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Experts' Perspectives on Inclusive Governance for Protecting Hot Spring Landscapes in China: Barriers and Implications

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Abstract: Hot spring landscapes offer enticing development prospects for investors in China. However, due to mounting economic pressures and a lack of coordination among various authorities, inclusive governance has proven ineffective in overseeing development projects centered around hot spring landscapes. Consequently, this manuscript delves into the potential for implementing inclusive governance strategies to safeguard hot spring landscapes in China. This study selected Linyi City as its study site due to its location above a fault zone, which has resulted in the presence of numerous hot springs. Additionally, it has been officially classified as a 'hot spring city in China' by the Chinese Ministry of Land and Resources. This study employed a semi-structured expert interview to investigate the barriers that stand in the way of applying inclusive governance to hot spring landscapes. Moreover, the interview investigates the implications of the lack of utilization of inclusive governance strategies for hot spring landscapes. The analysis of the results indicates that experts believed that the current protection policies were ineffective due to the existence of a multitude of barriers, such as the existence of deficiencies in the current policies, the multiplicity of management authorities, differences in visions in decision-making, limited public participation, a lack of awareness and trust from the public, a lack of balance in development approaches, and a limited role of science and technology. This resulted in a lack of proper communication and delegation of responsibilities with regard to inclusive governance strategies for protecting hot spring landscapes. Furthermore, the analysis unveiled diverse implications arising from the non-application of inclusive governance strategies, encompassing aspects such as tourism, economics, environment, sociocultural, and sustainability.

Keywords: inclusive governance; landscape governance; landscape protection; landscape sustainability; expert interview; expert perspective; stakeholder



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1. Introduction

China has made significant advances in economic development over the past four decades. This development, in conjunction with accelerated urbanization, has stimulated substantial investments in urban areas [1]. This rapid economic development has yielded growth in development around natural landscapes in the vicinity of urban and semi-urban regions, which has harmed the sustainability of natural landscapes in these areas [2]. Furthermore, this speedy urbanization has represented an absence of harmonious equilibrium between economic and environmental sustainability [3]. In general, economic growth has been driven by an increase in human activities, which has come at the expense of the sustainability of the natural environment, and it has often resulted in the degradation

of natural landscapes [4]. In this context, ensuring the compatibility of sustaining economic growth with protecting natural landscapes within hot spring landscapes necessitates incorporating inclusive governance as a crucial strategy for achieving balance and sustainability [5]. Therefore, the concept of inclusive governance has emerged as a pillar in the fields of landscape protection and sustainable development [6,7].

Inclusive landscape governance is defined as the set of policies, rules, and decision-making processes of actors within the public and institutional sectors, with stakes in natural landscapes that could influence actions regarding this particular landscape [8]. According to Kusters et al. [9], inclusive governance of landscapes is concerned with the institutional arrangements, decision-making processes, policy instruments, and underlying values in the system by which the biodiversity of ecosystems in multifunctional landscapes is protected. Kozar et al. [10] conclude that landscape governance is inherently multi-level, multi-sector, and multi-actor, necessitating strategies and mechanisms for aligning norms and coordinating decision-making processes between these various levels, sectors, and actors. Landscape governance entails designing and implementing institutional decision-making processes while building upon the underlying social values of the public to enable multiple actors to pursue their interests in sustainable landscapes [8]. Ultimately, inclusive governance has the potential to promote sustainable environmental governance and establish a balance between development and preservation [11,12]. However, inclusive landscape governance challenges in China lie in regions where water resources and other elements of the natural landscape are situated together; in such cases, there is a need to consider multiple aspects of landscape governance.

The inclusive governance of landscape management is closely related to the concept of integrated landscape management, which refers to actions designed to accomplish multiple outcomes in the landscape, ultimately contributing to the holistic pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [9]. The SDGs and the 2030 Agenda commitment are to leave no one behind and to focus both on giving voice and influence to those who have been marginalized and on enhancing benefits so that they can be more broadly shared [13]. This suggests that inclusive governance is necessary to achieve more inclusive development outcomes. Despite widespread agreement on the centrality of inclusive governance in the current discourse on the SDGs, the international development community continues to focus on stakeholder involvement and perception, seeking to create meaningful dialogue and build relationships [14]. Actively involving stakeholders throughout the decision-making process involves eight stages as follows: setting objectives and goals, information gathering, stakeholder involvement and perception, analysis and evaluation, decision-making, implementation, monitoring and review, and documentation [15]. Although these stages appear sequential, beginning with setting objectives and goals and concluding with documentation, decision-making rarely follows a linear structure in practice. The specific stages and their order may vary depending on the context, but these steps provide important stages for stakeholder decision-making in landscape protection.

Inclusive governance of hot spring landscapes seeks to involve stakeholders in the process of management and protection of hot spring landscapes in order to create an alignment between the various stakeholders' visions. Expert approaches focus on involving experts in producing decisions based on shared knowledge rather than relying on presenting the results [16]. Expert approaches acknowledge the importance of the set of expertise and perspectives of experts, treating them as valuable contributors to the decision-making processes rather than passive recipients of information [17]. This means that they are responsible for making decisions based on their precise knowledge and experience in this field [18,19]. Furthermore, the experts enable the integration of expert knowledge in the multi-environment, allowing for the creation of innovative solutions to complex problems [16]. Ultimately, the expert approach aims to ensure the sustainability and viability of projects in interdisciplinary fields such as sustainable urban environments [20,21]. Also, it enhances the likelihood of delivering net value to society by combining expert judgment processes with management [22,23]. Expert stakeholders may include managers,

government employees, and trade union institutions responsible for making landscape decisions [24].

1.1. Influencing Factors on Experts' Perspectives

Experts are defined as professionals with extensive knowledge, skills, and experience in a specific discipline or research field [25]. They are recognized for their deep involvement in practices and conventions, granting them context-dependent epistemic authority [26]. The level of expertise an individual possesses varies across different fields of study but typically involves a combination of knowledge, practical experience, and the ability to apply principles [27]. Several factors may influence experts to form their opinions on inclusive governance for landscape protection in a specific context. Experts' opinions are important to consider because they play a crucial role in decision-making processes and the successful implementation of protection strategies [28]. Therefore, recognizing and understanding these factors are essential when involving experts and incorporating their perspectives into decision-making processes. By addressing these factors, decision-makers can effectively navigate expert dynamics and promote more inclusive and effective decision-making processes [29]. Considering factors such as the diverse values, interests, and demands of experts in multifunctional landscapes can help address conflicts and improve landscape management [28]. Moreover, numerous factors, such as knowledge, expertise, trust, and relationships, can impact experts' perspectives during the decision-making process [30]. Therefore, experts' perspectives on landscape protection are influenced by several factors, namely, values and beliefs, interests and needs, knowledge and expertise, power dynamics, trust and relationships, and other influences (Table 1).

Table 1. Influencing factors on experts' perspectives.

| Factor | Description | References |
|-------------------------|---|---------------|
| Values or beliefs | Experts' perspectives can be influenced by cultural, religious, or ethical factors, which shape their attitudes and priorities. | [28,31,32] |
| Interests and needs | Experts may prioritize economic development or conservation, depending on their community or organizational affiliations. | [32–34] |
| Knowledge and expertise | Experts' perspectives may differ based on their level of scientific or technical expertise compared to those with limited knowledge or different expertise areas. | [30,32,35,36] |
| Power dynamics | Experts with greater power and influence tend to shape perspectives to align with their interests, while marginalized or less powerful experts may have limited influence in the decision-making process. | [29,37,38] |
| Trust and relationships | The level of trust between experts and decision-makers, as well as among different expert groups, can significantly impact perspectives, and trusting relationships foster cooperation and shared perspectives, while lacking trust can lead to conflicts and divergent perspectives. | [39–42] |
| Other influences | Experts' perspectives can be shaped by external factors such as laws, regulations, policies, and societal norms. These external influences provide a broader context for experts to consider when forming their perspectives. | [30,31] |

1.2. The Study's Aim

Traditional methods of landscape protection have frequently disregarded inclusive governance, posing gaps and challenges to the sustainability of landscape protection initiatives [43]. Therefore, inclusive governance emerges as a suitable landscape governance strategy to protect hot spring landscapes. A set of particular challenges lies in regions where green landscape elements and water resources are situated at the same location, such as hot spring landscapes in the Chinese context. In such cases, there is a need to know the perspectives of experts on the causes based on their knowledge and expertise

of the subject matter. Consequently, the primary gap that motivates this study is a lack of understanding of the barriers faced in achieving inclusive governance in the protection process of hot spring landscapes in the Chinese context. This study also seeks to discover the various implications resulting from the lack of inclusive landscape governance toward the protection of hot spring landscapes in China. Therefore, the core objective of this study is to understand experts' perspectives on barriers that stand against achieving the inclusive governance of natural landscapes as well as investigate the implications of the lack of inclusiveness in the process of landscape governance on the protection of hot spring landscapes in China. This is accomplished by answering the following two questions:

- What are experts' perspectives on the barriers faced in achieving inclusive governance for protecting hot spring landscapes in China?
- What are experts' perspectives on the various implications of the lack of inclusive governance for protecting hot spring landscapes in China?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area

Linyi City is positioned in the southern region of Shandong Province in the north eastern part of China, adjacent to the capital city of Beijing. Linyi sits atop the Yishu Fracture Zone, resulting in the emergence of hot spring water due to the compression of the earth's crust. This unique geological feature contributes to the distinctiveness of Linyi's hot spring landscapes. In 2011, Linyi City was designated "China's hot spring city" by China's Ministry of Land and Resources [44]. Linyi's hot springs are plentiful and widely distributed throughout and around the city, making it important in terms of tourism and, consequently, a target for investment developers. It is worth noting that while Linyi city has several major hot springs, this study focuses on three significant hot spring sites, namely: Zhisheng, Songshan, and Tangtou Hot Springs (Figure 1).

