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Preservation of Cultural Heritage through Chieftaincy Titles: Strategies for Sustainable Tourism in Benin, Edo State

Faith Osunde

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Osunde Faith

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Abstract

The preservation of the world cultural heritage has been a focal point of the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization, both in its tangible and intangible forms. This has propelled the initiatives for identifying and conserving the various cultural heritage assets. In reference to tourism, culture and its assets have played a dominant role in attracting tourists to various destinations. While Nigeria is a multicultural nation and the Benin ethnicity having a rich culture and reputation on the international stage, its tourism potentials are largely undeveloped. This study's geographical focus is the Benin ethnicity. It investigated the relevance of the region's chieftaincy institution as a tool for cultural preservation as well as the development of responsible tourism. As custodians of the culture, history, traditions and values of the region, six participants from the chieftaincy institution were interviewed. The resulting data revealed several efforts by the institution towards cultural heritage preservation in the region including reinforcing the teaching of the Benin language in schools, continuity of societal observations and festivals. In addition, the pioneering of the guild systems with the motive of preserving the region's unique crafts. These efforts were impeded by the introduction of politics into the cultural affairs as well as the negative influences of globalization. To address these challenges, the study recommended the adoption of an inclusive development strategy, the design and establishment of a regional tourism destination management strategy and subsequently a destination management organization. The study established that the chieftaincy institution can be leveraged as a key driver for cultural heritage preservation in the region.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

Cultural Heritage Preservation, Cultural Tourism, Sustainable Tourism Chieftaincy Institution, Benin, Nigeria

Miscellaneous (Confidential information)

No confidential information in this research

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Figure 1. Picture of the chieftaincy in seating with the grand monarch. Image: Anthony Ndule, Pinterest **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

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Abbreviations

CSICH - Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

DMO- Destination Management Organization

ICH - Intangible Cultural Heritage

ICOMOS - International Council on Monuments and Sites

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

TCH- Tangible Cultural Heritage

MOWAA - Museum of West African Art

NCTR- National Council of Traditional Rulers

NCMM - National Commission for museum and monuments

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNWTO - United Nations World Tourism Organization

USICOMOS - The American Chapter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites

WTO - World Trade Organization

1 Introduction

This thesis is focused on the relevance of traditional institutions (in this case chieftaincy titles), as an aspect of intangible cultural tourism in facilitating the preservation of cultural heritage and the propagation of sustainable tourism practices in Edo State, Nigeria. Richard (2010) posits that there is an intrinsic relationship between culture and tourism which substantiates the appeal of said regions and attractions. This goes to corroborate the importance of this study to the region in its pursuit of pragmatic means of cultural heritage preservation and sustainability in its tourism industry. As a tourism professional and an indigene of the region under focus, the author is propelled to conduct this research as an input towards the region's tourism development.

1.1 Background of Study

Tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon that involves various forms and activities that impact the nation's economy (Rastegaeva & Kazakov, 2016). In its versatility, tourism involves the movement of people from a start point (origin) to a destination. These myriads of activities form economic, social cultural and environmental impact to the hosting region or country. In the realities of the post-COVID era, the tourism industry has adapted and evolved above the challenges posed by the pandemic. This is evidenced by the 9.7 trillion Euros making up 9.1 percent the industry contributed to the global GDP in 2023, (Statista, 2024).

According to the UNWTO (2016) about 40 percent of the global tourism quota is attributed to cultural tourism. The consumption of tangible and intangible elements of cultural is an integral part of cultural tourism. This affirms heritage and identity as key vehicles for advocating the valorization of culture in tourism. In the wake of globalization, there has arisen the need for cultural exchange. This is evidenced by the high appeal of cultural authenticity (Richards, 2003). Taylor (2001) asserts authenticity to be paramount for all tourism, stating that it has become irrefutable for an industry that generally seeks the experience of other people's realities.

The African continent holds a diversity of cultures and natural heritage; one of such prominent countries is Nigeria. It has as much as 317 ethnic groups and over 500 spoken languages (Vanguard, 2017). The multiculturalism of Nigeria presents a cluster of tangible and intangible aspects that are pivot for the growth of cultural and heritage tourism. Over the years, with the country's shift from its predominate oil dependent economy to exploring other viable economic prospects (Adebayo, 2018), tourism is increasingly acknowledged as a quintessential economic pursuit in showcasing indigenous heritage and identity. This conception is appraised by Adeyemo (2018), stating that Nigeria's tourism resources are diverse and mostly unexplored. To achieve this economic shift, cultural tourism resource is highlighted and compared to the successes achieved in other culturally heterogeneous countries like Brazil, China and Japan (Richards, 2007).

The geographical focus of this thesis is the Benin ethnic group in Nigeria, the ethnicity is prominent on the international stage for its bronze art craftsmanship, holding the status of 'the guild of Benin bronze casters world heritage site' and its shared past with the British colonial empire. Despite its rich culture and heritage resource, the region's cultural tourism is largely underdeveloped. Richards (2001) corroborated the shift in cultural tourism towards a broader range of heritage, popular culture and living cultural attractions. Standing on this precedence, this work is centered on the aspect of intangible forms of cultural tourism in this case 'Chieftaincy or chieftains' as a channel of cultural heritage preservation.

Chieftaincy titles are a vital part of the Benin cultural identity and heritage, representing centuries-old traditions that have survived since the 11th century (Osunde, 2017). However, with the rapidly advancing globalization landscape these traditional institutions risk eroding their relevance (Osunde, 2017; Edigin, 2014). As part of its pursuit, this study is aimed at exploring ways of preserving the relevance of these titles in a way that aligns with responsible tourism practices, impacting the dimensions of sustainable tourism.

Cultural tourism has become a global currency (Richards, 2007). As such it should be preserved and sustained. In support of this, the United Nations education, scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) encourages the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity (UNESCO Convention, 1972). This convention capacitates the need for the various services and administrations towards heritage preservation. Sustainability in tourism rests on the paradigm of economic, social-cultural and environmentally sustainable development of destinations. It purports the actions taken by both the destinations and the tourists towards the preservation of said attractions. This is surmised in the concept of responsible tourism (Responsible Tourism Partnership, 2002).

1.2 Scope of Thesis

This thesis focuses on the Benin ethnic group's chieftaincy institution and its potential role in sustainable tourism within Edo State. The Benin ethnic group is the predominant group in the region under study (Edo state), it shares the same name as the region's capital city 'Benin City'. While the region has other ethnic groups, they are not included within the scope of this study. By concentrating on a specific ethnicity in a defined location, the study aims to provide in-depth insights that can lead to tailored preservation strategies. This focused approach permits a detailed exploration of the cultural significance of chieftaincy titles towards cultural tourism, while also offering specific, actionable recommendations for local stakeholders. This thesis only defines the concept of chieftaincy titles and the current state and relevance of the structure in the region under study. It does not investigate the origin of the chieftaincy titles; the context of the chieftaincy institution is restricted to their current relevance and viability towards cultural heritage preservation and responsible tourism practices.

