

## Harnessing Heritage Resources for Social, Economic and Cultural Benefits in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *Heritages are non-existent and existent assets of a community that are important for historical, economic, educational, recreational, social, and cultural significance, conserved and handed over from one generation to another. The utilization of heritage sites' resources for social, economic and cultural benefits in some countries have been extensively studied. This paper presents the overview of heritage sites benefits on social, economic and cultural benefits in Nigeria. A qualitative approach through a synthesis of literature was adopted in the study. This review provides details to further develop deeper understanding of heritage resources for social, economic and cultural advancement in Nigeria. Empirical studies are cited to elaborate on the importance of heritage resources to sustainable development. Findings of the research revealed moderate contributions of heritage sites resources to sustainable development in Nigeria. The need to encourage communities' participations and development of domestic tourism for heritage sites was maintained in the paper. The study concluded that for there to be development of heritage resources that will drive socio-economic and cultural growth, the protection of the resources is of utmost importance.*

**Keywords:** heritage sites, cultural, economic, social, benefits, Nigeria

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### INTRODUCTION

Heritage is a valuable identifier of a community that is handed down from generation to generation through mindful conservation (Onyima, 2016; Bekwele & Oyindoubra, 2023). According to UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2022), heritage is the legacy of historical eras that are useful to present generations and passed to future generations. Heritages are standards, references as well as the identities of a set of people, communities and nations. Madandola and Boussaa (2023)

maintained that heritages are based on patrimony, inherited resources as well as a representation and reinterpretation of the past. This includes natural and cultural environments such as: historic sites, constructed environments, landscapes, biodiversity collections, cultural practices, knowledge and life experiences (Günlü et al., 2013). Heritage can be classified into two groups according to its origin: ecological/natural heritage and cultural heritage. (Onyima, 2016; Arua, et al., 2017; Hui et al., 2019). According to Aremu (2008); Arua et al. (2017), the ecological or natural heritages are the ones that emanate from nature and environment such as animals (fauna) geomorphological features (mountains, caves, hills, rivers, lakes, waterfalls), and wild plants (flora). Cultural heritage develops through human activities through the modification of natural heritage (Aplin, 2007; Ezenagu, 2020). Cultural heritage is therefore limited to artifacts and beliefs and can be classified into two categories: tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage (Eluyemi, 2002; Ogundele 2014; Ezenagu, 2020).

Cultural heritage resources are inherent beauty and value that can be exploited for tourism development (Chang, 1997; Ale et al., 2020; Fusco Girard & Vecco, 2021; Mumbengegwi et al., 2023). The uniqueness of these resources attracts tourists to experience the unique sceneries, customs and antiquity of cultural heritage sites (Ezenagu, 2020; Ale et al., 2020). Developing cultural heritage resources as tourist destinations is often seen as having positive impacts, both directly and indirectly, on indigenous community well-being along with national social, economic, and cultural advantages (Chhabra, 2010; Matarrita-Cascante, 2010; Ma & Hassink, 2013; Tugcu, 2014; Tang & Tan, 2015; Kozhakulov, et al., 2021). Mamirkulova et al. (2020); Labadi et al. (2021) hypothesize that cultural heritage stimulates infrastructure and socioeconomic development, enhances regional security, and promotes civic pride. The importance of these cultural heritage influences the ecological, community and economic well-being of citizens (Adegoriola et al., 2023). Heritage therefore plays a substantial role in sustainable development and is preserved and conserved by the state.