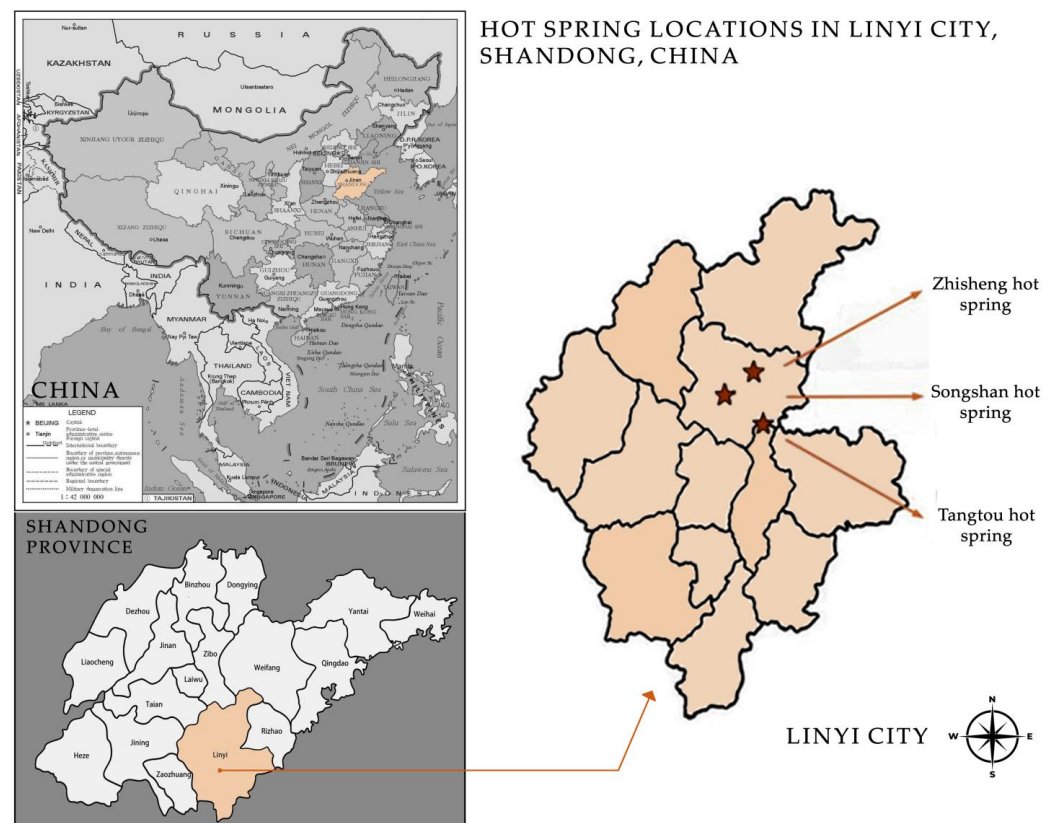


Figure 1. Highlighted locations of the selected hot springs in Linyi City, Shandong, China.

The selection of these particular sites is based on the amount of human activity around the hot spring landscape area. Zhisheng hot spring is considered to be the most successfully developed hot spring in Linyi city, while Songshan hot spring is distinguished by its unique water quality and the highest water temperature. Moreover, Tangtou hot spring boasts the longest history and the largest development volume.

2.2. Expert Interview

This research adopts the form of a semi-structured interview to generate an understanding of experts' perspectives on the adoption of inclusive governance in order to protect hot spring landscapes in China. Semi-structured interviews can be used to grasp the perspectives of various experts by seeking their perspectives and integrating these viewpoints into research findings. These interviews allow for the exploration of multiple dimensions of experts' perspectives and experiences, providing researchers with the opportunity to investigate various aspects. Semi-structured interviews can reveal the inner thoughts of the interviewees. At the same time, the semi-structured interview method is flexible since it is not limited by a fixed set of procedures, allowing the interviewer and the interviewee to exchange their opinions and feelings more genuinely [45]. Semi-structured interviews provide comprehensive insights into the experiences, perspectives, emotions, and motivations of research participants, which can be challenging to obtain through alternative methods. Sometimes, the interview method is influenced by the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee; when they trust each other, the interview materials can be more genuine and complete. Therefore, for this study, semi-structured interviews involving the use of specific questions were chosen. Ultimately, most of the first-hand data in this study were obtained through semi-structured methods to ensure the authenticity and depth of the data.

The interviewing procedure began in April 2023, during which the investigator conducted interviews with expert respondents. Experts were selected to be interviewed within their institutions according to specific categories (Table 2). According to Forsyth and Springate-Baginski [24], experts were chosen from managers/local policymakers and protection groups/NGOs. Crouch and McKenzie [46] recommended a participation range of 5–20 experts, considered sufficient for reaching the saturation point. Additionally, Madani et al. [47] suggested that an expert should have at least five years of experience in a particular field. It was assumed, based on experience, that the experts should fall within the age range of 27 to 60 years. It is important to note that the interviews, involving both note taking and voice recording, were conducted in Chinese for easy communication. Subsequently, the interview content was transcribed and translated into English.

Table 2. Requirements for obtaining expert interview data.

| Category | Expert Interview |
|---------------------|--|
| Expert type | Managers/local policymakers and protection groups/NGOs |
| Sample size | 5–20 expert respondents * |
| Gender | Male/female |
| Expertise | More than 5 years ** |
| Age | 27–60 |
| Interview procedure | Within the institutions. |

* According to the saturation point [46]. ** According to [47].

The interview included a set of questions investigating factors identified in the introduction, namely values and beliefs, interests and needs, knowledge and expertise, power dynamics, trust and relationships, and other influences. Table 3 lists the questions along with their corresponding factors.

Table 3. Expert interview questions.

| Factor | Experts Question |
|-------------------------|---|
| Values or beliefs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you believe that hot spring landscapes require further protection? Do you believe the government should be primarily shouldering the responsibility of protecting natural hot spring landscapes? Do you think hot spring landscapes should undergo development? |
| Interests and needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would you be interested in participating in activities or discussions about protecting hot spring landscapes? What are the barriers that individuals or groups are facing that prohibit their involvement in protecting natural hot spring landscapes? What actions or needs do you think should be taken to ensure the protection of the natural hot spring landscape? |
| Knowledge and expertise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you ever been engaged in/or have expertise in the management or legislation related to hot spring landscapes? What was your managerial or legislative role in the process of mandating or enforcing natural hot spring landscape protection legislation? How do you rate the measures taken to protect the hot spring landscape in Tangtou, Songshan, and Zhisheng during their development? |
| Power dynamics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think that the existing policies or methods for protecting and managing hot spring landscapes are effective? What problems do the local authorities face in enforcing the protection measures of the natural hot spring landscape? Do you think that the existence of multi-departmental/managerial bodies responsible for the protection of natural resources has led to the degradation of natural hot spring landscapes in urban areas? |
| Trust and relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there power opportunities for broader public participation in protecting the hot spring landscape? Do you think that there is a trust and relationship level of engagement between policymakers and the public about the governance of natural hot spring landscapes? |
| Other influences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the influences that may affect the decision-making process with regard to the protection of natural hot spring landscapes in urban areas? What do you think the social, economic, and natural implications would be if the development around natural hot spring landscapes continues as is? |

2.3. Coding Analysis

In this qualitative study, a coding process was employed to analyze experts' interviews. The coding process follows a hierarchical system, beginning from the base and culminating at the head to identify the most significant symbols for the study. Through this coding process, the study aimed to identify barriers encountered in achieving inclusive governance for protecting hot spring landscapes in China. It also applied the same approach to identify various implications of the lack of inclusive governance for protecting hot spring landscapes in China.