1.3 Significance to working life

Theoretically, this study is relevant to uncover the interconnectedness of cultural heritage preservation and sustainability in tourism. This translates to how best the cultural heritage of the Benin culture can be preserved using an existing traditional institution (i.e. Chieftaincy) whilst integrating responsible tourism practices into the cultural heritage tourism industry. This is tied to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11.4 which 'aims to strengthen the efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage' (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2024).

In practicality, this thesis is of importance to the traditional institutions of the region, policymakers in the tourism industry of the region, communities with chieftains, and tourism operators. The outcome of the research will equip these stakeholders with needed knowledge to forge the tourism industry towards socio-cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability.

1.4 Research Problem

The prevalent situation in the chosen region is the increasing threat to the sustaining it's cultural heritage, and the decline in relevance of traditional structures like the chieftaincy titles due to modernization and limited sustainable tourism practices. With the weakening traditional institutions and cultural identity of the Benin ethnicity, current cultural tourism initiatives fail to harness the rich heritage at their disposal. This research would help breach these gaps by suggesting approaches towards promoting sustainable tourism which will impact these communities economically, socially, and environmentally.

1.5 Research Questions

The key research questions that this thesis seeks to answer are:

- How can chieftaincy titles be leveraged to promote cultural heritage preservation in Benin while minimizing negative impact?
- What strategies can be employed to integrate chieftaincy titles into responsible tourism practices that contribute to long-term environmental, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability?

1.6 Objectives

The main objective of this thesis is to establish the relevance of traditional institutions (i.e. Chieftaincy title) in ensuring cultural heritage preservation and sustainable tourism practices. At the conclusion of this research, the potentials of the chieftaincy institution towards sustainable cultural tourism development in the region is presented. To achieve this, first an analysis of core concepts that form the knowledge base for this research is conducted, as well a synthesis of the academic contributions to provide structure for the interview phase of this study. Secondly, the interview phase explores the expertise of chiefs and other stakeholders, in identifying existing preservation efforts, including their economic, socio-cultural, and environmental limitations. Thirdly, based on the result of the previous steps, recommendation is made, for improvement the responsible tourism practices in the regions tourism industry.

2 Knowledge Base

2.1 Cultural Tourism

The concept 'cultural tourism' was first mentioned by MacCannell (1976); he copulated cultural process as tourists seeking authenticity as the motivation for travelling. In addition, he puts forward the assertion that tourism itself is part of cultural production. The study of cultural tourism is one with an almost inexhaustible pool of academic research. With over 369 articles involving 781 authors and 244 journals (Benhaida et al, 2024), several systematic reviews of cultural tourism have been undertaken. Irrespective of the vast numerical fit achieved in contributions to the academic body, defining the concept had posed problematic. McKercher & Cros (2002) affirmed the existence of a variety of definitions and approaches on the concept, comparing it to the number of cultural tourists there is in existence. The American Chapter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, USICOMOS (1996) appraised this fact as it observed that 'cultural tourism means a great number of things to many people, herein lies its strength and weakness' (p.11).

The cultural tourism phenomenon is a conjunction of the terms culture and tourism. Interestingly, culture has been labelled as one of the most ambiguous words in the English language (Williams, 1983) due to the variations in interpretation and linguistical complexities (Richards, 2003). Richards further asserts the revisions of the term over the years have resulted in the assortment of terminologies linked to cultural tourism such as heritage tourism, arts tourism, ethnic tourism and other terms which are used interchangeably. However, it is irrefutable that there is an intrinsic relationship between culture and tourism (Richards, 2010), this substantiates the motive of a traveler or tourist. In the wake of this relationship, births the assertion that tourism is the noun and culture or cultural is the adjective used to modify it (McKercher & Cros, 2002).

2.1.1 Definition Approaches

In achieving a globally acceptable definition for cultural tourism various approaches have been propounded. First the qualitative approach, put forward by Bonink and Richards (1994). The approach is based on the description of sites, monuments and typology of attractions and tourist volumes. Second is the conceptual approach, with emphasis on describing the motive and meanings attached to cultural tourism activities (Richards, 2005). McKercher and Cros (2002) contributed to the conceptual approach by propounding the four-tier approach: tourism, motivational, operational and experiential perspectives. While these definitions were plausible, they were however restricted to specific segments of the complex phenomena of cultural tourism. In retrospect the academic body can appreciate the conglomerate of these different approaches and the limitations they posited; it became the incentive for achieving a globally accepted definition. This was achieved by the UNWTO (2017), it defined cultural tourism as 'a form of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions in a tourism destination'.

The introduction of the terms tangible and intangible became a novelty in framing an encompassing definition. It is a replacement for the terms high and low culture that were synonymous with the older definitions (McKercher & Cros, 2002). Richards (2018) posits tangible cultural heritage (TCH) and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) to be the cultural factors promoting tourism. The UNWTO, (2017, par. 3) progresses to define attractions and products as 'distinctive materials, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts, historical, cultural heritage, creative industry and living cultures, lifestyle, beliefs, traditions and value systems. The concept of living cultures and its entails substantiates the inclusion of institutionalized traditional political systems as part of cultural products which is essential to this research.

During the course of this research, the term cultural heritage tourism has been a reoccurring term in other literary works and is often posited as a new concept or subset in tourism different from cultural tourism. As aforementioned, over the course of academic research an assortment of terminologies like heritage tourism, art tourism, cultural heritage tourism has surfaced (Richards, 2003). These terms have been used interchangeably with cultural tourism and at other points used to connote a new form of tourism. However, since the institutionalization of the United Nations world tourism organization (UNWTO) as the global body governing academic resources on tourism and the establishment of its definition on cultural tourism (UNWTO, 2017), it is important to make this distinction.

Madandola and Boussaa (2023) cited Richards, (2018), defining cultural heritage tourism as 'a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination'. Further research confirmed the inaccuracy in this assertion. Richard (2018) appraised the UNWTO's definition of cultural tourism with no reference to cultural heritage tourism. Similarly, other researchers (Rosenfeld, 2008; Ismail et al, 2014; AIANTA, 2024) have implied the interchangeability of cultural heritage tourism for cultural tourism, utilizing the terms in same paragraphs or sub-texts. This has undoubtedly contributed to the complexity of the contextual accuracy.

It is therefore important to attest that the UNWTO has only defined cultural tourism as a form of tourism with no distinctions made to cultural heritage tourism as a subset in tourism. The necessity of making this clarification is in a bid to debunk the repetition of the term especially in resources found in cultural tourism as practiced in Nigeria and to ensure contextual accuracy among users of this study. This critique is made with hopes that clarity is made on this subject and the possibility of it becoming a field for future research. Questions can be drafted from this complexity on whether there is a distinction or connection, if so, what are the contextual boundaries for its usage.

