

Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development of Rivers State

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Abstract

Rivers State, located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, possesses a rich cultural heritage that holds immense potential for tourism development. The state's diverse ethnic composition, traditional festivals, historical landmarks, and unique architectural expressions provide a significant opportunity to boost tourism and, in turn, drive economic growth. However, despite these potentials, tourism in Rivers State remains underdeveloped due to various challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, security concerns, lack of preservation of historical sites, and insufficient governmental policies geared towards tourism enhancement. This study aims to explore the interplay between cultural heritage and tourism development in Rivers State, identifying key assets that can be leveraged for tourism growth. By analyzing the existing cultural landmarks, indigenous traditions, and architectural heritage, this research seeks to propose strategic interventions that can revitalize the tourism sector. Furthermore, the study examines the role of architecture in shaping tourism experiences, particularly in the design and conservation of cultural sites that could serve as major tourist attractions. Through a comprehensive review of literature, case studies, and field assessments, this research identifies best practices in cultural tourism development and recommends frameworks for sustainable tourism planning. The findings highlight the need for improved infrastructure, enhanced security measures, and community participation in heritage preservation to create a thriving tourism ecosystem. The study concludes that with proper investment, policy formulation, and architectural innovations, Rivers State can harness its cultural heritage as a catalyst for tourism-driven economic transformation. Ultimately, the research underscores the role of cultural tourism in fostering regional development and enhancing the global visibility of Rivers State as a cultural destination.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Tourism Development, Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

Tourism today is one of the world's fastest growing and oldest industries (Bhatia, 2002). The origin of the modern concept of tourism can be traced back to the 17th century, when young nobles from Western and Northern European countries made what was called Grand Tour: a trip around Europe (usually covering France, Germany, Italy and Greece) with the main purpose of soaking up history, art, and cultural heritage. The tourism industry at inception was meant for nobles who could afford the luxury of such expensive tour of places outside areas of their usual normal activities and the tour was for a short period. Tourism is a vital component of the global economy, contributing significantly to the socio-economic development of many regions. In Nigeria, the tourism industry holds great potential, with diverse attractions ranging from natural landscapes to cultural heritage sites. Rivers State, located in the Niger Delta region of southern Nigeria, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, vibrant festivals, and economic significance, particularly in the oil and gas sector.

The state's capital, Port Harcourt, serves as a major gateway for both domestic and international tourists, attracting visitors for business, leisure, and cultural experience. Tourism was defined by United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. The continuous and progressive development of tourism industry, considering its past, present and future impacts on global agenda places it as one of the best sectors of investment. The essential needs of a tourist, which basically included accessibility, accommodation, amenities, attractions, activities and affordability must be articulated and properly address to have a successful tourism programmed (Onu, 2015).

Every human habitation has its unique identity. This identity may be as a result of natural location, historical importance, cultural values and technological development. It is the responsibility of various human settlements to identify her potentials and also maximise its use to the benefit of her settlement. Nigeria has tourism magnetism in the Obudu Mountain Resort and Tinapa Free trade Zone in Cross Rivers, Coconut Beach in Badagry, Lagos Bar Beach, Ibeno Beach, Yinkari National Park, Old Oyo Natural Park, Biafra War Museum in Umuahia, Osun Osogbo Grove, Ancient Kano Wall, tropical rain forests and mangrove swamps on coastal zones, among others (Ojoye, 2016).

Tourism in Rivers State, despite its rich cultural heritage and natural attractions, faces significant architectural and infrastructural challenges that hinder its full potential. For the tourism sector to thrive, it is essential to address architectural needs such as accessibility, accommodation, and safety, which are critical for enhancing the visitor experience (Onu, 2015). While the state offers an array of unique sites, including vibrant festivals and significant natural resources, sustainable tourism development requires purpose-driven architectural designs that ensure environmental harmony and cultural sensitivity (Ojoye, 2016).