The coding process comprises three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding [48]. The open coding stage represents the initial phase, extracting fundamental concepts, topics, and ideas presented by experts in their interviews. In the second stage,

axial coding involves the collection and comprehensive overview of open coding data. The final stage is selective coding, where the process involves selecting the ultimate encoding of the data derived from axial coding.

3. Results and Findings

3.1. Experts' Demographic Description

After attempting to contact a group of experts, only ten experts participated in the study and expressed their willingness to conduct individual interviews within their institutions. The ten experts are divided into two groups: the first group consists of five experts from local managers/policymakers, and the second group consists of five experts from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are active in the field of protecting natural resources. The experts were comprised of eight men and two women, with ages ranging from 29 to 60 years. They had experience ranging from 6 to 38 years and worked in various institutions specializing in protecting hot spring landscapes, as shown in Table 4; for more details, see Appendix A, Table A1. Ultimately, the sample count reaches the saturation point, and the experts fulfill all the categories required for interviews. It should also be noted that a small number of purposeful samples enhances the researcher's in-depth engagement with the research domain and adds authenticity to a thorough investigation.

Table 4. Experts' demographic description.

| Expert | Code | Gender | Age | Expertise | Institution Work |
|-----------------------------|------|--------|-----|-----------|--|
| Managers/Local Policymakers | LM1 | Male | 50 | 27 years | Culture and Tourism Bureau. |
| | LM2 | Male | 45 | 22 years | Natural Resources Management Bureau. |
| | LM3 | Female | 32 | 9 years | Natural Resources Management Bureau. |
| | PM1 | Male | 41 | 19 years | Department of Natural Resources in Shandong Province. |
| | PM2 | Male | 40 | 18 years | Shandong Provincial Bureau of Geology & Mineral Resources. |
| Protection Groups/NGOs | NGO1 | Male | 32 | 10 years | China Geological Survey. |
| | NGO2 | Male | 60 | 38 years | China Environmental Protection Association. |
| | NGO3 | Male | 30 | 7 years | Shandong Tourism Trade Association, Hot Spring Branch. |
| | NGO4 | Male | 60 | 37 years | Shandong Tourism Trade Association, Hot Spring Branch. |
| | NGO5 | Female | 29 | 6 years | Nature Conservancy Organization. |

3.2. Experts' Perspectives on Influencing Factors for Protecting Hot Spring Landscapes in Linyi City, China

The interviews were conducted one-on-one with the experts, and they expressed their perspectives by answering questions related to protecting hot spring landscapes in Linyi City, China. Each expert's interview lasted about two hours and was conducted in Chinese; therefore, the interviews were audio-recorded after getting an "Informed Consent Statement". Additionally, initial impressions, recurring topics, and any surprising or significant statements made by participants were noted. The answers were transcribed and categorized according to the six factors, namely values and beliefs, interests and needs, knowledge and expertise, power dynamics, trust and relationships, and other

influences. Appendix B, Table A2 presents the detailed answers from the ten expert interviews distributed across these factors.

3.2.1. Values or Beliefs from the Experts' Perspectives

The experts unanimously stress the need for comprehensive protection of hot spring landscapes, with a shared belief that the primary responsibility lies with the provincial government. They highlight deficiencies in current policies that fail to accommodate all users and note instances of development overlooking landscapes as valuable resources for hot springs. Despite these challenges, experts collectively recognize the substantial value of hot spring landscapes, emphasizing their sustainable and renewable attributes as essential green assets. Experts also recognize the link between protecting landscapes and safeguarding hot springs, underscoring the necessity for additional protection, primarily borne by the government.

While acknowledging the necessity of development, experts emphasize that it must align with government policies, ensuring a harmonious blend with the natural landscape created by the flow of hot spring water through geological fissures. Experts advocate for active government involvement in formulating policies, managing, protecting, and monitoring hot spring landscapes. They underscore the significance of guiding and educating developers and local residents to collaborate in preserving these natural assets. Furthermore, experts believe that the strategic development of hot spring landscapes can result in positive impacts on society, the economy, and the environment. The collective belief persists that additional development of hot spring landscapes is warranted, given their inherent value and significant impact on society.

Ultimately, the values and beliefs of experts converge on the imperative need for comprehensive protection, sustainable development, and active government engagement for the benefit of society and the environment in safeguarding and utilizing hot spring landscapes in Linyi City, China. They acknowledge challenges but believe collectively in the potential for positive impacts through strategic development and enhanced protection measures.

3.2.2. Interests and Needs from the Experts' Perspectives

Experts express a keen interest in actively participating in activities related to protecting hot spring landscapes. They emphasize the importance of involving developers and local residents in more effective protection efforts. They acknowledge obstacles and needs hindering participation and stress the importance of overcoming these challenges to ensure impact and effective protection. To address this, there is a clear need for increased commitment and a positive response from developers to enhance the implementation of protection measures. Also, they stress that both the government and concerned citizens should share the responsibility for making protection decisions. Furthermore, experts advocating for environmental protection stress the need for enhanced management quality. They call for increased involvement of individuals and groups while addressing obstacles such as the lack of interest from protection institutions and challenges in gathering public opinions. Public involvement, both in decision-making and protection activities, is emphasized as a crucial factor for success.

In addition, some experts are interested in events or seminars focusing on the rational use of hot spring landscapes. They highlight the need to hear from more experts and local residents to better understand the landscape's needs. Public participation, currently limited to listening, should involve more interviews to address these needs effectively. Also, organization experts stress the importance of science and technology in protecting natural hot spring landscapes. They emphasize the need for objective and selfless engagement to ensure a focused approach.

Ultimately, the conclusions highlight the interests and needs of experts regarding active government engagement, inclusive public participation, increased commitment from

developers, the role of science and technology, and enhanced management quality to ensure the effective protection of hot spring landscapes in Linyi City, China.

3.2.3. Knowledge and Expertise from the Experts' Perspectives

The experts' knowledge and expertise regarding the protection of hot springs are diverse, reflecting various roles and perspectives. One expert responsible for establishing policies and regulations for protection highlights the importance of clear policies to identify parties responsible for protecting the hot spring landscape. Despite observing slow progress in government efforts to implement protective measures, this expert notes that developers bear the primary responsibility for managing and safeguarding these landscapes. Another expert from the Department of Natural Resources in Shandong Province provides insights into geothermal resource development, categorizing it into various areas. This expert notes a well-executed management system, primarily reliant on investments for protection. There is a focus on monitoring and preventing exploitative development in the protection sector, emphasizing the importance of specialized understanding. The reasonable and lawful development of hot spring landscapes within the developer's rights is seen as providing technical support for protection policies. Also, some experts within a non-profit organization stress the pivotal role of science and technology in hot spring landscape protection despite limited involvement in practical issues during specific hot spring landscape developments.

Another expert specializing in management expresses concern about the potential damage to hot spring sources and landscape protection due to significant development. This individual emphasizes the need to delve deeper into the cultural value of landscapes and subsequent landscape deterioration resulting from extensive development. Furthermore, some experts familiar with the three hot springs appeal to developers to prioritize rational development, redirecting attention to the prudent protection of these natural assets. Overall, the diverse perspectives of these experts underscore the multifaceted nature of hot spring landscape protection, encompassing cultural, regulatory, managerial, and protection aspects.

Ultimately, the knowledge and expertise of experts in hot spring landscape protection cover various dimensions, including landscape cultural management, policy establishment, monitoring, research, protection advocacy, and development oversight. Collectively, these perspectives contribute to a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities in protecting hot spring landscapes in Linyi City, China.

3.2.4. Power Dynamics from the Experts' Perspectives

The power dynamics among experts in protecting hot springs reveal a complex landscape marked by challenges in management and coordination. The multiplicity of management authorities, particularly between the water resources and natural resources departments, poses a significant challenge in assigning responsibility and ensuring effective protection. The call for streamlining management through establishing a unified administration underscores the need for clarity in roles and responsibilities among different departments, which is crucial. The need to clarify relationships between departments and improve coordination emphasizes the importance of a unified approach to ensure effective protection. The decentralization of authority to the provincial level introduces complexities of responsibilities, conflicts among departments, disparities in management practices, and the lack of a uniform approach at the provincial level. Moreover, the promotion of hot spring landscapes as renewable resources is seen as a reasonable protection strategy, but the challenge lies in avoiding fragmentation and ensuring a unified decision-making process.

Furthermore, the experts highlight the importance of public awareness and involvement in protecting hot spring landscapes. The lack of recognition by consumers and the absence of clear guidelines contribute to the underestimation of hot spring landscapes as valuable resources. The involvement of the public is acknowledged for its potential

contribution to protection, but there is a call for more transparency and oversight in the protection process.

Ultimately, the power dynamics among experts in hot spring protection reveal a landscape where collaboration, the streamlining of management, and improved coordination are essential. The existing policies are viewed with a mix of confidence and suggestions for improvement, emphasizing the need for clarity, transparency, and public awareness to ensure the effective protection of hot spring landscapes in Linyi City, China.