2.2 Cultural Tourism in Nigeria

The African continent sees cultural tourism as an avenue for its pursuit of identity, similarities and differences. The continent boasts a vast collection of ethnicity and diversity; hence it aims to explore cultural tourism as a podium for showcasing the depth of African cultural fabric (Anyira & Emakunu, 2021; Bakare & Akinbileje, 2010). Nigeria's heterogeneity in ethnicity presents an enunciated opportunity for cultural tourism as a channel to expressing cultural compatibility and buttress national unity. Csápo (2012) posits culture as a shared lifestyle among multitudes, this summarizes the diversity of the Nigerian nation. The country's multiculturalism, peculiar geographic terrain made up of mountain regions, plateaus, coastal belts, rain forests, and semi-deserts (Ajayi & Hamilton Millard Kirk-Greene, 2025; Country Reports, 2025) affirm its prime status for cultural tourism development. While it has substantial recognition for its efforts in coastal tourism (Amaeze & Otabor, 2024), its development in the spectrum of cultural tourism has been mired with challenges.

Nigeria has an abundance of both tangible (TCH) and intangible cultural (ICH) assets. In previous years most conversations about cultural heritage in the nation focused on the tangible aspect of its cultural heritage ranging from museums, bronze and clay artifacts, traditional relics etc. (UNESCO, 2025; National Commission for Museum and Monuments, 2025). Hence TCH witnessed substantial actions as far back as 1945 with the inauguration of the Nigerian Antiquities service, which facilitated the establishment of museums with the sole prerogative to preserve artifacts and physical proof of ethnic civilization before the colonialism (Bakare & Akinbileje, 2010). Currently, the nation has two properties inscribed on the UNESCO world heritage list, with eight on the tentative list (UNESCO, 2025). The number of national museums has increased to 53 inclusive of the

museum of West African art (MOWAA) which is undergoing construction in Edo State, Nigeria (National Commission for Museum and Monuments, 2025; MOWAA, 2025).

As expressions of intangible assets, each ethnicity has its distinct language, art, festivals, folklore, dance, music, traditional institutions and crafts which encapsulates their authenticity and potentials for valorization (Anyira & Emakunu, 2021). This aspect of cultural tourism was pivoted in 1977 with the hosting of the festival of arts and culture (Festac), it had on array various cultural heritage that put the country on the map in the continent (Bakare & Akinbileje, 2010). In addition, the Nigerian national carnival in Abuja incepted in 2005, designed as a recreation of the Rio de Janeiro carnival in Brazil contributed to developing ICH in Nigeria (Anyira & Emakunu, 2021). Similarly, the Calabar carnival commenced in 2004, as a month-long celebration of the Nigerian cultural diversity and African art. 2018 marked a monumental year for the Calabar carnival with the attendance of 25 countries (African Festivals, 2024). As a testament to the growth of ICH, the country now has six practices inscribed on the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage list (UNESCO, 2025; UNESCO intangible cultural heritage, 2025). Based on this, it is permissible to state that cultural tourism should be a core focus for economic growth in the nation. However, while these cultural tourism assets are fascinating and the national efforts inspiring, a gap remains in where the country is in the scheme of sustainable tourism in comparison with the available cultural heritage resources especially in its bid to transition from its oil/gas dependent economy (Bakare & Akinbileje, 2010; Adebayo, 2018).

2.3 Intangible Cultural Heritage

The ICOMOS (1999) establishes the conception of cultural heritage as a feature of cultural tourism. Over the years cultural heritage been framed to constitute 'tangible cultural heritage (TCH), such

as natural and cultural environments, sites, built environment, as well as intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The latter includes the past and continuing practices, knowledge and living experiences (p.1-2). To be concise, TCH represent the hard cultural assets of a community while ICH represent the soft cultural assets; people, and their values (McKercher & Cros, 2002). This research is limited to exploring only the ICH, in order to set a contextual accuracy. For three decades, ICH received considerably less recognition in comparison to TCH, hence this restricted cultural elements to monuments and immovable assets (Bouchenaki, 2003).

The tipping point for the recognition and development of ICH began with the institutionalization of Japan's 'Living Human Treasure' in 1950 (McKercher and Cros, 2002). This reflected Japan's concession of these so-called artisans as living embodiments of their cultural identity, heritage, values and practices (Aikawa-Faure, 2014; Toki.Tokyo, 2023). McKercher and Cros (2002) defined living human treasure to be such individuals or group of individuals that play focal roles in promoting the continuity of intangible cultural heritage and are locally or regionally recognized as cultural custodians. Similar instances were replicated in Korea, the Philippines and France between 1962 to 1989 (p. 85). These legislations were influential in the establishment of UNESCO's recommendations on safeguarding traditional culture and folklore (McKercher & Cros, 2002). The inclusion of the folklore category affirmed the birth of what has evolved into ICH (UNESCO, 2003; McKercher & Cros, 2002). Over the next decades various researchers through various approaches contributed to the regularization of ICH and its appreciation as a source of cultural identity and diversity (Bouchenaki, 2003).

UNESCO defines ICH to include traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts (UNESCO, 2003; Xia, 2024). Key terms like living expressions, social practices, oral traditions, and continuity, stand out in relations to this research.

In order to establish traditional institutions as part of ICH, it is paramount to understand the meaning of the key terms highlighted and the manifestations of ICH as well. According to Article 2 of the UNESCO convention on ICH (2003), social practices refer to habitual activities that structure the lives of communities or groups. The term living expression is synonymous to living culture, it therefore connotes cultural practices, representations, knowledge and skills transferred intergenerationally within cultural systems (Rich Resources, 2014). In addition, oral traditions encompass a variety of spoken forms including proverbs, tales, legends, poems etc. They are relied on for ensuring the continuity of collective memory, cultural and social values (UNESCO, 2006).

With the above in mind, traditional institutions are established social practices, structures and organizations historically relevant within said societies. These institutions are deeply rooted in culture, social values, reforms and often shape education, governance and religion (Fiveable, 2024).

Juxtaposing the traditional institutions with the manifestations of ICH, it becomes clear that there are repetitive elements like social practices, cultural continuity, education, cultural preservation that affirms the opinion that traditional institutions are living assets of ICH. What is more, traditional institutions conform to the characteristics of ICH as listed in the UNESCO convention in 2003;

- Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time. Highlighting the link between past, present and future.
- Inclusive in terms of intergenerational and adaptive to changing circumstances. While fostering a unique sense of identity.
- Community-based, as ICH elements it is restricted to the community or group where it draws jurisdictional relevance and authority.
- Representative, it thrives on acknowledgement of traditions, skills, customs, knowledge that is shared between generations or from/ to other communities.