In Nigeria, heritage sites are scattered across the regions and states. Some of these heritage sites are UNESCO-recognised, UNESCO-tentative and potential heritage sites. These sites have been experienced by both domestic and international tourists and researchers (Awaritefe, 2004; Esu, & Arrey, 2009; Ijeomah, & Eniang, 2018; Ezenagu, 2020). However, there is a dearth of literature on the social, economic and cultural benefits of these heritage resources. Most available literature focus on the heritage resources to cultural tourism (Ezenagu, 2020); cultural heritage and tourism development (Onyejegbu, 2014; Onyima, 2016); effect of modernization on cultural heritage (Eze-Uzomaka & Oloidi, 2017). This paper therefore, examines the social, economic and cultural benefits of heritage resources. This is with a view to promoting heritage conservation and preservation in Nigeria. Global heritage sites is discussed in the next stage which dovetails into Africa heritage sites as well as Nigeria heritage sites. Next, lessons from selected countries and benefits from heritage sites were elucidated. The paper concluded with some findings on the area of study and made policy recommendations that can be harnessed to engender the performance of heritage resources for sustainable development in Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative approach was considerably utilized in this paper. The strategy involved gathering data from empirical studies and academic manuals, authorized internet and website articles. The study was conducted utilizing already-existing documentation obtained from reports, websites and journals. This study collected information on the importance of heritage site across the globe and lessons from selected countries with heritage activities and its application to Nigeria situation. Both theoretical and analytical techniques were used to collect the data for the investigation. The materials were evaluated through content analysis for acceptable conclusions and recommendations in relations to the underlined objectives of the paper which is the social, economic and cultural benefits of heritage sites in Nigeria.

### **Synthesis of Related Literature on Heritage Resources**

#### **Global Perspective**

All over the world, the significance of each country's cultural heritage from economic, historical, tourism, aesthetic, educational and scientific perspectives is well documented (Peacock & Rizzo, 2008; Young, 2020). The history of World Heritage Sites (WHS) dates back to 1972, when UNESCO adopted the World Heritage Convention (WHC) to safeguard cultural and natural heritage sites of “exceptional world value” (Rao, 2010; Labadi, 2013).

The overall goal of UNESCO is to safeguard cultural and natural heritage (tangible and intangible) for prospective generations (Bille, 2012; Caust and Vecco, 2017; Bogolyubova et al., 2019). The UNESCO Commission for Culture in Paris therefore publishes annually a list of World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) elements, showing the outstanding world value of each site (Santa Cruz and Lopez Guzmán, 2017; Cameron, 2020. Shabani et al., 2020). The World Heritage List encourages the documentation, safeguarding and communication of these precious sites and monuments to future generations from a historical and artistic perspective (Saiprradist & Staiff, 2008). However, Meskell (2014), argued that the 1972 WHC was no longer about conservation, but rather about marketing and promotion of new nominations in a heritage economy that is becoming more acquisitive. Although the aim of these awards by UNESCO is to safeguard and preserve these sites, UNESCO natural and cultural wonders rank among the most popular tourist destinations worldwide. (Canale et al., 2019; Maxim & Chasovschi, 2021). Endresen (1999) agreed that these WHSs are significant tourist attractions and form the strength of the tourism industry. Kajzar (2014) also suggested that WHS could benefit the conservation of the site and generate revenues that could support the livelihoods of communities living in and around the site. This claim is controversial, however, as the contribution of global tourism to World Heritage sites and cities can sometimes be overblown and insensitive, and the growing gap between the importance of heritage to local communities and the demand for world culture. Many countries around the world have developed and utilized cultural heritage resources for social, economic and cultural purposes. Countries where Nigeria can learn relevant lessons are:

### **Brazil**

Brazil is a country with a multi-ethnic cultural background, natural diversity and a vast geographic area (Lohmann & Dredge, 2012). According to the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report (2008), Brazil is better known for its natural resources than many other countries. Brazil is becoming more competitive, and she ranks 32nd in the global ranking of travel and tourism competitiveness (Vegh & Dowbor, 2021). This was the result of what the World Bank called his 2015 “Golden Decade (2003-2013)” (Ocampo et al., 2019). In Brazil, cultural tourism is a cornerstone of economic growth in several regions of the country (Silva et al., 2023). The travel and tourism sector accounts for a significant share of employment, with \$5.9 billion in revenue from foreign tourist arrivals in 2019, according to Brazil's central bank. Moreover, the domestic market is also central to Brazil's economic development as it generates domestic income. In addition, the number of domestic tourists visiting this country is more than 30 times that of foreign domestic and contributes to its continued development as a tourism destination.