3.2.5. Trust and Relationships from the Experts' Perspectives

The experts highlight the critical role of trust and relationships in the context of protecting hot springs, particularly in the domain of public participation and governance. All experts' consensus is that existing efforts in public engagement are deemed ineffective, requiring adjustments at both the central and provincial levels. A key challenge identified is the lack of emphasis on public participation in Linyi City, indicating a potential trust deficit between local authorities and the public. The experts argue that a relationship of trust is essential for informed decision-making and its positive impact on the scientifically oriented overall development of both society and nature.

The experts stress the need for integration and trust in decision-making processes related to hot spring protection. Establishing a strong relationship between governments and the public is seen as crucial for the effective safeguarding of these resources. The lack of public awareness and appreciation for hot springs is identified as a hurdle, emphasizing the importance of building trust through education and awareness campaigns. Calls for integrating public participation into research efforts underscore the belief that involving the general public in the protection of hot springs would significantly enhance protection outcomes. However, responses to these calls have been relatively limited, indicating a potential trust gap between policymakers and the public. Therefore, the experts suggest that the government should lead initiatives to build trust between policymakers and the public. Also, there is a call for inclusivity, involving all members of the community in the protection of hot spring landscapes.

Ultimately, the experts stress the need to build trust and foster strong relationships between policymakers, developers, researchers, and the public to enhance the effectiveness of hot spring landscape protection efforts in Linyi City, China. Public participation is deemed crucial, and the inclusivity of all stakeholders is seen as paramount for successful protection outcomes.

3.2.6. Other Influences from the Experts' Perspectives

The experts highlight various influences that play a significant role in the decision-making process related to the protection and development of hot springs. The tourism aspect is singled out as the most influential factor in decision-making, with implications for both the development and protection of hot spring landscapes. The potential economic impacts, material gains, and increased tourism associated with continued development are seen as positive outcomes, particularly when balanced with nature preservation.

Economic and natural factors are identified as influences affecting decision-making, and the experts acknowledge that decisions can vary among decision-makers based on societal factors. Also, the incomplete management of hot springs is identified as a factor influencing decision-making, and the role of environmental authorities in overseeing management is emphasized. The economic impact of hot spring development is a recurring theme, with experts emphasizing the potential positive effects on local economies. The balance between development and preservation is stressed, acknowledging the benefits of hot springs for tourism, economic growth, and health. However, there is recognition that excessive development can lead to a reduction in the quantity of available hot spring water. Therefore, the need for a scientific approach to ensure sustainable development is emphasized, with local government decisions in attracting investments considered crucial.

Ultimately, the influences on decision-making regarding hot spring protection in Linyi City, China, are multifaceted, involving economic considerations, tourism development, environmental management, and the balance between development and preservation. The economic benefits and positive impacts on society and nature are recognized, but there is an overarching concern for sustainable development and the potential negative consequences of unchecked exploitation.

3.3. Coding Analysis: The Barriers Faced in Achieving Inclusive Governance from the Experts' Perspectives

Based on the responses from expert interviews, open coding was conducted resulting in the identification of 35 codes representing the barriers to achieving inclusive governance. In the axial coding phase, these obstacles were further categorized into 14 codes. Finally, the selective coding classification yielded 7 codes, providing a qualitative coding of the barriers to achieving inclusive governance as perceived by experts in the context of protecting hot spring landscapes in Linyi City, China. The findings indicate that, according to expert perspectives, the barriers to achieving inclusive governance include “deficiencies in current policies, multiplicity of management authorities, multi-perspective in decision-making, limited public participation, lack of public awareness and trust, lack of sustainable development, and limited role of science and technology” (Table A2).

Table 5. Coding analysis of barriers faced in achieving inclusive governance.

| Open Coding | Axial Coding | Selective Coding |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deficiencies in existing policies acknowledged. Recognition of the substantial value of hot spring landscapes. Shared belief in the need for comprehensive protection. Primary responsibility attributed to the government. | Current Policies and Government Responsibility | Deficiencies in Current Policies |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on the link between protecting landscapes and safeguarding hot springs. Call for additional protection, primarily from the government. Recognition of hot spring landscapes as sustainable and renewable green assets. | Limited Link Between Landscape and Hot Spring Protection | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for integration of Management Authorities Challenges in management and coordination, especially between water resources and natural resources departments. | Integration and Inclusivity of Management | Multiplicity of Management Authorities |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call for streamlining management through establishing a unified administration. Need clarity in roles and responsibilities among different departments. | Unified Management and Coordination | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diverse perspectives reflect various roles and expertise. The multifaceted nature of hot springs makes the decision-making process difficult | Diverse Perspectives in Decision-Making | Multi-Perspective in Decision-Making |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power Dynamics and Management Challenges in Decision-Making Complex power dynamics among experts in Decision-Making. | Complex Power Dynamics in Decision-Making. | |

Table 5. Cont.

| Open Coding | Axial Coding | Selective Coding |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress on shared responsibility between the government and citizens. Importance of public involvement in decision-making and protection activities Call for increased involvement of individuals and groups. | Shared Responsibility with Public Involvement | Limited Public Participation |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for involving all stakeholders Calls for inclusivity, involving all members of the community in protection efforts. | Inclusivity of Public Participation | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on the importance of public awareness and involvement. Lack of recognition by consumers and a call for transparency and oversight in the protection process. Importance of guiding and educating developers and local residents. | Public Awareness and Involvement | Lack of Public Awareness and Trust |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of the critical role of trust and relationships. Acknowledgment of a potential trust deficit between local authorities and the public. | Trust and Relationship Building | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledgment of the necessity of harmonious development. Emphasis on aligning development with government policies. Advocacy for harmonious development respecting the natural landscape. | Lack of Harmonious Development with Government Policies | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief in the positive impacts of strategic development on society, the economy, and the environment. Recognition of the inherent value and significant impact of hot spring landscapes. | Strategic Development and Impacts | Lack of Sustainable Development |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of the potential negative consequences of unchecked exploitation. Concerns about excessive development leading to a reduction in hot spring water quantity. | Concerns about Excessive Development | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of the pivotal role of science and technology in hot spring landscape protection. Emphasis on objective and selfless engagement. Emphasis on a scientific approach for sustainable development. | Recognition of the Role of Science and Technology | Limited Role of Science and Technology |

3.4. Coding Analysis: The Various Implications of the Lack of Inclusive Governance in Experts' Perspectives

Based on responses from expert interviews, open coding was conducted resulting in the identification of 15 codes representing various implications of the lack of inclusive governance. In the axial coding phase, these obstacles were further categorized into seven codes. Finally, the selective coding classification yielded five codes, providing a qualitative coding of the various implications of the lack of inclusive governance as perceived by experts in the context of protecting hot spring landscapes in China. The findings indicate that, according to expert perspectives, the various implications of the lack of inclusive governance are “economic, tourism, environmental, social and cultural, and sustainability implications” (Table 6).

Table 6. Coding analysis of various implications of the lack of inclusive governance.

| Open Coding | Axial Coding | Selective Coding |
|--|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tourism aspect is considered the most influential factor in the decision-making of hot spring development. Tourism development is considered one of the aspects most affected by the lack of comprehensive management. | Tourism Development Impact | Tourism Implications |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued development is seen as beneficial for the economy, leading to material gains. In the absence of inclusive governance, the economy is directly affected. Supporting the development of the hot spring landscape is seen as a significant boost to the local economy, and vice versa. | Impact on the Local Economy | Economic Implications |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive governance in the preservation of the hot springs landscape has a broader impact on the urban environment. Inclusive governance in the protection of the hot springs landscape affects the overall environmental quality of the city. | Urban Environmental Impact | Environment Implications |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental protection governance affects developers' decision-making processes related to the environment. The supervision and policies set by the government influence the development and protection of hot spring landscapes. | Environmental Protection Governance | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relatively low cultural level of some employees directly impacts overall governance and, consequently, contributes to the degradation of hot spring landscapes. An emphasis on preserving culture and heritage alongside hot spring development highlights an inclusive approach and vice versa. The loss of the natural landscape of hot springs has implications for both society and culture. | Challenges in Cultural and Social | Social and Cultural Implications |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to employ scientific methods in inclusive management results in an inability to ensure sustainable development. The local government's judicious decisions in attracting investments are crucial for achieving sustainable development and vice versa. | Sustainable Development | Sustainable Implications |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective governance in controlling the reduction of hot spring water extraction contributes to achieving water sustainability. Over-development and mismanagement have led to a reduction in the available hot spring water, presenting challenges to water sustainability. | Water Sustainability | |

4. Discussion

4.1. Experts' Perspectives on the Barriers Faced in Achieving Inclusive Governance for Protecting Hot Spring Landscapes in China

The barriers to achieving inclusive governance in protecting hot spring landscapes in China, as identified by the experts, are multi-faceted. While there is a unanimous call for comprehensive protection, challenges and barriers in existing policies hinder inclusive governance. These challenges and barriers begin with deficiencies in current policies, emphasizing the need for adjustments at both the central and provincial levels. Additionally, experts pointed out challenges arising from the multiplicity of management authorities, particularly between the water resources and natural resources departments. This complexity makes it difficult to assign responsibility and coordinate protection efforts effectively. The call for establishing a unified administration that reflects clarity in the roles and responsibilities between the various departments is a must. This call is consistent with Cao et al. [49], which emphasizes revealing the problems that exist in management and further explores establishing a unified administration strategy for the protected landscape area in China.