Problem Statement

Tourism in Rivers State holds immense potential, yet it remains underdeveloped, requiring urgent attention to unlock its benefits. Despite its rich cultural heritage, diverse natural resources, and strategic location in the Niger Delta region, Rivers State has not achieved its potential as a tourism hub. Challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, environmental degradation, security concerns, and lack of cohesive architectural planning continue to hinder the growth of the sector (Onu, 2015; Ojoye, 2016). In this article, we will explore the various cultural activities in Rivers State, and also how the cultural heritage of Rivers State can be preserved through architectural solutions.

Aim of the study

The aim of this research is to identify some cultural heritage of the Rivers people.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are:

1. Identify some cultural heritage/festivals of Rivers State.
2. Examine some architectural solutions to preserve the cultural heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to draw tourists looking for engaging and significant experiences, cultural heritage and authenticity are essential (Echtner & Ritchie, 2013). A destination's cultural attractiveness is influenced by its historical landmarks, museums, festivals, customs, and food. Both the local community and tourism can benefit from the preservation and promotion of cultural assets.

These essential components work together to produce a comprehensive travel experience that affects the industry's supply and demand sides. A destination's competitiveness and long-term performance in the tourism sector are influenced by its capacity to efficiently manage and incorporate these factors (Crouch & Ritchie, 2019).

Bähre & Elss (2020), researched on 'Tourism and Architecture in the framework of cultural heritage and innovation'. This document, presented as part of the proceedings from the 3rd Scientific Conference of the German Society for Tourism Science (DGT), delves into the intricate relationship between tourism and architecture within the context of cultural heritage and innovation. Celebrating the centennial of the Bauhaus movement, the conference centered on exploring how cultural heritage, particularly architectural heritage, can serve as a dynamic resource for tourism development while fostering cultural continuity and innovation. The research underscores that architecture is not only a structural artifact but also an experiential component of cultural tourism, where the interplay between historical preservation and modern tourism demand shapes both regional identities and economic growth. The methodology in this study, encompassing qualitative case studies, surveys, and thematic analysis. The researchers applied a survey of seniors in the Czech Republic to understand preferences in architectural tourism, utilizing statistical analysis to gauge interpretive preferences. Another approach involved a comparative analysis of architectural heritage adaptation in rural Romania, assessing how migration has altered traditional housing structures and cultural landscapes. Together, these methodologies reflect a multi-faceted examination of how architectural tourism interacts with cultural, social, and economic factors across different European contexts.

The findings reveal several significant themes in architectural tourism. Firstly, interpretation of architectural heritage plays a crucial role in shaping visitor experiences. In the Czech study, seniors exhibited a strong preference for guided tours over digital interpretation, highlighting the importance of personal interaction in historical site visits. This points to a broader need for diverse interpretive strategies that cater to different demographic preferences in cultural tourism.

Additionally, the studies reflect the transformative impact of migration on rural architecture, particularly in Romanian villages. Migrant remittances have facilitated new architectural forms that blend traditional styles with modern materials and designs influenced by exposure to Western European aesthetics. This shift often results in "architectural hybridity," where traditional building practices intersect with contemporary influences, reshaping the visual and cultural landscape of these regions. Another key finding is the value of experiential and immersive interpretation methods in enhancing engagement with architectural heritage. Methods such as augmented reality, virtual tours, and "living history" demonstrations have been shown to enrich visitors' understanding and appreciation of historical sites. However, such technology-driven methods must be balanced to preserve the authenticity and "genius loci" (spirit of place) that make these sites unique.

The study suggests several recommendations for enhancing architectural tourism. It advocates for a diversified approach to heritage interpretation that includes both traditional and technological methods to accommodate varying preferences among tourists. For example, while seniors may prefer guided tours, younger tourists might be more engaged by interactive digital tools. Furthermore, there is a call for policies that support sustainable tourism practices, particularly in rural areas experiencing architectural transformation due to migration. Encouraging the use of local materials and preserving traditional designs within new constructions can help maintain cultural integrity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research procedure employed for this study, this research first reviews the most relevant and recent literature on tourism, culture and architecture. The paper also focuses on identifying the cultural festivals of the Rivers people and some architectural solutions that can help preserve the cultural heritage Rivers State. The study investigates these issues with a pragmatic research philosophy, employing a mixed-methods approach to ensure comprehensive and reliable outcomes. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with key stakeholders, including architects, government officials, and local tourism experts, while quantitative data were gathered from surveys of respondents across the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State and some tourist.