2.4 Relevance of Traditional Institutions in Benin Ethnicity, Nigeria

As an expression of ICH in Nigeria, traditional institutions have existed as core aspects of its multi-cultural society (Osunde, 2017; Eweka, 1992). Iyeh (2014) presents the opinion of the late Nigerian president Sani Abacha in verbatim 'Traditional institutions are an enduring part of our heritage. It plays a critical role as the custodian of culture and traditions' (p.142). As established the Benin ethnicity is acknowledged for its sustenance of its authentic culture and an instituted traditional ruling system since the 11th century. It remains one of the few ethnicities in Africa with a ruling monarch, in this case the termed the 'oba' (Egharevba,1956). Encompassed in the success of this intricate system is a functional traditional institution. In this regard, it is known as the chieftaincy titleship (Osunde, 2017; Eweka, 1992). The concept of chieftaincy refers to one such person who is conferred the power of leadership over a group of people in which varies in retrospect to various societies and culture (Osunde, 2017). This extends to the rudiments of daily activities, oral tradition renditions, investitures of traditional craftsmanship, and herbology (Eweka, 1992). The evolution of these chieftaincy titles emphasizes also the advancement of the society from simplistic communities into the formation of supercommittees (Bondarenko, 2015), subsequently into chiefdoms, an empire and currently a state. It is important to note that continuity of the Benin culture remains tied to these institutionalized structure as living cultural assets. Regardless of the democratic structure at the helm of the state's governance, the relevance and efficiency of these title holders are irrefutable (Bondarenko, 2015). They are relied upon as proponents for addressing fundamental needs in the society (Osunde, 2017, p 36-37).



Figure 1: *Picture of the chieftaincy in seating with the grand monarch. Image: Anthony Ndule, Pinterest*

2.4.1 Communication

These chiefs serve as communication pathways between the government, monarch and the locals. Iyeh (2014) appraises this notion by positing that ‘traditional institutions are the most effective channels of communication between the federal, state government and the rural people. Similarly, late general Sani Abacha posited the close link between these traditional rulers and the grassroots, he mentions the intimate understanding they share for the people’s plight. This is seen particularly in their executory roles in disseminating of information on laws and statutes both legal and customary. These can bother on new state laws, or customary actions and cultural events: festivals, meetings etc. Each chief in charge of a constitution of locals have the sole prerogative over them as custodians of sorts (Osunde, 2017).

2.4.2 Custodians of customs and culture

Ali and Bukar (2019) establish that the consolidation of the community culture, oral traditions, their similarities and variations on levels of family, clan, village and the entire tribe is propagated and preserved through chieftaincy titles. They are living consultants on folklores and craftsmanship. In addition, they are mostly accomplished authors who have ensured the survival of cultural ideologies across lineages through documentations in books and other literary works (p.8). Itodo and Onodugo (2016) acknowledged that most traditional rulers across the country are well educated, with distinguished career pursuits in chosen fields prior to their assumption of these hereditary titles. This accounts for the tribe's success and chronological accuracy in documenting its past (monarchs and life) from the 11th century till date.

2.4.3 Conflict Resolution

Oghi (2014) confirms conflicts to be a reoccurring phenomenon in all societies. Most frequently revolving around land disputes, religious differences, inter clan aggressions (p.4). These conflicts have strong impacts on the economic status of these communities (Ali & Bukar, 2019; Opasina, 2016). This is applicable as well in the Benin ethnicity. In this regard, the chiefs have instituted jurisdiction to deliberate and proffer solutions to these occurrences. Rationality bespeaks a natural pull towards a center piece figure with decision making power, which in this case are the chiefs. As ethnic custodians they possess the culturally accepted philosophy on justice and what is permissible (Bondarenko, 2015). He further asserts that there is an ingrained servant-leader mindset in the tribe. Egharevba (1956) asserted that at the inception, titles were conferred on the bases of merit with accompanying privileges. In the case of abuse of power, they are reprimanded and in certain cases stripped of the titles (Osunde, 2017). This translates to an expectancy of fairness mostly dictated by preexisting values and norms. Each chief is relied on in the discharge of these duties, they

as well hold the prerogative to utilize state enforcers in severe cases (Sogbesan & Brown 2022; Eg-harevba, 1956).

2.4.4 Preservation of local craftsmanship

According to Osunde (2017) and Ben-Amos (1992), the ethnicity has a number of established guilds for bronze casters, brass- casters and wood workers. These craftsmen have created distinguishing works that have serviced the monarchs, the locals and have international acknowledgement and acquisitions. These works include bronze works, terracotta's which are on display in the several museums in the United Kingdom. In addition, there are sets of chiefs who head guilds that are mandated to teach, hone and preserve the crafts and skills that are associated with this ethnicity. The guilds were formed to create a sense of community for these craftsmen to harness their skills and ensure continuity (Ben-Amos, 1995). The administration and protection of these guilds have been sustained by the conferment of chieftaincy titles to head these guilds (Sogbesan & Brown 2022). The presence of these chiefs ensures structural and operational compatibility.



Figure 2: *Bini Bronze Caster Modelling Wax over Clay, Benin City, Nigeria 1971. Photo Credit: Eliot Elisofon*

2.5 Cultural Heritage Preservation

As part of its enactments, the 1972 convention concerning the protection of the world cultural & natural heritage, put into effect cumulative efforts to safeguard these heritage assets for future generations (UNESCO, 1972). Nomishan and Sani (2024) establish the concept of globalization and shared culture as a redefining factor in our world in terms of collaborations it is also a constituent for the dilution, and misconception of certain cultural heritage assets. In addition, this contributes to the declining relevance of cultural heritage assets (i.e. endangerment of some linguistic assets). The above leads to the subject of preservation. Banda et al, (2024) highlight the distinction between conservation and preservation. They assert conservation to be the active fixtures proffered to cultural heritage assets, while preservation takes a more cautious approach. It proposes the care, security and restoration of these cultural heritage assets without an alteration to their original state. In addition, it connotes the concise act of ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage from present to future. These actions are inclusive of investigation, analysis, corroboration and restoration (Skublewska-Paszowska et al, 2022; Banda et al, 2024).

The operational statute for the preservation of CH assets is found in article 5 of the 1972 UNESCO convention. It dictates the procedures and actions permissible for member states: which includes, assimilation and protection of cultural and natural heritage into community life, ratification of extensive programs with adequate staffing and trainings, development of scientific and technical studies into available CH assets, utility of legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures for the 'Identification , protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of these assets', the development of national or regional organizations charged with facilitating trainings in line with preservation efforts (UNESCO, 1972).

As is the premise for this research, it is paramount to mention the convention for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (CSICH) held in Paris 2003 (UNESCO, 2003). The convention makes an epochal contrast of safeguarding being the terminology associated with ICH and its assets. CSICH defines safeguarding as the efforts geared at the viability of intangible cultural heritage inclusive of 'identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, and transmission through formal and informal education' (p.3). Article 11(a) of CSICH mandates state parties to decisively ensure ICH resources within its territories. It establishes the antecedence for education, awareness, capacity development, community, group and individual inclusion, listing ICH resources in need of urgent safeguarding and global collaborations (CSICH, 2003).