Furthermore, multi-perspective decision-making introduces complexities. Disparities in management perspectives have led to the lack of a uniform management method, which is highlighted as a barrier. The challenge is to reconcile perspectives and ensure a unified decision-making process for protecting hot spring landscapes in China. On the other hand, one of the most significant barriers is limited public participation, as noted by experts who highlight that responses to calls for participation have been relatively limited. Barriers to effective public participation include a lack of interest from protection institutions, challenges in gathering public opinions, and obstacles hindering the involvement of individuals and groups. As a result, the reasons for the lack of public participation may be rooted in a lack of public awareness and trust, which is identified as one of the barriers. There is a perceived lack of trust between policymakers and the public, which leads to decreased interest and limited public participation in protection efforts. Building trust is recognized as a crucial factor for informed decision-making and effective overall development. He and Cliquet [50] emphasize that challenges for the management of protected landscape areas in China can be addressed by improving the management system, enhancing relevant legislation, promoting public participation, and increasing public awareness and trust.

Moreover, one of the most important barriers faced in achieving inclusive governance for protecting hot spring landscapes in China is the lack of balanced development. Experts expressed concerns about excessive development leading to a reduction in the quantity of hot spring water and the disappearance of the landscape. This raises concerns about the sustainability of hot spring landscapes in China. This result is consistent with the findings of Abu Bakar [51], which emphasized balancing protection and community development through inclusive governance. Also, Feng and Li [52] highlighted critical legal and political issues related to hot spring development in China. Ultimately, experts stress the importance of science and technology in protecting natural hot spring landscapes. A focused and objective approach is deemed necessary for leveraging science and technology effectively in protection efforts.

In summary, achieving inclusive governance in protecting hot spring landscapes faces barriers related to deficiencies in current policies, multiplicity of management authorities, multi-perspective in decision-making, limited public participation, lack of public awareness and trust, lack of balanced development, and limited role of science and technology. Addressing these barriers requires a holistic and coordinated approach involving various stakeholders and a commitment to sustainable and comprehensive protection measures.

4.2. Experts' Perspectives on the Various Implications of the Lack of Inclusive Governance for Protecting Hot Spring Landscapes in China

The lack of inclusive governance for protecting hot spring landscapes in China has various impacts and implications. Beginning with the tourism aspect, it significantly influences decision-making regarding hot spring development in China, with experts emphasizing its pivotal role. The potential benefits associated with continued tourism development are viewed positively, contingent on balancing these aspects with nature preservation. However, the absence of inclusive governance for the protection of hot spring landscapes poses challenges for tourism development, making it imperative to address these issues. This result was confirmed and revealed the challenges and prospects of landscape tourism development by Ketema [53]. It was found that poor management and conflicts of interest in resource use hinder the landscape tourism business, thereby not benefiting the local community.

Furthermore, continued development is perceived as beneficial for the economy, leading to material gains. However, in the absence of inclusive governance, economic impacts become more pronounced, and supporting the development of hot spring landscapes is seen as a significant boost to the local economy. The experts emphasize the potential positive effects on local economies, but they also stress the need for a balanced approach between development and preservation to ensure sustainable economic growth and prevent negative consequences associated with excessive exploitation. In confirmation of

that, Mundher et al. [54] found that economic importance decreases when cutting down trees and the disappearance of natural landscapes, and vice versa, as economic importance increases when protecting natural landscapes.

Certainly, the lack of inclusive governance for protecting hot spring landscapes in China has significant environmental implications, as inclusive governance in the preservation of the hot spring landscape has a broader impact on the urban environment and affects the overall environmental quality of the city. Environmental protection governance also plays a crucial role in influencing developers' decision-making processes related to the environment, and the supervision and policies set by the government are pivotal in shaping the development and protection of hot spring landscapes. On the other hand, the relatively low cultural level of some employees directly impacts overall governance and policies, contributing to the degradation of hot spring landscapes. Emphasizing the preservation of culture and heritage alongside hot spring development highlights an inclusive approach, and conversely, the loss of the natural landscape of hot springs has implications for both society and culture. Steinhardt and Wu [55] explained that the culture of the public in China affects the administration and decisions taken by the government, changing the landscape of urban developments and vice versa.

Moreover, the local government's judicious decisions in protecting hot spring landscapes have significant implications for sustainability. Also, the local government's decisions to control the reduction of hot spring water extraction contribute to achieving water sustainability. However, overdevelopment and mismanagement of the lack of inclusive governance have led to a reduction in the available hot spring water, and the loss of landscape presents challenges to sustainability. Kusters et al. [9] stress the need to balance benefits and protection in landscapes with the concept of decision-making for sustainability. This requires adequate knowledge and cognizance of the meaning and significance of sustainability, policies, and regulations that promote sustainable practices directly, as well as the actual implementation of these policies and regulations. Bryson [56] identifies stakeholders through appropriate analysis and shows that adapting benefits-sharing to enhance overall effectiveness is an important step in optimizing participation and inclusion. Therefore, benefit-sharing is a key to sustainable, inclusive governance. Ultimately, experts emphasize the need for a scientific approach and responsible management practices to ensure the long-term sustainability of hot spring landscapes.

In summary, the lack of inclusive governance has implications for the economy, tourism, environment, social and cultural aspects, and sustainability. Balancing economic benefits with environmental preservation and addressing cultural and social challenges is crucial for the effective protection of hot spring landscapes in China. Subsequently, the multifaceted influences on decision-making require inclusive and sustainable governance to ensure the long-term well-being of hot spring landscapes and the communities they impact.

5. Limitations and Future Studies

Despite the findings of this study, the study's methodology and procedures contained a list of limitations that also presented a set of opportunities for future research initiatives to take on. Firstly, the findings of this study are limited by the type of participants, who were predominantly subject matter experts. Investigating the variables from the public's point of view may yield different views that were not covered by this study. Secondly, the findings of this study were limited by the locations selected as case studies in this research; other locations may present a different set of protection challenges, which may present a different set of expert approaches and thought processes. Thirdly, it's important to note that this qualitative study focused specifically on protecting hot spring landscapes in China. Therefore, we encourage researchers to explore and elucidate the approaches adopted for preserving and utilizing hot spring resources in various other countries across the globe. Finally, the findings of this study were limited by the fact that all experts were involved in institutions operating in the province of Shandong in China, which possesses its own set of legislation with regard to the protection of landscape and natural resources.

6. Conclusions

This study conducted an expert interview technique to investigate the barriers to the application of inclusive governance strategies in hot spring landscapes in Linyi City, China. The analysis and interpretation of the interview answers indicated a set of barriers facing the employment of inclusive governance strategies, highlighting the lack of centrality and effective communication between authorities. Furthermore, deficiencies in current policies and the multiplicity of management authorities present significant hurdles, highlighting the need for policy adjustments and the establishment of unified administrative structures. Disparities in management perspectives and limited public participation further complicate decision-making processes, emphasizing the importance of reconciling viewpoints and fostering public engagement. Moreover, concerns about balanced development and the role of science and technology underscore the need for sustainable approaches guided by scientific expertise. The analysis indicated a number of potential adverse outcomes to the lack of inclusivity in the governance of hot spring landscapes, highlighting a fear of further degradation, which in turn could yield a set of sociocultural, economic, and ecological negative implications. Decision-makers can utilize understanding and addressing the identified barriers in this study to streamline decision-making processes, foster greater collaboration among authorities, and actively engage the public in inclusive governance initiatives to protect hot spring landscapes.

The findings of this study could be utilized to highlight the importance of effective, inclusive decision-making in the process of governing hot spring landscapes in China. Moreover, the findings of the study bring attention to the vitality of hot spring landscape protection in the region due to the potential negative implications resulting from their degradation. Additionally, the findings of the study are of importance to local authorities, legislators, and decision-makers taking part in initiatives to employ inclusive landscape governance in landscape areas that are adjacent to urban areas undergoing rapid development. Finally, local authorities, legislators, and decision-makers can leverage these findings to develop policies and strategies that promote inclusive governance, sustainable development, and the long-term preservation of hot spring landscapes in China. By embracing inclusive and science-based governance practices, stakeholders can ensure the well-being of both landscapes and communities for generations to come.