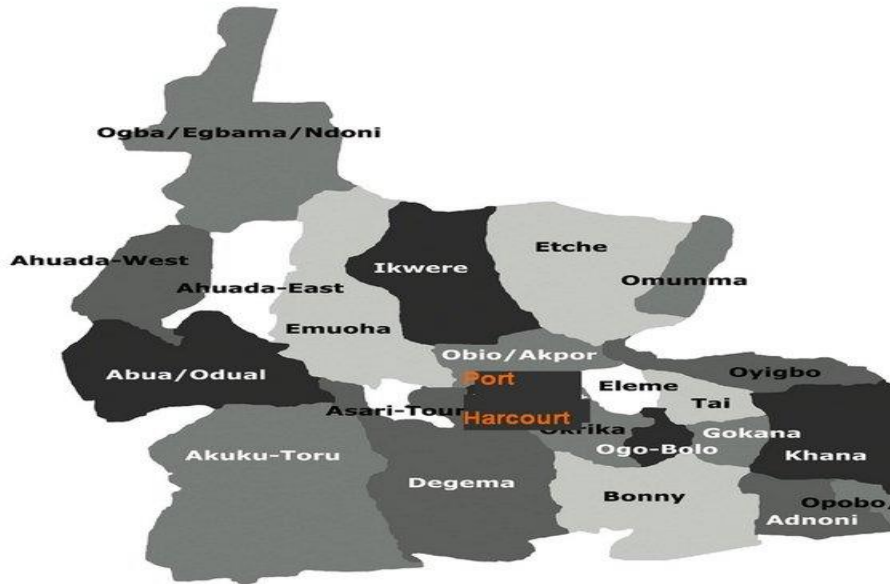


Plate 1: Map showing the study area. (Source: www.maphill.com)

4. Result and Discussion

This section focuses on analyzing the data collected from fieldwork survey, providing a detailed examination of the primary data using table. The primary aim of this analysis is to offer insights that answer the research question, thereby achieving the research objectives.

Table 1: Some Cultural Festivals Identified As Tourism Potentials in Rivers State.

S/N	L.G.A	Cultural festivals	Date/period of festival	Type of festival	Architecture provisions.	Remark.
1	Abua/Odual	Eyaa-Abua New Yam festival.	August	1 Agricultural/Harvest	1 Town hall. 2 Open space.	Annually
		Abua/Odual wrestling fiesta and cultural dance.	April/August	1 Traditional wrestling 2 Masquerade display 3 Traditional music/dance.	1 Town hall. 2 Open space	Annually
2	Ahoda East	Ekpeye New Yam festival	August	1 Agricultural/Harvest	1 Open space.	Occurs annually, it marks the beginning of the yam harvest season.
		Ekpeye Cultural festival		1 Traditional wrestling. 2. Masquerade display	1 Stage for cultural display 2 Open space	Occurs annually,
3	Ahoda west	Usomini New Yam festival	August	1 Agricultural/Harvest	1 Town hall. 2. Open space	Annually
		Odiroko Cultural festival		1 Masquerade displays. 2 Traditional wrestling.	1 open Spaces.	Annually
4	Akuku-Toru	Koro festival	April/May	1 Masquerade performance. 2 Traditional dance	1 Open space. 2 Town Square	Annually
		Kalu-wu festival	December	1 Traditional dance/music performance	1 Open space. 2 Stage for performances	Annually
5	Andoni	Unyeada Fishing festival (Ijok-Irin)	July/August	1 Fishing competitions. 2 Boat races.	1 Riverbank shelter for participants.	Annually
		Ikuru Beach festival	January	1 Beach games. 2 Boat regattas. 3 Traditional dances.	1 Riverbank shelter for participants	Annually
		Andoni International Carnival.	January	1 Unity walk 2 Coconut festival 3 Traditional music/dance.	1 Street. 2 Open space	Annually
6	Asari-Toru	Owu-Aru-Sun festival		1 Traditional dances/music. 2 Masquerade performances. 3 Historical reenactments of battles.	1 Open space. 2 Stage for performance.	Once every seven years.