Nigeria's post-inception as a member party, has been marked with commendable achievements towards CH preservation. With specific outlook on ICH, the ratification of the decree 77 of 1979 constitution premised the establishment of the NCMM (National Commission for museum and monuments) and other contributions (NCMM, 2017; Nomishan & Sani, 2024). While it had consideration successes, the decree failed to provide satisfactory regulations for safeguarding ICH assets (Nomishan & Sani, 2024). It had no clear provision for the inclusion of communities and traditional management and enforcement structure. Subsequently, these failures lead to the intervention from UNESCO with a donation from Japan. The project ran from July 2014 to July 2017, it included several strategic meetings to address and proffer effective solutions towards an amendment of the decree 77 (UNESCO, 2014). These meetings proffered the inclusion of traditional instructions in the management and safeguarding of ICH, compulsory community engagement (Nomishan & Sani, 2024, p.315).

Notwithstanding, these aspirations have been countered by the continuity of certain challenges such as armed conflicts, limited awareness of preservation practices and trained manpower (Anasi

et al, 2013; Nomishan & Sani, 2024). This reverts to the aim of this research in proffering traditional institutions (i.e. chieftaincy) as a means of propagating ICH preservation from a management and enforcement perspective.

2.6 Sustainability in Tourism

The term sustainability is quite ambiguous and complex. Over the years, it has sparked numerous academic conversations, studies and perspectives. Its ambiguity is both literary and practical. It brings forward the question of what sustainability in tourism is, both as theory and in practice. The terminology was incepted in 1990's followed by numerous research. Saarinen (2006) purports the idea of sustainability was imported into tourism from the sustainable development ideology. The Brundtland commission report in 1987 (WCED, 1987) put forward sustainable development definition as the operations that facilitate the needs of the present generation without posing risks to the needs of future generations. The notion of striking a balance between present and future is consistent with what is known as sustainability in tourism presently.

Similarly, the UNWTO (2017), defines sustainability as 'tourism that takes full account of its present and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors in the industry, the environment and host communities'. This definition appraises the inclusion of the 'triple bottom line' (TBL) concept (John Elkington, 1990). The TBL was popularized by John Elkington (1990), resting on the balance of economic, socio-cultural and environmental dimensions of an organization. In debunking this rationale, various opinions have surfaced, is sustainability a supply concern or an idea for a utopian society. Sustainable tourism relies on both the sustainable growth of tourism, its impact on the destination's economy as well as the efficient use of resources (Zhenhua, 2003). Tourism industry is galvanized by the push of demand dictating mechanism of traveler decision pattern, and the pull of supply determining the lure of destinations. Is it

then holistic to assert sustainable tourism to be the efficient use of resources by destinations with an assurance of futurity (Zhenhua, 2003; Stoddard et al, 2010). On the other hand, Zifkos (2016) posits the notion of sustainability in tourism as an 'optimistic hope filled plan for human gratification, which surpasses mere solicitude for the environment and enthusiasm for progressional economic growth' (p. 26).

In addition, there is the place of the approach of 'carrying capacity' in unraveling sustainability in tourism. Butler (1996) argues for the possible co-existence of these two frameworks and the benefit of understanding the impact of rapid development and the place for set limits. Carrying capacity means the superlative numeric factor in terms of people that can consume tourism assets without exhaustive alterations to the physical environment or consistent decline in the tourist's experience (Matheson & Wall, 1982). In contrast with the current SDG's propounded by the UN, and the arising issue of overtourism, it is acceptable to posit the interconnectedness of carrying capacity and the preservative spectrum of sustainable tourism.

The Inclusion of the TBL constructs the criterium for measuring what passes for sustainability in tourism. These form sustainable practices which are actionable and measurable plans by organizations in achieving a balance in the three dimensions of sustainability; Economic prosperity, social equity and environmental protection. The economic dimension caters for the deliberate actions leading to the provision of socio-economic advantage for all stakeholders in the region (Stoddard et al, 2010). This can be accessed through per capital tourist expenditures, employment rates, local economic impacts and poverty alleviations (Zifkos, 2016). Socio -cultural dimension centers on the impact tourism has on the indigens of the community, their engagement, support for local cultural and artistic endeavors (WTO, 2004). Environmental dimension projects the efficient use of environmental assets, maintenance of indispensable ecological practices; biodiversity, natural and cultural heritages (Stoddard et al, 2010).

The use of the term sustainability in tourism industry reflects on the inclusion of corporate social responsibility by tourism organizations. This justifies the concept of responsible tourism (Ethical adventure, 2025). The responsible tourism perspective supports the role of tourist and companies in actively reducing the environmental impact of tourism in communities. What this achieves is constituting the actionable aspect of sustainability in tourism (Responsible Tourism, 2002; Ethical adventure, 2025). In synthesizing the above, it follows through that the use of the term responsible tourism, over the ambiguity of the term sustainability in tourism which connotes irregularities in measurable markers in different countries around the world.

Lettau et al (2022) analyses that the concept of sustainability in Nigeria is perceived from an etymology viewpoint. The author describes this perspective from the cultural practices amongst ethnicity of the country. The use of words like 'sustained, withstand, long lasting' to attribute responsible practices (p.4). The authors assert that this perspective has shaped certain environmentally sustainable actions like avoidance of shooting pregnant animals or overfishing. In view of the UN's SDG's there has been concerns amongst African scholars as to the lack of concepts, structures and possibilities implementable towards responsible tourism (p.5). While Nigeria's multiculturalism is a potential attraction for tourists, in order to compete in the tourism industry, there is an irrefutable need for the establishment of sustainable tourism (in view of all three dimensions). Stoddard et al (2010) and Lettau et al (2022) emphasize that the phenomenon of sustainable tourism is an emerging trend in the country, while there are substantial conversations and practical examples in its pursuits, it is more predicated towards social cultural aspects (cultural heritage preservation). However, an opportunity presents itself, to proffer strategic vehicles in pioneering the development of responsible tourism, in the growing national tourism industry (Lettau et al, 2022) as well as within the Benin ethnicity.

3 Implementation

3.1 Research Methodology

This study utilized the qualitative method of research. Billups (2022) describes qualitative research as ‘an approach that supports the multiple views and perspective elicited from participants’ (p.21). It facilitates the researcher’s aim to examine specific issues and proffer intricate resources towards understanding the complexities of these issues (Tenny et al, 2022). This method allows for subjective analysis of human activities, seeking to inductively find the motivating factors behind ‘why’ precise actions or patterns exists as they do (Kaae & Traulsen, 2020). Similarly, Billups (2022), posit this method of research to include ‘the researcher as an instrument of data collection who through an interactive role, subjectively incorporates the multiple realities collated from participants and proffers a holistic triangulation of its findings’ (p.21).