Beside, Brazilian cultural aspects have strategically enhanced the attractiveness and uniqueness of the tourism experience, thereby enhancing the country's brand image (Mariutti et al., 2013). Since the mid-2000s, Brazil has attracted 5 to 6 million international tourists each year for many years. The growth of Brazil's tourism sector is the result of targeted policies, especially through strong involvement of the private sector and the Convention and Tourism Bureau (C&VB). Furthermore, the development of Brazilian tourism is driven by high patronage of domestic tourists (seixas & Troutt, 2003; da Conceição Walkowski, et al., 2019).

### **Russia**

Russia is a home to multinational population which has an extensive cultural and historical heritage of great national importance, making it an integral part of the World Heritage List. Russia offers a mix of Eastern and Western cultures for tourism purposes (Balaeva et al., 2012; Sheresheva & Kopiski, 2016).

Russia has more than 1000 cities with about 70% of which are small towns with special and unique historical value (Karpov & Merzlov, 2016). The country has all the necessary resources for the active development of tourism. Over 12,000 hotels, 477 historic cities, over 144,000 historical and cultural monuments, 108 museums and 142 national parks (Tarasova, 2013; Tanina et al., 2022). In 2017, Russia ranked 4th in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Attractiveness Rating for Cultural Heritage Tourism and 11th in terms of number of World Heritage Sites. In 2017, 26 cultural and natural sites from different regions of Russia were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. By 2018, Russia became the world leader in international tourism (Dzobelova et al., 2020; Pogodina et al., 2021). The Russian tourism industry is a dynamically developing economic sector that employs over 500,000 people (Dzobelova et al., 2020). Russia's international tourism revenue in 2017 was \$8.945 billion, accounting for 3.4% of the country's GDP. In 2018, international tourist arrivals reached 24.6 million, accounting for 6% of the country's GDP. These

figures are based on high global growth, accessibility of air travel, technology changes, new business models, visa simplification and formal agreements among destinations and recipient countries (UNWTO, 2020). Moreover, domestic tourism has been a driver of industrial growth, contributing to the economy's development as well as supporting this sector's growth from 2014 onwards (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017). The Russian tourism sector is officially recognized as a state revenue generating industry (Andrades & Dimanche, 2017; Sharikov et al., 2021). The industry offers numerous opportunities to meet the needs of national and international citizens in the field of tourism services. It also contributes to the development of the national economy through household tax revenues, foreign currency inflows, employment increases, along with the preservation and rational use of cultural and natural heritage resources (Akindinova, 2016). Looking at trends in the Russian travel market, the number of tourists and foreign currency income increased until 2018, but since 2018, Russia has recorded a decline of 8.01%, and in 2020, it has declined by 71.22% compared to 2019. An analysis of the current state of Russia's tourism shows that since 2019 due to factors such as COVID-19 pandemic and Russian Ukraine war, the number of annual visitors continues to fall. Moreover, Russia has made visa requirements for foreigners from some countries more difficult and have had a negative effect on the growth of tourism in that country (Sheresheva, 2016).

## **Mexico**

Since the 1950s and 1960s, Mexico's heritage resources have grown and become an important source of social and economic development (Faber & Gaubert, 2019). Mexico has 33 World Heritage Sites, including 27 cultural sites, 10 cultural cities, 187 archaeological sites open to the public, 111 magical villages, 174 religious' shrines, 1,121 museums and an internationally recognized gastronomic diversity. In terms of World Heritage Sites, Mexico ranks only sixth after Italy, China, Spain, Germany and France (Marbán et al., 2020). The country is known to have multiple destinies that determine whether its physical, natural and cultural features are inscribed as tourism heritage sites (Ravina et al., 2020). The cultural tourism sector recorded the second largest foreign exchange inflow to Mexico in 2019 (pre-pandemic), contributing USD24 million or more than 8.6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generating a total population of 1,646.554 billion people, with a total of 2,271,112 equivalent paid jobs (Madrid and Godines, 2021). In 2021 the sector contribute 7.1% to Mexico's GDP and 8.3% in 2022. This has largely been achieved through proper management of tourism activities of residents, networking, strengthening equity, and developing solutions to problems that directly affect residents. As a result, the cultural tourism sector is not only an important source of local and national economies, but also an important area for the cultural revitalization of communities.