		Kalabari Beach Party	December	1 Beach parties. 2 Live music performance 3. Beach games	1 River bank shelter 2 Open spaces for music performances	Annually
7	Bonny	Bonny Boat Regatta	December	1 Boat races. 2 Traditional dances.	1 Riverbank shelter 2 Open space	Annually
		Bonny Beach carnival	December	1 Beach parties. 2 Live music performances.	1 Beachfronts for party	Annually
8	Degema	Degema Boat Regatta	December	1 Boat race. 2 Canoe Paddling. 3. Fishing Competitions. 4. Traditional dance.	1 Riverbank shelter.	Annually
		Degema Cultural festival		1 Traditional dance/music 2 Masquerades performance	1 Open space 2 Town hall.	Annually
9	Eleme	Eleme New Yam festival	August/September	1 Agricultural/Harvest 2 Traditional dance	1 Open space 2 Town hall	Annually
		Eleme Cultural festival	December	1 Traditional music/dance. 2 Masquerade performances. 3 wrestling competition.	1 Open space 2 community center.	Annually
10	Emohua	Ogbakiri Boat Regatta Festival	December	1 Boat races 2 Traditional dance. 3 Masquerade display. 4 Cultural exhibitions.	1 Riverbank shelter	Annually
		New Yam Festival	August/September	1 Agricultural/harvest	1 Open space 2 Community center.	Annually
		Amara festival	December/January	1 traditional Music/Dance	1 Village Square. 2 Streets.	Biennially
11	Etche	Etche New Yam festival	August/September	1 Agricultural/Harvest	1 Community centre.	Annually
		Etche Cultural festival	December	1 Traditional music/dance. 2 masquerade performance.	1 Open space 2 Town hall	Annually
12	Gokana	Yor-Mene Festival	December	1 Traditional dance. 2 Masquerades performance.	1 Village square.	Annually
		Gokana Harvest Festival	August/September	1 Sharing of harvested crops. 2 Communal feasting.	1 Open space	Annually

				3 Cultural exhibitions.		
13	Ikwerre	Egelege Festival	June - November	1 Traditional wrestling. 2 traditional music/dance performance.	1 Open space. 2 Stage for performance.	Annually
		New Yam Festival	August/September	1 Agricultural/Harvest	1 Community center. 2 open space.	Annually
		Isiokpo bicycle carnival	December	1 sports activities. 2 traditional music/dance display.	1 Open Space 2 streets	Annually
14	Khana	Ogoni Day celebration	January	1 Cultural music/dance 2 Display of Ogoni cultural artifacts.	1 Open space. 2 Stage for performance.	Annually
		Nwidon Festival	December	1 Traditional rituals. 2 Masquerades performance.	1 Village square. 2 Open space.	Annually
15	Obio/Akpor	Obio Traditional wrestling festival (Egelege)	June - July	1 Traditional Wrestling matches. 2 traditional drumming/dance. 3 Communal gatherings.	1 Open space. 2 Town Square.	Annually
		Akpor New Yam Festival	August/September.	1 Agriculture/Harvest. 2 Cultural display.	1 Town hall. 2 Open space	Annually
16	Ogba/Egbema /Ndoni	Egwu Ogba/Nchaka Festival	November - December	1 Masquerade performance. 2 traditional dance. 3 drumming.	1 open space	Annually
		Igu Festival	March/April	1 Agricultural/Harvest 2 Communal feasting and thanksgiving ceremonies.	1 Open space 2 community center.	Annually
17	Ogu/Bolo	Ogu Regatta Festival	April/May	1 Canoe races. 2 Traditional music/dance. 3 Masquerade display.	1 Riverbank shelter	Annually
		Iri-Awo Festival	August/September	1 Traditional initiation rites. 2 Drumming, music and dance.	1 Community center.	Annually
18	Okirika	Iria Ceremony	Varies, often during the dry season	1 Traditional dance. 2 Body painting. 3 Adornment of young women in cultural attire.	1 Community center. 2 Open space.	Annually
		Okirika Boat Regatta	December/January	1 Boat races. 2 Canoe paddling competitions. 3 Masquerade display.	1 Riverbank shelter	Annually
19	Omuma	Omuma New Yam Festival	August/September	1 Agricultural/Harvest	1 Open space 2 Village Square.	Annually
		Egelege Cultural Festival	December	1 Traditional wrestling competition.	1 Open space	Annually