Qualitative research methodology was adopted for this study on grounds of suitability. The study requires subjective and contextual analysis in order to achieve its objectives. This study includes cultural elements which warrant sensitivity, hence the opinions and perspectives of the participants of this research are integral in substantiating and propagating the responsible tourism in the Benin ethnicity of Edo state. This resolve is appraised by Creswell and Poth (2018), they assert qualitative research to be suitable for analyzing complex phenomena where context and specific perspectives are necessary.

In addition, ‘theoretical frameworks often guide qualitative research in formulating structure and purpose’ (Billups, 2022, p.23). This study appropriated the feature of qualitative research by establishing core concepts that have formed the knowledge base from which the author draws construct. Finally, this research also applied the case study approach. As a characteristic of the qualitative research methodology, Billups (2020) submits case study design to be suitable for analyzing

specific processes and integrating the perspectives of key stakeholders. She further pivots this design in providing 'rich and multidimensional' projection of the organization under study (p.27). By focusing on the Benin ethnic group and its chieftaincy structure, this study utilized the case study design allowing for an in-depth analysis of the institution's practices, accomplishments, and unique challenges. The case study concept permits contextual analysis and produces subject-specific outcomes.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collected for this study was gained through semi-structured virtual interviews. Interviews are data collection frameworks that constitute interactions based on pre-planned questions (Amaeze & Otabor, 2024), it is one of the methods through which research results attain data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015) and is efficient in collation of valuable responses through the use of relevant questions relating to specific issues (Shneiderman & Plaisant, 2005). Semi-structured interviews are in-depth frameworks that rely on the use of open-ended questions (Jamshed, 2014), it affords the flexibility of interactions for clarification (Taherdoost, 2022). This method was most suitable for this study on the basis of flexibility, adaptability to small scale research (Finn et al, 2000) and the requirement to gain richness of data over quantity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Flexibility of participants to express their opinions and for the researcher to adapt the questions to resulting directions was crucial to this study. The semi-structured interviews were conducted online due to geographical restrictions of the researcher and the respondents residing in different continents during this study. Taherdoost (2022) confirms that remote interviews are either conducted by telephones or computers and possess merits in bridging geographical restrictions and needs no comparison with face-to-face interviews (p.42).

The target group consisted of chiefs of various ranks and jurisdiction. These chiefs are experts in the knowledge and management of the traditional institution. A total of 9 interviewees were

planned to participate in this study. However, during the implementation of the interview's, the compromise of restricting the participant to six was made to accommodate the restructuring that took place within the institution. It was expedient to make this decision in order to gain unbiased perspectives. This was worthy of mention to emphasize the changing institutional landscape and the impact on its functionality. In justifying this number of interviews, Maruster and Gijsenberg (2012) asserts that an important feature is 'that subjects weave in and out of each other, such that two or three index numbers are repeatedly interspersed' (p.143). This is usually a sign of some interconnection between themes or issues that should be noted for later associative analysis (p.148).

This is usually a sign of some interconnection between themes or issues that should be noted for later associative analysis (p.148). The potential participants were selected through local networks and referrals and approached through email and social media. The intent and scope of the study was established, in addition a consent form that included data management policy was presented, detailing the handling, storage and post research activities. The interviews were conducted remotely on WhatsApp to accommodate the available platform accessible in the participants region. The interviews adhered to the semi-structured interview format (see **appendix 1** for interview structure), there was the flexibility for the research to gain meaningful data through follow up questions. In addition, to facilitate the reduction of the possible biases, the researcher refrained from providing supporting information to participants during the interviews (Capella Edu, n.d; Patton, 2002).

3.3 Data Analysis

The resulting data being qualitative were transcribed and stored in JAMK OneDrive platform. In analyzing the collated data, the thematic analysis approach was adopted. Gibbs (2021) explains

thematic analysis to be the findings interpreted by noting similarities and differences within the data and paying attention to repeating notions. The goal is to achieve data saturation, 'where no new data meets no new themes' and mentioned previously data (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p.1409).

Similarly, Braun & Clarke (2013) propound the advantages of the thematic analysis approach to be ease of use and the flexibility adapt the approach to the study's scope.

In view of this approach, this study utilized the inductive thematic analysis as the framework for analyzing the collected data. This framework permits themes to develop organically from the available data with no pre-determined concepts, rather a synthesis of emanating themes (Oberoi, 2025; Naeem et al, 2023). Crosley (2021) expands that the inductive thematic approach is suitable for explorative studies, especially topics with limited existing research which this research falls under. The collated data was transcribed and reviewed to build codes from relevant information and expressions (use of color highlights). Saldaña (2013) asserts codes to be symbolic constructs attributing interpreted meaning and patterns to data (p.4). He further establishes that the codes are necessary in 'detecting repetitive patterns and consistencies in qualitative data' (p.5). These codes were triangulated into emerging themes and further analyzed to establish facts and recognize strategic recommendations.

4 Findings

This section presents the result of the interview phase. It examined cultural heritage preservation and cultural tourism from the lens of the chieftaincy institution. This approach was utilized to capture what the institution perceives to be cultural preservation, their roles, efforts and challenges and establish their relevance to cultural preservation within the region. Similarly, what their opinion is on the phenomena of cultural tourism and their responsibility in its development in the region. The six participants to this research consisted of chiefs from various groups within the institution. This was targeted to ensure variety in data that represents their different viewpoints while highlighting keynote points on their various interests. While consent was gotten to publish their titles, these interviewees were anonymized and subsequently referred to as Participant (P)1 to 6. Below is a table showing the categorical data of participants.

Table 1: Tabular presentation of participants' categorical data.

| TITLE | DESIGNATION | JURISDICTION |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|--|
| <i>Igueizigbon of Benin,</i> | Palace Chief | Palace chieftaincy subgroup (Physicians and Diviners) |
| <i>Akenuwa of Igun (Benin)</i> | Guild and Palace chief | Igun bronze caster guild and Palace chieftaincy subgroup |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Omuemu of Uselu (Benin)</i> | District, guild and palace chief | Uselu district, Drum players guild and Palace chieftaincy subgroup |
| Adolor of Ehor | Community Chief | Ehor district |
| <i>Obadohloragbonyi of Benin</i> | Palace PR and spokes person | Palace chieftaincy subgroup |
| <i>Obaehiagbon of Benin</i> | Senior Palace chief | Palace chieftaincy subgroup |

The overview of the interviews revealed that amidst several challenges, the chieftaincy institution is avidly aware and involved in the cultural preservation and tourism in the region. These conversations produced some recurring and varied themes which are discussed in subsequent subheadings.

4.1 The Institution and Cultural Preservation

The title holders in the region see themselves as the core custodians of the cultural values, customs, norms and operations in their various spheres of jurisdiction. They are acutely aware of their relevance in the scheme of cultural heritage preservation. It was found out that in practicality, their daily roles, mode of dressing, carriage, operational activities, wealth of knowledge, what is expected of them by the society, and restrictions is attributed to cultural preservation. This notion was often repetitive across the conversation.