Mexico's tourism sector has undergone extensive infrastructure development in surrounding areas to accommodate the growing number of tourists (Brenner, 2005). In recent decades, the majority of Mexico's tourism activity in terms of revenue generation has been driven by domestic interregional visitors rather than international visitors (Faber & Gaubert, 2019).



### **Africa Continental Perspective**

The African continent is home to outstanding archaeological sites and cultural landscapes that have attracted treasure hunters, archaeologists and tourists from Africa and the world for centuries (Makuvaza, 2014; Sinamai, 2014). Africa's cultural heritage resources include natural landscapes and diversity of flora and fauna that attract tourists from continents where wildlife is no longer protected (Sinamai, 2014; Bula, 2016). As of March 2021, 145 (12.93%) of 1,121 sites in Africa are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (Chirikure et al., 2021; Hutcheson, 2021; Ndoro, 2021; Kenterelidou & Galatsopoulou, 2021). Of these numbers in Africa, South Africa currently has the highest number (10), followed by Ethiopia (9), Morocco (9) and Tunisia (8). Algeria, Egypt, Kenya, Senegal and Tanzania each have seven World Heritage Sites, while Nigeria has only two (Sooryamoorthy, 2018; Ale et al., 2020). Some African countries have only one, others none at all. Africa has unique cultural assets of extraordinary value, attractive and stunning places with natural and cultural heritage values (Ndoro, 2015). Cultural heritage resources are viewed as “money trees” that bring in quick money in many African countries (Galla, 2012; Ndoro, 2015). International tourist arrivals and revenues increased by more than 8 % in South Africa during the period from 2000 to 2005, while tourism's share of overall capital investment went up from 11 % in 2007 to 15 % in 2019 (Sarpong et al., 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, the tourism industry employs about 4 million people. Again, Cultural heritage resources in Africa act as a local force for infrastructure development and direct investment that leads to social cohesion, conservation of skills, education, partnerships and an increased GDP (Galla, 2012). In Africa, the power of natural and cultural resources to empower local communities is widely recognized, but their use does not always meet the needs of communities living near heritage sites. Managed by NGOs and international organizations (Thiaw, 2014; Wassie, 2020). It has also been pointed out that the development of heritage resources by external multinationals brings little benefit to the communities from which they are extracted (Montague, 2002). However, to effectively develop cultural heritage resources, it is necessary to enhance research and conservation capacity with an increase in the number of African workers at these sites (Ogundiran, 2016; Chirikure et al., 2021).

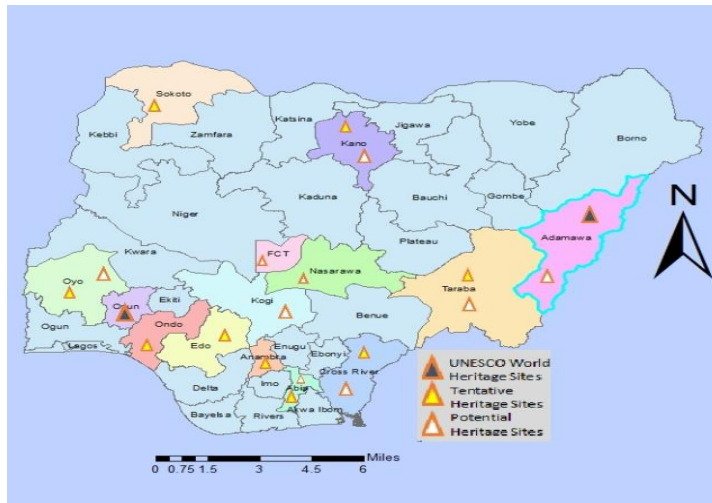
### **National Heritage Resources Perspective**