				2 Cultural music/dance. 3 Masquerade performance.	2 Stage for performance	
20	Opobo/Nkoro	Opobo Festival	December/January	1 Parades. 2 Nwaotan 3 Beach party. 4 Traditional dance/music. 5 Cultural exhibitions.	1 Community center. 2 Open space 3 Stage for performance.	Annually
		Nkoro Festival	September	1 Traditional rituals 2 Masquerade display. 3 Traditional music/dance.	1 Open space 2 Community center.	Annually
21	Oyigbo	Oyigbo New Yam Festival	August/September	1 Agricultural/Harvest 2 Traditional music/dance. 3 Masquerade display.	1 Open space. 2 Village square.	Annually
		Oyigbo Cultural Festival	Varies	1 Traditional music/dance. 2 masquerade performance. 3 Cultural exhibitions.	1 Open space. 2 Community center	Annually
22	Port Harcourt	Bole festival	August	1 Bole/Local cuisine display. 2 Cultural exhibition. 3 Traditional music/dance.	1 Stadiums. 2 Open space. 3 Cultural centers	Date varies.
		Port Harcourt Carnival	December	1 Parades. 2 Masquerade display. 3 Traditional music/dance. 4 Tradition attire display. 5 Cultural exhibition	1 Street 2 Open space	Annually
		New Yam Festival	August/September	1 Agricultural/Harvest. 2 Traditional music/dance. 3 masquerade display.	1 Open space 2 Stage for performance.	Annually
23	Tai	Tai New Yam Festival	August/September	1 Agricultural/Harvest. 2 Traditional music/dance. 3 masquerade display.	1 Open space 2 Stage for performance.	Annually
		Tai Cultural Festival	December	1 Traditional dance. 2 Masquerade display. 3 Arts and crafts exhibitions. 4 Food fairs.	1 Open space 2 Stage for performance.	Annually

Egelege Cultural Wrestling: An In-Depth Exploration of Tradition, Strength, and Community Identity.

Egelege Ikwerre wrestling, deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Ikwerre people of Rivers State, Nigeria, is more than just a sport; it is a manifestation of strength, tradition, and community identity. This form of wrestling holds significant historical and cultural importance, serving as a means of showcasing physical prowess, resolving disputes, and preserving cultural heritage through generations.

Egelege Ikwerre wrestling is a traditional practice rooted in the history and culture of the Ikwerre people in Rivers State, Nigeria. Originating in ancient times, it was initially a means of honing practical skills such as hunting and self-defense. Over time, the practice evolved into a structured

cultural activity, becoming an essential feature of social gatherings, festivals, and ceremonies. Wrestling provided young men with an opportunity to demonstrate their bravery, physical strength, and readiness for adulthood within the community (Udoh, 2017).