Chiefs are living monuments and respected ambassadors. By being the palace chief, we become custodians of the cultural values. And in every home where there's a chief, he has people around who respect him. When he dresses, when he goes to palace, he

wears this wavering white gown. It's a way of saying, I'm proud of my culture. In that area, he becomes the flagship of our own cultural heritage (P3).

Similarly, the participants identified roles they function in that facilitate cultural preservation. They pivot roles like dispute resolution, propagation of good community practices, public relations communication between the monarch, government. They identified culture and its preservation as moderator of the society and constrictors of individual behaviors.

The chiefs are the epitome of cultural behavior in their immediate environment. They help in creating consciousness for cultural values and norms. Certainly, that's the purpose of having these creations of titles, you know, by their function as a title holder in a community for instance, in their own way of life, they are curtailed from behaving in a manner that will not conform with society. And thereby, if you spread it around, you find that the whole society has learned (P4).

4.2 Threats and Challenges in Preservation

There were several threats and challenges highlighted by the participants, they identified certain aspects of the cultural under threat to be language, mode of greeting, certain rites and customs, architecture and festivals. It was inferable that these aspects are core to the society operation and their reduction or in some cases extinctions have led to obvious consequences.

Possible language extinction and mode of greetings

It was exposed from the conversations that there has been a significant depreciation in the use of the indigenous language especially among the younger generation. This was considered by the participants to be a high-risk situation that limits cultural preservation and knowledge transfer.

The language and salutations are very important, their being threatened affects the very fabric of [our] heritage and tradition. Only Benin people in the world have a unique way of greeting which signifies where you come from, the family you belong to. If we lose our salutations, we lose our oneness and uniqueness as a people (P3).

Well, the number one is language. Language is almost going extinct because of the adoption of only English even from infancy. Therefore, the children grow up and lose their sense of language (P4).

Traditional observations and festivals

The participants relayed strong emphasis on the relevance of traditional observations and certain festivals to the cultural structure of the region, hence an integral part of its heritage. The significant reduction in the performance of these observations and festivals have been noted to be of concern to the institution, as it impacts directly to the cultural and societal construct.

We believe in celebrating life at every stage, from cradle to death. These traditional observations are going extinct, but these were ways of moderating the society and impacting human feelings. The non-observance of these things makes people look like they hold nothing dear (P4).

The *Igue* festival is being threatened because of modern influences, some see it as irrelevant and do not want to participate. The annual festival is a way of marking the end of the year and an event to give thanks (P3).

Architecture

In addition to the threats, the reality of the extinction of the indigenous architectural style of the region as a cultural heritage product was brought to light. The discourse imprinted on the merits of the lost skills and reiterated the necessity of preserving cultural heritage products.

We have lost the architecture as our culture; the way and manner we build our houses. We have our own style of building in such a way and manner that when anyone that is not of that compound, if they enter unless taken around, they may not be able to find his way out. And this is also the reason thieves were easily caught when they enter such houses, they lose their way. So, we have completely lost this style of building due to the so-called modernization (P5).

Challenges to Cultural Preservation

The forces of globalization, modernization and the inclusion of politics in cultural affairs were indicated to be drivers of the threats and challenges to the chieftaincy institutions efforts towards cultural preservation. Globalization was perceived from various viewpoints; technology being a tool for faster communication and inclusion of a larger range of communities as well as a disruptive tool that encourages cultural drift and the propagation of violence. This cultural drift arose from an over reliance on the global western cultural products at the detriment of the Benin cultural products.

Globalization has really changed the way customs and tourism are practiced; in a way our tradition is much intact. The advent of technology has helped fasten our communication (P1).

The forces of globalization (with key indicators like the internet, social media) is eating away our culture. It is first introducing our children to a foreign way of seeing things first before they come back to learn our own cultural value. More or less, we are only consuming content created by others. For instance, the so-called game design for children these days, none have cultural content in it. As a people we have not been able to create our own space on the internet to showcase our cultural content (P3).

Similarly, it was buttressed that these western influences have enabled the mindset of 'end-justifies the means' in the pursuit of wealth among the youth.

Social media has greatly impacted our culture and customs. Now we see what happens with everyone and in everywhere. It shows both the good and bad sides, unfortunately, people copy more of what is bad. What is common among the youth is flaunting wealth and the need to make wealth young and at any cost. Whereas in our culture we have great respect for the way and manner of making money. It is dignity in labour (P5).

On the other hand, a major challenge expressed is the incursion of politics into the cultural framework. This was debunked to include the relegation of the traditional institution to be subject to the local government tier, blurred line of constitutional jurisdiction of the chieftaincy institution hence the interference of law agencies in the process of dispute resolution and in some case contempt for the authority of chiefs.

As I have rightly said is that they brought politics into traditional institution. Politics has eaten deep into the traditional institution. Where the chiefs need to function, the government brings in their thugs to disorganize the activities (P2).

It is heartbreaking that the traditional institution and monarchs like the Oba of Benin, who used to be an emperor, is now controlled by a common Local Government Chairman. Dictating their activities and restricting their movement (P5).

Lastly, the challenge of limited financial remuneration for chiefs in the institution was highlighted. It was discussed to be a result of the unclear constitutional authority they hold hence they rely on personal wealth which has militated against acceptance of titles and this impacts to the cultural preservation in the region.

First and foremost, some of the chiefs are not as wealth and rely on their personal income. nobody listens when there is no money (P6).

So, because the chiefs are not being paid in the palace [or from any allocation] they need to find a way to make ends meet. so, the issue of survival, issue of making ends meet, becomes a deterrent for some chiefs in assessing their full function by being initiated to the palace (P3)

4.3 Efforts and Limitations to Cultural Preservation

In response to the threats and challenges posed by the afore mentioned factors, the interviews revealed that certain initiatives and actions have been deployed by the institution. This was exemplified by the monarch's degree on the reinforcement of teaching of Benin language as core subjects in schools as well as advisory message to families on the advantage of the language's adoption and usage in homes.

Our present-day Oba is doing everything possible to prevent our language from going into extinction by advising parents at various homes, to draw their children closer by teaching them our cultures and languages (P1).

In addition to the above, the continuation of the annual festivals, the guild systems and observance of customs was highlighted as efforts made to buttress the sustenance of its cultural heritage. They stressed their collective observance of activities like praying during events and dispute resolution to be examples.

At events, the very habit of praying in Benin [and breaking kola nut] by chiefs, helps to keep the language alive. It demonstrates to that audience there the value of prayer. by so doing, are helping to keep our culture alive. In addition, in every community where there is a chief they help in settling disputes and conflict resolution. It is prescribed to tell a chief when in dispute, because the chiefs swear oaths to be truthful, honest, not to be biased [and] so people believe in that institution (P3).

Similarly, the concept of knowledge transfer through the guild systems was emphasized. It was mentioned that each guild has several chiefs who through their roles ensure the transfer of culture specific skills and crafts. This is done through internships, mentorships and celebrations (festivals).