Nigeria, with its unique and varied cultural heritage as well as evidence of human creativity found almost everywhere in the country, is rich in history and culture (Adie & Hall, 2017; Adie et al., 2018). Nigeria is an ethnically diverse country, and the display of special cultural heritage resources shines a light on its distinct lifestyle (Ezenagu, 2020; Olanrewaju et al., 2017; Oladeji, et al., 2022). This is evident in numerous natural gifts and cultural practices (Ezenagu, 2015). Nigeria has not only natural heritage, but also ecological and cultural heritage (Onyima, 2016; Arua et al., 2017). The Cultural heritage resources represent the important treasures of the country's tourism assets and sustainable heritage tourism (Worku-Tadesse, 2023). Egusquiz et al. (2021) assert that, by virtue of its benefits, cultural heritage resources have a significant impact on economic growth, societal integration and the environment sustainability in their respective regions. The number of arrivals and visits from other countries are, however, widely accepted

indicators to assess the effectiveness of heritage resources in a country. In Nigeria, the number of domestic tourists made by land increased from 1.4 million in 2020 to about 2.8 million in 2021. In 2021, cultural heritage resources contributed 3.6% to Nigeria's GDP (approximately USD16 billion), contributing to increased foreign exchange earnings from tourism activities. McMorran (2008) points out that heritage sites are profitable and used as a tourist attraction. For example, the annual Osun Osogbo Festival and its ceremonies have become an international event and are widely open to foreign tourists in the country. According to Yusuff and Akinde (2015), cultural heritage resources generate employment as job creators in the form of service- and product-oriented services that employ people to serve tourists. In 2021, Nigeria employed approximately 2.4 million people (4%) of total national employment in the travel and tourism sector. This has a fluid impact on people, increasing their income and ultimately improving their living standards and reducing the social problem of unemployment (Tunde, 2012).

In addition, the importance of heritage resources in Nigerian society is that they stimulate a sense of community pride and contribute to an area's environment. In Nigeria, the availability of cultural heritage resources has improved the attractiveness and competitiveness of large cities (Fajemirokun, 2021). However, Nigeria is rich in cultural heritage resources and services, especially in rural areas which are not valued by local communities and lack basic facilities and accessible roads. Cultural heritage resources are also threatened by lack of funds, theft, insecurity, human activities, natural forces, and biological and chemical agents (Ogundele, 2014).

In Nigeria's ecological heritage resources include 29 game reserves, 1,129 forest reserves, 4 game reserves, 2 strict nature reserves and 8 national parks (Marguba, 2008). The cultural heritage resources can be divided into the arts, customs, festivals, sacred sites and places of worship, norms, values, ideology, clothing and dress patterns, traditional monuments and buildings (Onyima, 2016). These rich cultural heritage resources remain important drivers and assets for tourism across Nigeria (Figure 1). Heritage resources of this country have an important cultural significance, but there are just 2 sites on the World Heritage List (Sukur Cultural Landscape and Osun Osogbo Sacred Ditch), many of which are on the Tentative List and have a rich tradition, especially in cultural festivals as shown in figure 1 (Ezenagu, 2020; Adhuze et al., 2021). The degree of state involvement in global production and market trade competition is plausible evidence of this development (Dada, 2016). To increase social, economic and cultural benefits of heritage resources, Nigeria must accelerate her commitment and investment into tourism sector and build new links with the rest of the global economy.



**Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the Study UNESCO World, Tentative and Potential**

## Heritage Sites in Nigeria

### Benefits of Heritage Resources

Cultural heritage resources are one of the considerations for people to travel to a place, and the development of the place brings economic, social and cultural benefits to indigenous communities (Figure 2) (Fang & Fang, 2020). However, the positive impact of heritage sites essentially depends on the participation of indigenous communities, their integrity to the shelter, and their level of consent to the use of the heritage site as well as a tourist attraction (Ballesteros & Ramirez, 2007).