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Appendix A

Table A1. All details of Experts' demographic description.

| Expert | Code | Description | Institution |
|-----------------------------|------|---|---|
| Managers/Local Policymakers | LM1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of the Culture and Tourism Bureau. • Gender: Male • Age: 50 • Expertise: 27 years • Citizen: Chinese local citizen • Level of education: Bachelor degree • Managerial level: Linyi City level | The Culture and Tourism Bureau is responsible for coordinating the planning of the city's cultural and tourism industries. It organizes and implements surveys, excavation, protection, and utilization of the city's cultural and tourism resources, while also promoting the development of the cultural and tourism industries. |
| | LM2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Mineral Section managing in Natural Resources Management Bureau. • Gender: Male • Age: 45 • Expertise: 22 years • Citizen: Chinese local citizen • Level of education: Bachelor degree • Managerial level: Linyi City level | The Natural Resources Management Bureau is responsible for overseeing the ownership of all land, minerals, forests, grasslands, wetland areas, water, and other natural resource assets. It also regulates the spatial use of all national land. The Mines Management Section, as part of the Natural Resources Management Bureau, is tasked with managing the mining, development, protection, and use of hot spring water. |
| | LM3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management staff of Mineral Section managing in Natural Resources Management Bureau. • Gender: Female • Age: 32 • Expertise: 9 years • Citizen: Chinese local citizen • Level of education: Master degree • Managerial level: Linyi City level | |
| | PM1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of the Mineral Resources Protection and Supervision Division, Department of Natural Resources, Shandong Province. • Gender: Male • Age: 41 • Expertise: 19 years • Citizen: Chinese local citizen • Level of education: PhD degree • Managerial level: Shandong province level | The Department of Natural Resources in Shandong Province is responsible for overseeing the province's natural resource assets, including land, minerals, forests, grasslands, wetlands, water, oceans, and other natural resources owned by the entire population. Additionally, it manages the spatial use control of the national territory. |
| | PM2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief of the Management Section, Shandong Provincial Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources. • Gender: Male • Age: 40 • Expertise: 18 years • Citizen: Chinese local citizen • Level of education: PhD degree • Managerial level: Shandong province level | The Shandong Provincial Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources primarily undertake the province's primary, public welfare, and strategic geological surveys and mineral resources exploration work. It also conducts hydrogeology, ecological environment geology, urban geology, agricultural geology, tourism geology, and engineering geology surveys. Additionally, the bureau is responsible for ecological and geological environment monitoring, geologic hazards investigation, evaluation, monitoring, prevention, early warning, and control of emergencies in the province. |
| | | | |

Table A1. Cont.

| Expert | Code | Description | Institution |
|------------------------|------|--|--|
| Protection Groups/NGOs | NGO1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member of the China Geological Survey (CGS) organisation Gender: Male Age: 32 Expertise: 10 years Citizen: Chinese local citizen Level of education: Master degree | The China Geological Survey (CGS) is a nonprofit institution directly under the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). It is responsible for the unified deployment and organization of the implementation of national fundamental, and strategic geological and mineral exploration work in accordance with national land and resource survey planning. |
| | NGO2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member of the China Environmental Protection Association (CEPA), and researcher in Shandong Provincial Bureau of Geology & Mineral Resources (retired). Gender: Male Age: 60 Expertise: 38 years Citizen: Chinese local citizen Level of education: Bachelor degree | The China Environmental Protection Association (CEPA) is a well-known national and international social organization in the field of environmental protection in China. It was originally formed by the enthusiasm of people, enterprises, and institutions for the environmental cause, and it operates as a non-profit organization and independent social group with legal status. The main focus of the association is on public interest environmental protection activities, serving as a civil society organization. CEPA advocates that the protection of the environment is the responsibility of everyone. |
| | NGO3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member of the Shandong Tourism Trade Association Hot Spring Branch, and Staff member of Hydrographic Exploration Team in Shandong Province. Gender: Male Age: 30 Expertise: 7 years Citizen: Chinese local citizen Level of education: Master degree | The Shandong Tourism Trade Association Hot Spring Branch was established in May 1988. It is a province-wide, joint, industrial, non-profit social organization voluntarily formed by social groups, enterprises and institutions, and tourism-related organizations in Shandong Province. |
| | NGO4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member of the Shandong Tourism Trade Association Hot Spring Branch, and designer in Linyi Planning and Design Institute, Shandong Province (retired). Gender: Male Age: 60 Expertise: 37 years Citizen: Chinese local citizen Level of education: Bachelor degree | |
| | NGO5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member of the Nature Conservancy (TNC) organization of Shandong Province. Gender: Female Age: 29 Expertise: 6 years Citizen: Chinese local citizen Level of education: Master degree | The Nature Conservancy (TNC) was invited to enter China in 1998 to engage in conservation work. In 2017, TNC received the Certificate of Registration of Representative Organizations of Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) from the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau (PSB), enabling TNC to operate as an international nature conservation organization throughout the country. The TNC of Shandong Province is headquartered in Beijing. |

Appendix B

Table A2. Experts' Interview Answers.

| Expert | Code | Factor | Expert's Answer |
|-----------------------------|------|-------------------------|---|
| Managers/Local Policymakers | LMI | Values or beliefs | I believe the landscapes of the hot springs need protection, primarily the responsibility of the government. It should also be noted that in many hot spring landscape locations, the current policy does not accommodate all users. Development is often carried out without considering the landscapes as an additional resource for hot springs. Nevertheless, I believe the value of the hot spring landscape is substantial, as it is a low-carbon resource and a sustainable, renewable, green asset. |
| | | Interests and needs | I am interested in participating in activities related to the protection of hot spring landscapes, and I am conducting research in this field. The main challenge among developers is their limited involvement in safeguarding natural hot spring landscapes. Therefore, we need more outstanding commitment and a more positive response from developers to strengthen the implementation of protection measures further. |
| | | Knowledge and expertise | Throughout my career, I have been involved in management related to hot spring landscapes. Additionally, I hold the primary responsibility for the cultural tourism aspect of the hot spring landscape. These hot springs have seen significant development, but a concerning issue is the potential damage to their sources. This development has resulted in an insufficient supply of hot spring water and subsequent landscape deterioration. Drawing on my experience, I believe it is crucial to delve deeper into the cultural value of the hot spring landscapes. |
| | | Power dynamics | Local authorities encounter several challenges in implementing protection measures for hot spring landscapes, with the most significant issue being the multiplicity of management. The challenge of multiple management makes it difficult to assign responsibility, I believe the key is to streamline management. There is an overlap in management responsibilities between the water resources department and the natural resources department, resulting in a lack of coordination. To address these problems, it is essential to establish a unified administration with the authority to enforce conditions for the protection of hot spring landscapes at the source. Nowadays, mining rights certificates for hot spring water are rarely issued, yet many hot spring resources are mined illegally. In Shandong Province, there are more than 1000 hot spring wells, but only 100 of them have certificates. |
| | LM2 | Trust and relationships | I believe that the existing public participation in protecting hot spring landscapes is not effective. This issue cannot be resolved immediately and requires adjustments at both the central and provincial levels. In summary, hot spring resources need integration and trust when making protection decisions. Additionally, governments must establish a strong relationship with the public to protect hot spring landscapes. Unfortunately, many people do not appreciate them and are unaware of their value. |
| | | Other influences | The government is currently striving to minimize inaction while maximizing the utilization of geothermal resources. On this front, one of the factors that can influence the decision-making process is tourism development. In practical terms, if hot spring water is used for tourism, its price would be higher, whereas if it is employed for heating and other essential livelihood purposes, the price of water would be lower. This is considered to have economic implications for society. The loss of the natural landscape of hot springs also carries implications for both society and the climate. |
| | | Values or beliefs | I believe that the protection of the hot spring landscape is crucial. In this regard, I consider government actions to be of utmost importance. Additionally, I believe that development is necessary because the hot spring water naturally flows due to geological fissures, creating a beautiful blend with the natural landscape. |
| | | | |

Table A2. Cont.