Egelege wrestling is deeply embedded in spiritual and cultural traditions. Elaborate rituals are performed before matches to seek blessings from ancestors and ensure fairness. These rituals include prayers, incantations, and symbolic gestures, all aimed at spiritually fortifying the wrestlers and sanctifying the wrestling arena, known as the *Ogbalor*. This circular, sand-filled space holds significant cultural and spiritual importance and serves as the focal point for competitions (Akpan, 2019). The practice of Egelege Ikwerre wrestling adheres to traditional rules that emphasize respect, fairness, and cultural norms. Wrestlers don traditional attire made from local fabrics, reflecting the cultural identity of the Ikwerre people. Matches aim to throw an opponent to the ground using specific grips and techniques, with victory achieved by pinning the opponent's back or forcing them out of the arena. Experienced elders or referees oversee the contests, ensuring adherence to rules while interpreting the cultural significance of the matches (Eze, 2020). Egelege wrestling represents more than a physical contest; it embodies values central to Ikwerre culture. It is a demonstration of physical strength, agility, and endurance, traits highly esteemed in the community. Wrestling matches foster unity and pride, bringing together spectators from various villages to celebrate shared heritage. The associated rituals and ceremonies connect participants and audiences to ancestral traditions, reinforcing spiritual beliefs and cultural identity (Obot, 2018). Furthermore, the continued practice of Egelege wrestling helps preserve and transmit these traditions across generations, maintaining a vital link to the Ikwerre people's history and values.

In modern times, Egelege Ikwerre wrestling faces challenges from urbanization, globalization, and the growing influence of modern sports. These pressures threaten its continuity and authenticity. However, efforts by cultural enthusiasts, community leaders, and government initiatives have sought to safeguard and promote this practice as a vital aspect of Ikwerre heritage. Preserving Egelege wrestling not only strengthens community identity and cultural pride but also contributes to the broader cultural diversity and heritage conservation efforts in Rivers State and Nigeria. Egelege stands as a testament to the resilience and vibrancy of Ikwerre traditions. Its significance goes beyond its role as a competitive sport, reflecting the values, spirituality, and identity of the Ikwerre people. As documentation and preservation efforts continue, this traditional practice remains a powerful symbol of cultural heritage and community cohesion.



Plate 2: Picture showing a typical Egelege scene. (Source: Author's field work)

Boat Regatta: Exploring the Riverine Culture of Nigeria

Boat regattas are vibrant cultural events deeply embedded in the maritime heritage of Nigeria's riverine communities. These events have historically been tied to the rivers and waterways that have served as vital channels for trade, transportation, and cultural exchange. Originating from practical activities such as commemorating successful fishing expeditions and welcoming esteemed guests, regattas evolved into celebrated communal milestones that reflect the traditions and values of riverine societies (Amadi, 2021).

The rituals surrounding boat regattas are a rich expression of riverine spirituality and cultural identity. Traditional blessings by elders are performed to seek protection and success, invoking the favor of ancestral spirits and deities. Boats are adorned with intricate designs, vivid colors, and carvings that embody local craftsmanship and convey stories from folklore and historical events. Festive drumming, traditional dances, and communal singing create an electrifying atmosphere, emphasizing unity and pride (Obot, 2018). Boat regattas embody the harmonious relationship between riverine communities and their environment. They highlight stewardship of natural resources, foster social cohesion, and celebrate cultural identity. By preserving traditional boat-building techniques, navigational skills, and associated performances, these events ensure the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage. Regattas also reinforce communal solidarity, as participants and spectators unite to celebrate shared traditions (Eze, 2020).

In modern Nigeria, boat regattas face challenges posed by urbanization, environmental degradation, and shifting socio-economic dynamics. However, they remain essential for preserving riverine culture, showcasing traditional practices, and fostering community resilience. Efforts to promote sustainable tourism, cultural education, and government support are crucial to maintaining the

authenticity and relevance of these events in contemporary society. Boat regattas are enduring symbols of Nigeria's riverine heritage, reflecting the values, spirituality, and resilience of its communities. As they adapt to modern challenges, these cultural events continue to celebrate the vibrancy and diversity of Nigeria's maritime traditions while fostering pride and unity among its people.