### Economic Benefits of Heritage Resources

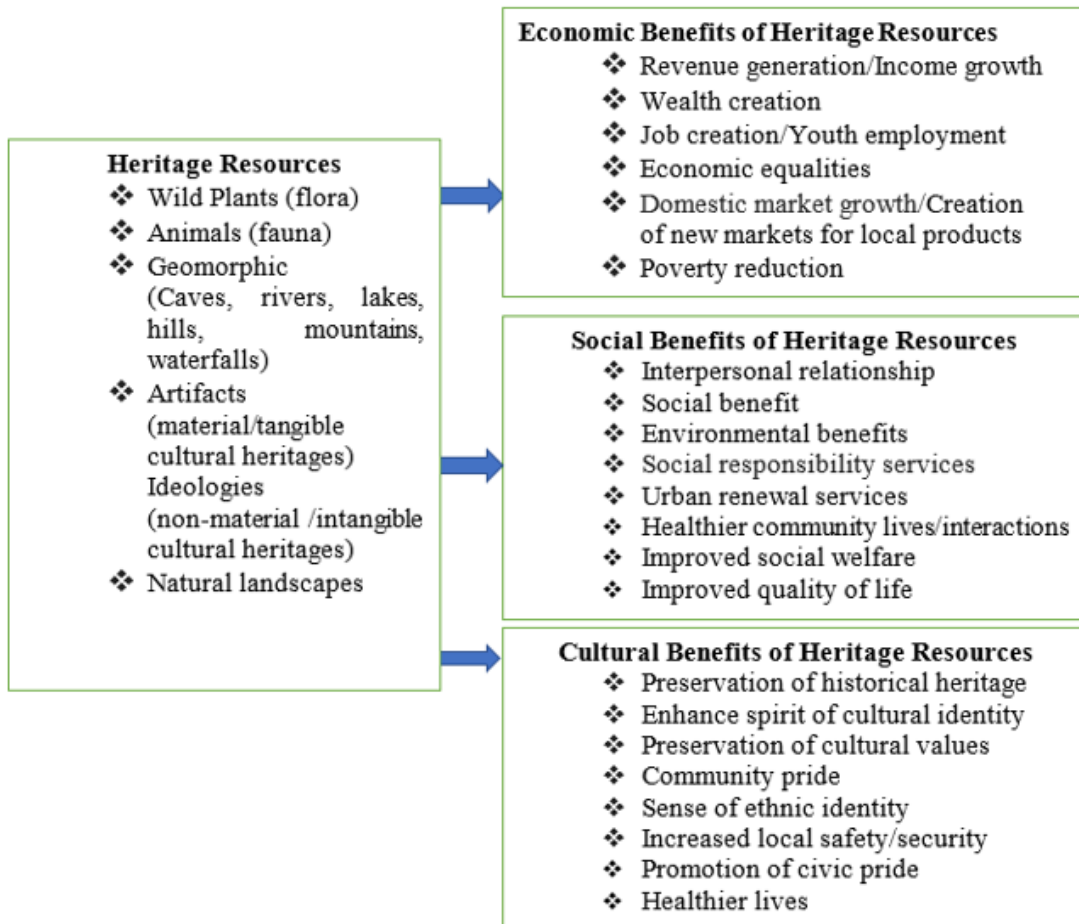
Economic benefits of cultural heritage resources derive from the conservation, protection and availability of cultural heritage facilities (heritage interpretation centres, libraries, archives and museums) that are primarily used by tourists and local communities (Tuan & Navrud, 2008). This value is seen primarily in terms of the revenue and wealth it generates for people and nations and can be identified by his three stakeholders: Authorities, local communities, tourists. At all levels, revenues are generated by taxes, job creation and contributions to the balance of payments (Saarinen, 2007; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012). Income generated from heritage resources has a progressive impact on savings of indigenous communities through direct, indirect and induced development (Vellas, 2011; Lemma, 2014; Ursasche, 2015). Direct development refers to direct payment by tourists for activities such as travel agency, hotel, airline and tour operator costs. Indirect development is defined as interim payments (third-party expenditures) for locally produced goods and services with the aim of optimizing revenues. Induced development is anything that is paid directly or indirectly to those working in the tourism industry (Ursasche, 2015). Moreover, the growing demand for heritage travel has attracted foreign assets, expanded infrastructure, and led to the deployment of investments to finance economic development



(Ouyang et al., 2017; Arain et al., 2018; Isik, et al., 2018; Piuchan et al., 2018). In addition, support for cultural heritage resources is based on poverty alleviation through job creation for indigenous communities and income-increasing opportunities through the introduction of diverse activities and new markets for local products (Kheiri & Nasihatkon, 2016; Su et al., 2016a; b; c; Su et al., 2017; Su et al., 2018). Furthermore, local investments, business opportunities and support for other sectors in the target area can be generated by promoting cultural heritage resources (Pappas 2014; Lin & Mao 2015). In summary, as a means of stimulating and underpinning regeneration development, the management of heritage resources is frequently an essential aspect of city regeneration services. (Murzyn-Kupisz, 2010).