| Expert | Code | Factor | Expert's Answer |
|-----------------------------|------|-------------------------|--|
| Managers/Local Policymakers | LM2 | Interests and needs | My primary responsibility is to oversee Linyi City, including the management of the hot spring landscape, which is a valuable resource within the city and falls under our department's jurisdiction. I am also keen on participating in activities related to protecting hot spring landscapes. Additionally, I believe developers must engage in the protection of the hot spring landscape actively, and the involvement of local residents would be beneficial. |
| | | Knowledge and expertise | Our responsibility is to establish clear policies, documents, and regulations regarding protection. This will help identify the parties responsible for protecting the hot spring landscape. Up to this point, the two hot spring landscapes have remained relatively undamaged, largely due to the abundant flow of hot spring water. However, the full potential of the hot spring landscape has not been realized, and there are still some limitations to future development. |
| | | Power dynamics | I think that the existing policies or methods for protecting and managing hot spring landscapes are effective. It is also important to understand how different departments and divisions collaborate with each other and how the responsibilities and rights of management are clarified. |
| | | Trust and relationships | Linyi City has not placed significant emphasis on public participation, while the state has repeatedly encouraged more public involvement in the protection of the hot spring landscape. This may be one of the challenges faced by local authority management. I believe there is a lack of trust between policy-makers and the public regarding the management of hot spring landscapes, leading to a decreased interest in public participation. |
| | | Other influences | These hot spring developments are the result of the government delegating the development of hot spring water to developers. The government aims to secure investments, attract investors, and encourage them to develop the hot springs area. However, some of these investments have had a negative impact on the community, transforming hot springs into entertainment venues. On the contrary, the development of the hot spring landscape should have a positive influence on socio-economic development and play a crucial role in promoting the importance of hot springs. |
| | LM3 | Values or beliefs | I believe that the landscape needs protection, and the primary responsibility lies with us in government to formulate policies, manage, protect, and monitor it. We must also guide and educate developers and local residents to collaborate in preserving the hot springs. Furthermore, I believe that the hot spring landscape should be developed to create a more positive impact on society, the economy, and the environment. |
| | | Interests and needs | I am interested in participating in activities such as trips to hot springs, which are pretty common. Regarding the interests of individuals or groups, I do not see much of their involvement, or they may not actively participate in the decision-making process. I believe that both the government and concerned citizens should be responsible for making protection decisions. |
| | | Knowledge and expertise | In fact, my work in the Natural Resources Management Bureau involves the management, protection, and planning of lands, mines, forests, and hot springs. Although I am aware that our organization oversees the hot spring landscape, I am not directly responsible for making protection decisions. I have observed that the government's efforts to implement protective measures are progressing slowly. At the same time, they are granting most rights in these hot springs to the developers, who bear the primary responsibility for protecting, developing, and managing the hot spring landscape. |

Table A2. Cont.

| Expert | Code | Factor | Expert's Answer |
|-----------------------------|------|-------------------------|---|
| Managers/Local Policymakers | LM3 | Power dynamics | I believe that the protection policy is currently quite reasonable and well-founded. Furthermore, there are no major issues with the ongoing development process; the government and developers are actively working to identify more suitable development goals. The most significant concern is the potential depletion of hot spring water, as this could lead to a decrease in visitor numbers. |
| | | Trust and relationships | Public participation can be integrated into research efforts, in collaboration with government and developer management, for the protection of hot spring landscapes. It would unquestionably be improved if the general public were encouraged to participate in the preservation of the hot springs landscape. It would be particularly beneficial if they could actively engage in promoting this idea. |
| | | Other influences | The hot spring landscape should indeed be developed to have a more positive impact on society, the economy, and nature. Development as a tourism resource makes sense, as it can stimulate economic growth in the county and attract visitors from out of town. They have emphasized the preservation of cultural and historical heritage and have even planned a folklore village next to the hot spring. However, it's worth noting that the development of hot springs has led to a reduction in the quantity of hot spring water available. |
| | PM1 | Values or beliefs | I believe that the protection measures are well-founded and based on well-thought-out steps, but there is no objection to further enhancing the protection of hot spring landscapes. Provincial governments are actively involved in this, and the authority responsible for issuing protection decisions bears the primary responsibility. I believe there should be further development of the hot spring landscape because it holds value and has a significant impact on society. |
| | | Interests and needs | I am currently more interested in events or seminars focusing on the rational use of the hot spring landscape. I would like to hear from more experts or local residents. Currently, public participation is mainly confined to listening to their perspectives and understanding their concerns, which aligns with my responsibilities at work. In my view, there should be more interviews conducted with the public to better understand their needs and interests regarding the protection of hot spring landscapes. |
| | | Knowledge and expertise | In the Department of Natural Resources of Shandong Province, I work in the Mineral Resources Protection and Supervision Division. Currently, the development of geothermal resources is mainly categorized into four areas: heating, bathing, planting and breeding (landscapes and animals), and power generation. Shandong primarily utilizes geothermal resources for heating and bathing, with less emphasis on landscapes. The management of these hot springs in Shandong is well-executed; the government primarily relies on investments for protection, and the investment levels vary among local governments. |
| | | Power dynamics | The primary issue lies in the management of geothermal resources, which is divided into two main departments: the Department of Water Resources and Natural Resources. The central government provides management guidelines, with each province having its own policies. The authority for geothermal management is decentralized to the provincial level, and more detailed management methods are established at the municipal level. In our role in government management, we primarily supervise the implementation of policies but sometimes struggle to find a balance; for instance, conflicts can arise with the water conservancy department. Furthermore, it is important to clarify the relationships between various departments and improve coordination between the two departments. |
| | | Trust and relationships | While there have been calls for public participation in management, their response has been relatively limited. However, there must be a relationship of trust between policy-makers and the public regarding the governance of natural hot spring landscapes. This ensures that everyone can benefit from these resources and that policy-makers can make informed decisions. The primary impact of protecting and managing hot spring landscapes on society is that individuals can collectively safeguard and develop them with a foundation of understanding. If the overall development is more scientifically oriented, it will also have a positive impact on nature (water and greenery). |

Table A2. Cont.

| Expert | Code | Factor | Expert's Answer |
|-----------------------------|------|-------------------------|--|
| Managers/Local Policymakers | PM1 | Other influences | I believe that one of the factors influencing the decision-making process regarding the protection of hot spring landscapes is the incomplete management of all hot springs. Environmental authorities can step in and oversee the management of hot springs and their landscaping if they choose to do so. Additionally, to generate profit from mineral resources, one must pay taxes and obtain a mining license, which, in turn, can stimulate the local economy. |
| | | Values or beliefs | Hot spring landscapes need protection, and as government workers, it is our responsibility to ensure this. I believe that the government should primarily bear the responsibility for protecting the hot spring landscape. Simultaneously, if developed sustainably and appropriately, hot spring landscapes can thrive and contribute positively to the environment. |
| | PM2 | Interests and needs | I am familiar with the hot springs landscape, and related activities are also part of my job duties. Additionally, I conduct research on policy documents for the protection of hot spring landscapes and visit various locations for field research. However, I am not particularly clear about the problems and challenges facing the development of these hot spring landscapes. |
| | | Knowledge and expertise | I work in protection, with a focus on monitoring to prevent hot spring development from becoming a means of exploiting national resources. Within the developer's rights, the reasonable and lawful development of a hot spring landscape provides technical support for protection policies. I believe that only very specialized or directly involved departments dedicated to landscape management can fully comprehend this. While I am not entirely sure about the measures being taken to protect the hot spring landscape during its development, I generally believe they are positive. |
| | | Power dynamics | The policy is good, but I believe it is not perfect; nevertheless, I have confidence in the management of the hot spring landscape and in the effective implementation of government-issued policies. The policy is gradually being improved at the national level. However, the rights of many departments are not clearly defined, leading to confusion in management. Shandong Province, along with other provinces, lacks a uniform management method, causing disparities in development and utilization practices. Each department operates differently, and there is no established coordination mechanism. |
| | | Trust and relationships | I believe that everyone in society should be involved, but the individuals who can truly be held accountable, in my opinion, are the key stakeholders connected to this matter. We also encourage more members of the public or stakeholders to participate in the management of the hot springs landscape by offering advice. As government staff, our focus is on guiding the public and residents to engage in the protection and promotion of the landscape. We also acknowledge that publicity is an essential tool for protection. |
| | | Other influences | There are various influences that may affect the decision-making process regarding the protection of hot spring landscapes, including social, economic, and natural factors. Additionally, decisions can vary among decision-makers based on the factors presented by society. |
| | | | |

Table A2. Cont.