Plate 3: Cultural performance showcasing the local dance of the kalabari group. (Source: Author's field work)

Table 2: Summary of descriptive statistics on how the cultural heritage of Rivers State can be preserved through architectural solutions

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Integration of indigenous architectural designs in new constructions to maintain cultural identity.	202	309	62	21	3.16	0.75	Agreed
2	Documentation and digital archiving of traditional architectural designs for future reference.	409	164	16	5	3.64	0.58	Agreed
3	Educational programs in architecture schools focus on traditional building techniques for heritage preservation.	216	352	21	5	3.31	0.58	Agreed
4	Implementation of architectural tourism routes showcasing traditional and historical buildings in Rivers State.	196	357	31	10	3.24	0.62	Agreed
5	Creation of cultural heritage districts where traditional architecture is preserved and promoted.	176	326	56	36	3.08	0.79	Agreed
6	Conservation of cultural landscapes and open spaces in architectural planning for heritage preservation.	123	404	13	54	3.00	0.77	Agreed
7	Involvement of local communities in the design and implementation of architectural projects to preserve cultural heritage.	201	303	60	30	3.14	0.79	Agreed
Grand mean						3.23	0.32	Agreed

The findings from Table 2 provide significant insights into how the cultural heritage of Rivers State can be preserved through architectural solutions. With a grand mean of 3.23 ± 0.32 , there is a general agreement among respondents on the importance and effectiveness of various architectural strategies for cultural heritage preservation. Respondents strongly agreed on the documentation and digital archiving of traditional architectural designs for future reference, with the highest mean of 3.64 ± 0.58 . This agreement underscores the crucial role of digital archiving in preserving cultural heritage. By documenting traditional designs, valuable architectural knowledge is safeguarded for future generations, enabling the continuation and appreciation of cultural identity (Harrison, 2013). Digital archiving also provides a readily accessible repository of information that can be used for educational purposes and heritage conservation initiatives (Gilliland-Swetland, 2020). Educational programs in architecture schools focusing on traditional building techniques for heritage preservation received strong agreement, with a mean of 3.31 ± 0.58 . Integrating traditional architectural knowledge into academic curricula ensures that future architects are well-versed in heritage preservation practices. This educational approach fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage, equipping architects with the skills necessary to incorporate traditional techniques into modern construction (Vellinga, 2016). Such programs also promote the

continuity of indigenous building methods, which are often sustainable and environmentally friendly (Oliver, 2013).

The implementation of architectural tourism routes showcasing traditional and historical buildings in Rivers State was highly agreed upon, with a mean of 3.24 ± 0.62 . Architectural tourism routes can enhance the visibility and appreciation of cultural heritage sites, attracting tourists interested in history and architecture (Timothy, 2011). These routes provide structured and engaging ways for visitors to explore the Rivers State's architectural heritage, contributing to cultural education and economic development through tourism (Mason, 2015). Integration of indigenous architectural designs in new constructions to maintain cultural identity was agreed upon with a mean of 3.16 ± 0.75 . Incorporating traditional designs into contemporary buildings helps preserve cultural identity while accommodating modern needs. This approach not only honors cultural heritage but also promotes a unique architectural aesthetic that distinguishes the Rivers State (Vale, 2020). By blending traditional and modern elements, architects can create spaces that reflect the community's history and values (Rapoport, 2018). Involvement of local communities in the design and implementation of architectural projects to preserve cultural heritage received a mean of 3.14 ± 0.79 . Community participation is essential for successful heritage preservation, as it ensures that the cultural values and needs of the local population are respected and integrated into architectural projects (Jones, 2017). Engaging communities in preservation efforts fosters a sense of ownership and pride in their cultural heritage, leading to more sustainable and effective conservation outcomes (Smith, 2016).