### **Social Benefits of Heritage Resources**

Social benefits, according to many scholars, are the result of the connections established between the local community and the tourist over a period of time, affecting the behavior, traditions, social activities and ethics of the visitor in that society. (Jovicic, 2011; Almeida et al., 2015). Increased communication between the population and tourists will lead to new concepts, ethics and catalysts for development of society and economy (Nyaupane et al., 2006). This interaction also affects the characteristics of native people, pride and belonging, intergenerational interaction or societal relations. (Murzyn-Kupisz & Działek, 2013). It shapes the image of a particular place for tourists, local communities and shareholders. The social value of cultural heritage resources may also include a strong sense of community identity, enhanced ties to the local environment, and increased social capital through increased tourism (Ramos et al., 2016).



**Figure 2: Heritage Resources, Economic, Social and Cultural Benefits**

**Source: Authors' Concept, 2024**

For example, the existence of a tourism destination in Indonesia has improved people's willingness to accept differences and enhance their understanding of another person's behaviour so that they can make life easier for themselves (Pramanik & Ingkadijaya, 2018). Furthermore, Tsundoda & Mendilinger (2009) opined that social benefits of cultural heritage include but not limited to: preservation of cultural values, enhanced intercultural communication and understanding, improved collective welfare quality as well as cross culturality.

### **Cultural Benefits of Heritage Resources**

Heritage attractions are one of the most significant drivers of cultural tourism, providing new evidence and knowledges that fulfill the request for culture (Csapo, 2012; Richards, 2014).The

cultural impacts of heritage resources pays attention to the understanding of “culture” which is connected with the contact between tradition, behaviours, ethics and conduct (Zhuang, et al., 2019). The positive effects of the services presented by the local community helps in the preservation of historical heritage, enhance the spirit of cultural identity, and preserves cultural values (Ferreira, et al., 2021).

Dangi & Petrick (2021) opined that the benefits of heritage site to the host community may include mutuality, community pride, tolerance and a stronger sense of ethnic identity. Furthermore, heritage resources expose hosts to other cultures, which can lead to benefits such as tolerance and understanding, thereby enhancing identity, pride, cohesion and support (Harbor & Hunt 2021; Mäkinen et al., 2023). Studies have also found that cultural heritage resources have a positive effect on cultural exchange, improving quality of life and enhancing the image of the host community (Eslami et al., 2019). Through proper planning and management, heritage resources can improve the quality of life of residents and enhance their sense of place (Masterson et al., 2019; Ramkissoon, 2023). Cultural heritage resources also contribute to conservation, improved visitor access or adaptive reuse of the cultural property. In addition, cultural heritage serves as a destination for sustainable development through preservation of cultural resources, accurate interpretation of resources, authentic visitor experiences, and stimulation of income from cultural resources (Lusetyowati, 2015). Finally, local communities take great pride in presenting their cultural heritage by creating traditional opportunities for tourists and local communities to participate (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017; Fajemirokun, 2021).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Globally, the importance of cultural heritage resources, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Its social, economic and cultural advantages have not only been the reason for this, but also because of its historic, touristic, artistic, educational and scientific importance. In order to promote the development of social inclusion and social identity, culture heritage resources have been recognised as a commercial imperative and an official necessity with symbolic importance. Apart from socioeconomic benefits, heritage resources promote peace and provide sustainable livelihoods for both communities and communities. Nigeria has a largely untapped potential for cultural tourism that needs to be tapped for the country's sustainable development. Owing to the Nigeria's rich culture heritage resources, Cultural tourism is becoming a significant source of external exchange for the country. In addition, the opportunities arising from the development of cultural heritage resources are still underutilized and there is a need for the development and protection of the tourism industry. Nigeria needs to pay due attention to this area for sustainable development. In summary, Nigeria's cultural heritage resources can serve as important drivers of both economic and sociocultural development. Finally, governments are encouraged to develop an environment conducive to the sound development of cultural heritage resources. Participation of host communities in heritage planning should be encouraged to ensure

proper management of resources. Also, in order to properly utilize cultural heritage resources, it is necessary to promote domestic tourism.

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