| Expert | Code | Factor | Expert's Answer |
|------------------------|------|-------------------------|--|
| Protection Groups/NGOs | NGO1 | Values or beliefs | I believe the protection of the hot spring landscape is primarily the safeguarding of groundwater, which is why it requires additional protection. The government remains the primary responsible party for this protection. I think hot spring landscapes should undergo development, but it must align with the government's policies. |
| | | Interests and needs | I am frequently engaged in events or discussions related to hot spring landscapes and protection issues. In this China Geological Survey organization, involvement is more objective and selfless, prohibiting the participation of individuals or groups in protecting natural hot spring landscapes. I believe the development of science and technology is crucial to protecting the natural hot spring landscape. |
| | | Knowledge and expertise | As researchers, we operate within a non-profit organization, we have undertaken numerous scientific research projects, particularly in the broad realm of geothermal protection. While everyone is actively participating in the protection of hot spring landscapes, the crucial element lies in the development of science and technology. The drawback is that we are not extensively involved in addressing the practical issues of the hot spring landscapes in Tangtou, Songshan, and Zhisheng during their development. |
| | | Power dynamics | The protection of the hot spring landscape is reasonable, and the entire geothermal resource can be better utilized if promoted as renewable. However, the multiplicity and distribution of responsibilities may lead to fragmentation and conflict in decision-making unless there is one department responsible for collecting decisions and making the final decision. |
| | | Trust and relationships | Besides the fact that everyone must be involved in the process of conserving hot spring landscapes, it is crucial to promote public participation in protecting the hot spring landscape. On the other side, the relationship with developers primarily involves cooperation, while researchers participate and offer cutting-edge suggestions. |
| | NGO2 | Other influences | Supporting the development of the hot spring landscape is a significant boost to the local economy. Additionally, the benefits of development outweigh the disadvantages, provided it is done in moderation. Consider the health benefits offered by hot springs and their impact on tourism. Therefore, the natural landscape of the hot springs must be developed. |
| | | Values or beliefs | I believe hot spring landscapes require protection. While I consider protection to be reasonable to some extent, it lacks oversight. In this regard, the government bears the responsibility in the first place. Hot spring landscape development is indeed positive; after all, hot spring landscapes represent a renewable green resource. |
| | | Interests and needs | In the past, I worked in the survey department, assisting developers in exploring hot spring landscape resources. Currently, I am actively engaged in protection activities and seminars related to this type of hot spring landscape. There is a need to elucidate the process of hot spring landscape protection through policy. It is crucial to involve more people and implement increased oversight in these efforts. |
| | | Knowledge and expertise | I am deeply interested in the protection of hot spring landscapes and would welcome invitations from relevant organizations to give talks on public interest issues. Currently, hot spring landscapes and geothermal resources are undervalued. Regarding the measures taken for protection, there is an issue where the government grants excessive power to developers, resulting in uncontrolled development. |
| | | Power dynamics | The existing policy for spa landscaping is deemed reasonable but lacks oversight and clear guidelines for the protection of hot spring landscapes. Additionally, consumers often fail to recognize it as a valuable resource during consumption, leading to a lack of public awareness of the importance of hot spring landscapes. The involvement of multiple managerial bodies responsible can, of course, contribute to the protection of natural hot spring landscapes in urban areas. |
| | | Trust and relationships | Hot spring landscapes need protection, and it is essential to involve more people. If only the government and us researchers are engaged, the entire protection effort becomes ineffective. There is currently a high lack of engagement between policymakers and the public regarding hot spring landscape management. |

Table A2. Cont.

| Expert | Code | Factor | Expert's Answer |
|------------------------|------|-------------------------|---|
| Protection Groups/NGOs | NGO2 | Other influences | The development of hot spring landscapes is indeed a positive initiative. After all, hot spring landscapes represent a renewable green resource that is beneficial to both social and economic development. However, factors influencing the decision-making process related to protection include social development and the relatively low cultural level of the staff, making the overall development challenging to sustain. |
| | | Values or beliefs | I believe that hot spring landscapes require additional protection, and the state government should take responsibility for safeguarding natural hot spring landscapes. On the other hand, those who act and monitor should be the public. I think that the development of hot spring landscapes should be approached with the right strategies. It is a waste to leave them undeveloped. |
| | | Interests and needs | I am frequently engaged in protection activities within the hot springs landscape, and I am often invited to participate in such initiatives due to my knowledge of the hot spring landscape. However, there is a consistent lack of public involvement in the protection of hot spring landscapes. The participation in the protection of the landscape should be inclusive, involving all members of the community. |
| | NGO3 | Knowledge and expertise | In the past, the requirements for mining hot spring water were not as stringent, and there was also less managerial oversight in the process of mandating the protection of natural hot spring landscapes. Now, our main focus is on assisting developers in surveying, evaluating, developing, and utilizing landscapes. However, the protection aspect of this process often lacks substantive guidance and becomes more of a formality. |
| | | Power dynamics | While the landscape policy is sound, it lacks an oversight component. Our primary role involves assisting developers in surveying, evaluating, developing, and utilizing landscapes. However, the protection aspect of this process often lacks substantive guidance and becomes more of a formality. The involvement of multiple departments responsible for protecting natural resources may contribute to the degradation of some of hot spring landscapes. However, we believe that as non-governmental organizations, our opinions should be taken into account because we seek to protect natural hot spring landscapes in urban areas. |
| | | Trust and relationships | All three of these initiatives should be led by the government with the assistance of developers. Local residents should be invited to participate in the protection of the spa landscape. However, there are limited opportunities for other stakeholders to engage in protection. Participation in the conservation of the landscape should be inclusive, involving all members of the community. Those who act and monitor should be the people. |
| | | Other influences | There is a need to explore scientific approaches to ensure sustainable development, and the decisions made by local governments in the process of attracting investment are crucial as they significantly impact the lives of many people. It is important to realize the highest economic value with the least extraction of hot spring water, prioritizing landscape protection. |
| | NGO4 | Values or beliefs | Yes, the hot springs landscape requires more protection, and the provincial government bears responsibility for this matter. It also necessitates further development, with an aim to utilize green areas with hot springs as a valuable resource for the tourism industry. |
| | | Interests and needs | I have participated in numerous activities and associations dedicated to promoting the protection of the hot spring landscape. It is essential for everyone to be involved in safeguarding the hot springs landscape, provided the public takes this matter seriously. Management also needs to enhance the overall quality of actions to meet the requirements of local people. |
| | | Knowledge and expertise | As a member of a protection organization, I am uncertain about the method or process of conserving the hot spring landscape, let alone the general public. Concerning these three hot spring landscapes, the overall development is still positive, and such development cannot be separated from the government's support. Linyi is recognized as a national geothermal hot spring city, and the emphasis is on developing hot spring tourism. |

Table A2. Cont.

| Expert | Code | Factor | Expert's Answer |
|------------------------|------|-------------------------|---|
| Protection Groups/NGOs | NGO4 | Power dynamics | The current policy is sound, but methodologically, the protection process lacks transparency. The development of the hot spring landscape in our area often encounters management problems, leading to conflicts among shareholders that ultimately hinder the development. |
| | | Trust and relationships | The local environmental protection department manages very flexibly, creating opportunities for broader public participation in protecting the hot spring landscape. I believe all people should engage in protecting the hot springs landscape, and it is crucial for the public to take this matter trust and seriously. |
| | | Other influences | The environmental protection department still holds significant influence that may affect the decision-making process of developers, as well as the supervision and policy guidance provided by the government. In my opinion, while there are various factors influencing decision-making, I believe that the tourism aspect is the most influential and crucial for developing and protection the landscape of hot springs. |
| | NGO5 | Values or beliefs | While protection is still necessary, it is insufficient without proper supervision. Mere policy issuance is also inadequate without effective implementation. The hot spring landscape requires thorough and reasonable protection, and hot springs should not remain undeveloped solely due to the need for protection. |
| | | Interests and needs | As an advocate for environmental protection, I encourage people to engage in landscape protection actively. I am highly interested and eager to participate more in activities that are impactful and effective. However, numerous obstacles hinder the participation of individuals or groups, such as the lack of interest from protection institutions in considering public opinions, challenges in gathering public opinions, the absence of public representatives, and difficulties in reaching a consensus on a singular opinion. To ensure effective protection, public involvement in decision-making is crucial. |
| | | Knowledge and expertise | I used to work in management at a hot spring resort, and I have actively participated in numerous hot spring landscape protection activities. I am well-acquainted with the situation in three hot springs, and currently, their development seems focused on establishing a brand for recreation. While the hot spring water is of high quality, the developer has not directed efforts towards utilizing the hot spring water and landscape; instead, it has been used for real estate development. We are jointly appealing to developers to prioritize the rational development of the hot spring landscape. |
| | | Power dynamics | The policy issued by the Department of Natural Resources of Shandong Province now emphasizes the need for local hot springs to be more effective. The responsibility for protecting hot spring landscapes still needs to be tailored to each local situation, striking a balance between responsibilities and rights. I also hope that local governments will consider local conditions and avoid overly rigid approaches. In my opinion, the main issue lies in the lack of highly efficient supervision. |
| | | Trust and relationships | I strongly advocate for the active participation of researchers in the research and development of hot spring landscape protection, utilizing high technology for effective protection. I also endorse establishing a strong relationship between decision-making bodies and the local community. While educating the community about the decisions, we must recognize the importance of providing incentives rather than expecting people to engage in protection efforts without proper motivation. |
| | | Other influences | Developing in the right way is beneficial for the economy, society, and nature, serving as a form of protection for the hot spring landscape. In my opinion, continued development is likely to have economic impacts, both in terms of material gains and increased tourism, by attracting a larger number of tourists. Preserving nature also has a broader impact on the city, particularly as these hot springs are located within urban areas. |

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