The creation of cultural heritage districts where traditional architecture is preserved and promoted had a mean of 3.08 ± 0.79 . Heritage districts can serve as focal points for cultural preservation and tourism, showcasing traditional architecture and promoting cultural activities (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2019). These districts can stimulate local economies by attracting tourists and providing spaces for cultural events and businesses that celebrate and maintain cultural heritage (Koskina, 2013). The conservation of cultural landscapes and open spaces in architectural planning for heritage preservation had the least mean among the items listed, with a mean of 3.00 ± 0.77 . Despite having the lowest mean, the agreement still highlights the importance of conserving landscapes and open spaces as part of heritage preservation. Cultural landscapes represent the interaction between people and their environment over time and are integral to the cultural heritage of a Rivers State (Mitchell & Buggy, 2020). Preserving these spaces within architectural planning ensures that the environmental and cultural contexts of heritage sites are maintained (Taylor, 2018). Documentation and Digital Archiving: The importance of documenting and digitally archiving traditional architectural designs is well-supported in the literature. Harrison (2013) emphasizes the role of digital archives in safeguarding cultural heritage, while Gilliland-Swetland (2020) discusses the benefits of accessible digital repositories for educational and conservation purposes.

Educational Programs in Architecture Schools: The agreement on the need for educational programs in traditional building techniques aligns with the findings of Vellinga (2016) and Oliver (2013). These scholars highlight the significance of integrating traditional architectural knowledge into academic curricula to promote heritage preservation and sustainable building practices. There is a consensus on the importance of documentation and digital archiving, educational programs focusing on traditional techniques, and the implementation of architectural tourism routes. Integrating indigenous designs in new constructions, involving local communities in architectural projects, and creating cultural heritage districts are also seen as vital strategies. The conservation of cultural landscapes and open spaces, while receiving the lowest mean, is still recognized as an important aspect of heritage preservation. These findings underscore the multifaceted approach needed to effectively preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Rivers State.

Palace of His Eminent Barr. Dr. Wachukwu Nnam Obuoha.Obi, The 3rd Oba Eze of Ogba Land

The Oba of Ogba land palace is a significant cultural tourism facility located in Ogba, Rivers State, Nigeria. This majestic palace serves as the official residence of the Oba, the traditional ruler of the Ogba people and also a centre for cultural activities.



Plate 4: The Palace of King of Ogba Land Omuku (Source: Author's field work)

Obi Wali International Conference Center

The Obi Wali international conference centre is a premier convention centre named after the renowned Nigerian scholar and politician, Dr. Obi Wali, the center was established to honour his legacy and contributions to the state. The conference centre boasts state-of-the-art facilities, including a large auditorium with a seating capacity of over 2,500 people.



Plate 5: Obi Wali international conference centre (Source: Author's field work)

Palace of Nye New Ali Akpor Kingdom

The palace of Akpor kingdom is a majestic and modern royal residence located in the heart of Akpor Kingdom, Rivers State, Nigeria. This impressive structure serves as the official residence of the King of Akpor Kingdom, symbolizing the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the Akpor people.



Plate 6: The Palace of Nye New Ali Akpor Kingdom (Source: Author's field work)



Plate 7: Akpor Cultural performance (Source: Author's field work)

Conclusion

For cultural and heritage tourism to grow sustainably, community involvement is essential. A sense of pride and ownership is promoted when locals are involved in the design, administration, and interpretation of cultural sites. This strategy can help spread cultural knowledge and customs while giving visitors more genuine and enriching experiences (Richards & Wilson, 2016). Cultural and heritage tourism heavily relies on preservation initiatives. For the sake of future generations, heritage sites, artifacts, and customs must be preserved. For cultural and heritage tourist destinations to remain viable, governments, non-governmental organizations, and local people must work together to implement effective conservation measures (Timothy & Boyd, 2013).

In addition, cultural and heritage tourism provides a link between the past and the present, allowing visitors to interact with a variety of customs, cultures, and historical accounts. This type of tourism enhances visitors' lives and advances intercultural understanding by promoting genuine experiences, aiding local people, and protecting cultural treasures.

Recommendations

The recommendations align with the study's objective and findings and are outlined as follows:

1. Promote local festivals and traditional ceremonies to showcase Rivers State's rich cultural heritage and attract cultural tourists.
2. Introduce architectural guidelines that emphasize functionality, aesthetics, and cultural relevance in tourism facility designs. Encourage the use of local materials and craftsmanship to boost the economy and preserve cultural identity. Organize workshops and training programs for architects and tourism stakeholders to align their efforts with global best practices.

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