 2011). In the United States (US), CHM has evolved significantly over the past few decades. Initially focused on preserving tangible heritage sites and artifacts, often through governmental and non-profit organizations (Elia, 2014), it has since adapted to changes in the cultural landscape and market dynamics (Hadley, 2024). The recognition of intangible CH and its integration into broader socio-economic frameworks have been crucial to this evolution (Myers, 2016). A key driver has been the growing recognition of CH as central to national and local identity and economic development (Hampton, 2005). In the US, CH sites and activities are increasingly central to the tourism industry, generating significant revenue and employment opportunities (McNiven & Connaughton, 2014). CH is now also recognised as a catalyst for community development, social cohesion, and improved quality of life (Murzyn-Kupisz & Działek 2013).

Cultural heritage marketing (CHMk) in the US intersects CHM and tourism, focusing on promoting cultural assets to attract diverse audiences (Chen et al., 2024). It involves communicating the value of heritage sites and experiences to enhance their appeal to tourists while ensuring their preservation and sustainability. This approach blends branding, storytelling, digital engagement, and community involvement. Central to CHMk is the creation of compelling narratives that appeal to both local and international audiences. Digital engagement—via social media, virtual tours, and interactive websites—also plays a crucial role in reaching patrons globally (King et al., 2016; Podara et al., 2021). Digital tools enable heritage sites to showcase their attractions through immersive experiences, making CH accessible to a wide range of visitors (Bekele & Champion, 2019; Marino et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2023).

It follows that, due to the significance and nuanced nature of the field, professionals in CHM require diverse range of skills that evolve alongside technological advancements. Traditional frameworks, such as UNESCO's Competence Framework for CHM (Bienstman et al., 2021), provide standardized methods for skill assessment. However, our approach leverages big data for real time evaluation, offering a more dynamic and adaptable way to assess employability skills needed in this evolving field.

## Methods

In this study, job postings were analyzed to understand the professional roles in CHM and CHMk. Focusing on job postings instead of broader internet data allowed us to profile the employability skills crucial for managing and promoting CH. Data was collected from various job boards and career websites through web scraping, which extracted relevant job postings using keywords like "cultural heritage manager" and "heritage tourism." The study focused on the US due to its rich CH and advanced management practices. Thousands of job postings were analyzed to identify key competencies and skills in the CH sector. The data analysis, conducted using R software, involved text mining techniques to process and structure the job postings. Text mining included three phases: pre-processing, where the text was cleaned and organized; lexical processing, which involved identifying keywords and performing lemmatization; and an operational phase for categorizing text entities. The study also employed probabilistic topic modeling to classify text entities into thematic areas, revealing trends in the job market. Partial correlations were computed to analyze the relationships between different employability skills. The final phases involved visualizing skillsets through scorecards and using Monte Carlo Markov Chains (MCMC) and Support Vector Machines (SVM) to forecast employment trends and skills demand, providing insights into the core competencies needed for CH management roles.

## Results

Results from the Tourism Management industry were obtained by analyzing a subset corpus from the extracted ads related to the sector. A tokenized Document-Term Matrix (DTM) was constructed, and sparsity was reduced to 72%. The most frequent terminological combinations identified in the corpus were "front desk" (2231 occurrences), "customer service" (2170), "attentive friendly" (2151), "destination management" (2149), and "helping guests" (2140). Topic modeling revealed four thematic areas within the dataset. Main correlations within the skill sets were identified, and further analysis detected three groups of skills based on greedy modularity, with corresponding memberships. Spectral modularity analysis and optimal modularity detection were also applied, with the memberships from each method evaluated and compared. Greedy modularity was found to be the most appropriate method, as indicated by the comparison of modularity indicators. Key centrality measures showed that the most prominent skills in the set, in terms of betweenness, were "digital literacy" (68.3%), "time attentive" (57.1%), "heritage knowledge" (38.6%), "customer service" (22%), and "multiple language" (19.9%). In terms of closeness, the highest-ranked skills were "years experience" (81%), "customer service" (73.7%), "helping guests"

(63.4%), "nature friendly" (56.2%), and "time attentive" (48%). Finally, a Monte Carlo Markov Chain (MCMC) simulation using the Maximum A Posteriori (MAP) method was applied to forecast and simulate a potential job interview scenario for the industry.

## **Discussion, Implications & Conclusion**

This study highlights the evolving skill set required for cultural heritage management (CHM) professionals in an increasingly digitalized landscape. The findings reveal a growing demand for competencies that blend traditional heritage knowledge with modern marketing and technological skills. Digital literacy is identified as a critical skill, underscoring the importance of proficiency in digital tools such as virtual tours, interactive websites, and social media for effective cultural heritage marketing (CHMk) and management (King et al., 2016; Podara et al., 2021). Professionals in this field must be adept at using these platforms to attract and educate diverse audiences.

Moreover, community engagement skills have become increasingly crucial, reflecting a shift towards more inclusive and participatory approaches in CHM. This aligns with trends observed by Chhabra (2010) and Mydland & Grahm (2012), where local communities are actively involved in decision-making processes. CHM professionals need to excel in facilitating stakeholder dialogues, mediating diverse interests, and integrating community perspectives into heritage preservation and promotion strategies. These competencies highlight the movement towards culturally sensitive and contextually relevant heritage management practices.

While traditional skills such as "heritage knowledge" remain essential, there is a notable emphasis on customer service skills, reflecting the growing role of heritage sites as tourist attractions and their impact on local economies (Richards, 2007). The increasing professionalization of CHM (Henson, 2020) indicates a need for expertise across various disciplines, prompting educational institutions to offer comprehensive training programs (Henson, 2020; Jagielska-Burduk, 2021). To address the evolving demands of the field, continued professional development and innovative approaches to education are necessary. Future research should evaluate the effectiveness of current training programs and explore new methods for advancing skills in the CHM sector.

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