We also help in assisting the community and as well as the society by bringing our children into the guilds. Once our children are involved, they too can also

move out of the backwardness of the society, because the job is time consuming before they finish a particular job, the day is gone, and they have little or no time to go and involve in atrocities (P2).

Limitations to Cultural Preservation

The major limitations impressed by the participants were the lack of funding for the institutions preservation activities which included the up scaling of the annual festivals, inter community developments (etc), also the limited collaborations with other tourism stakeholders (State Government, NGOs) and finally the nonexistence of initiatives to harness the institutions wealth of knowledge.

There's no rule. There's no office given to chiefs where they are supposed sit down and implement ideas. And, of course, we are not government, we do not have a enough fund to do it ourselves. If there is no funding, we just exist on our own. Our knowledge and the potentials are not being taxed. Our potentials can only be harnessed if we are being tasked to do so through a structured body whose duty it is to say chiefs, give us ideas of how we can do this and there is funding for it (P3).

Recommendations for Cultural Preservation

Cumulatively, the interviewee's proffered suggestions to tackle the established challenges and limitations from their various perspectives. It included the possibility of enacting culture-based Ngo's to provide structure and funding for preservation ideas. In addition, the allocation of constitutional jurisdiction for traditional institutions on the state and national levels.

There should be NGOs, can't NGOs be culture based? And say come together we want to do this, chiefs, that's the role you should function in this. It is not everything we leave to the government. Culture-based NGO can be created, raise funds, and let the chiefs come together and identify key areas to be addressed (P3).

Interestingly, they proposed the set-up of tech initiatives to utilize globalization (internet and social media) as drivers for propagating domestic cultural contents.

Youths who are tech savvy, should start domesticating our content. We should start taking over the talent space, create a space for the Benin people, for our own peculiar African culture heritage content (digital traditional games, stories, parables, wrestling). We need to start making content that will inform the African child about African worldview, perspective, culture and values (P3).

Additionally, they buttressed the need for inter-institution collaborations through submits, conferences and the publishing of literary works to document and transfer the knowledge of the institution. The necessity of eradicating the demeaning of chiefs to enable well-seasoned individuals to become chiefs, or investors which can contribute towards community-based developments.

Chiefs can also write. They can influence by coming together; to hold the submits, they can hold conferences together (P3).

The demeaning of chiefs should end. This will enable the chieftaincy institution be enhanced and we can have more chiefs around the area, that educated, enlightened people who are exposed, who have traveled out, who have something to impact in their society. Chiefs can be investors who can contribute accommodations and other infrastructures to promote cultural heritage preservation and influence tourism. So that's why we say think global act local (P4).

4.4 The Institution and Cultural Tourism

The cultural tourism potentials of the region were iterated and the ties between the institution's cultural preservation efforts and responsible cultural tourism propagation. In evaluating the discussions, two viewpoints emerged. The first being that the institution has not directly been part of

cultural tourism efforts in the region. It was mentioned that the few occurrences have been tied to private initiatives and the bronze casters guilds activities.

These private initiatives were explained to be the rereferrals from individuals to tourists about the existence or proximity of chiefs. In addition, the bronze guild's geographical location serves as an artifact market as well as the home of several chiefs. This phenomenon combines to attract tourism and provides the platform for these title holders to directly impact cultural tourism.

On the other hand, the second perspective exposed from the conversations deduced that the institution should be part of the cultural tourism process and execution. They iterated their status as custodians who have the wealth of knowledge, needed to validate the cultural aspects of the region's tourism.

Our culture is respected, within and through tourism. Tourism is intergernerded with our culture (P1).

Chiefs can influence tourism through their own knowledge. First and foremost, these chiefs are resource persons as well, they can tell stories for instance, stories and sightings about the Benin Moat system, one of the largest earths works dug with human hands without technology. It is a testament of a civilization that flourished before the white men came (P3).

In surmising the respondents' opinions, they succeeded in drawing connections between cultural heritage preservation and the propagation of cultural tourism. One being the emphasis that a boost in cultural tourism ensures the survival of the bronze casting legacy as well as the concept of knowledge transfer.

4.5 Economic, Social cultural and Environmental Perspectives

While disusing on responsible tourism in the region, the participants highlighted the various benefits its development would bring in their communities and regionally. Economically, the region can

benefit immensely from the sales of artifacts, cultural content, the influx of investors due to tourism activities and the creation of revenues allocatable for community development projects. The economic buoyancy can in addition impact cultural craft continuity (legacy) and promote sustenance of indigenous livelihood.

Tourism can be of benefit for example this bronze work, it is not done anywhere else as it is here in Benin. Once the work is done and people visit us, they come in and see what we have achieved with our hands, not with machine. And they are marveled. Again, they buy and when they go back, others in their various countries are attracted to it (P2).

Similarly, it was implied that developing responsible cultural tourism is both economically beneficial and a tool for cultural preservation. This notion was exemplified through the training of tour guides which facilitates the seamlessness of cultural tourism activities but also ensures knowledge transfer.

Tourism will help our economy greatly for an instance, train tour guides, It will help sustain our history, because as the people come on tours, they can gain meaningful information about history, political, economic, geographical and all parts of history from these guilds (P5).

From the environmental perspective, it was deduced that the culture in itself and its practices propagate the respect and preservation of nature. The interviewees drew emphasis on the various sacred grooves in the region which can be harnessed as cultural tourism products. These grooves have explicit orders to be preserved and are utilized for specific observances, holding spiritual or jurisdictional symbolism. Their usage is years apart and hence allows for the regeneration of the area and retention of biodiversity.

I think the environment is not degraded as a result of this cultural activities, during these festivals they don't go cutting down those trees, People sleep there

overnight when there are activities, because they are place is made to look neat without destroying the trees, the natural trees, they are well nurtured. You don't tamper with them. So, to that extent, they even help in maintaining/ preserve nature, sustaining the environment. They have well taken care of (P4).

In contrast to the above, a concern was raised addressing the possible negative environmental impact arising from increased demand for bronze works due to tourism activities. The work hazards to the bronze casters were portrayed to be of grave concern.

There are hazards in our job as bronze casters, our job includes the use of fire (casting) and after casting, we'll have to file, in course of filing particles get into our body. We inhale the particle dust which is quite harmful to the body (P2).

As a solution to the above, it was proposed that the aid of the government is essential in standardizing the casting environs and process with priority on mitigating the hazards associated with the craft.

So, we need to seek governments help and the society because if we are not taken care of, and we get sick from this craft the work can go into extinction (P2).

Social-culturally, several of the participants indicated positive impact of cultural tourism in the region. The discussion was approached from the angle of the impact of cultural tourism on the indigenes. They identified benefits such as the possible reduction of crime rates through engagement of work force due to continued patronage. In addition, the platform for cultural exchange and exposure, networking as well as social excitement were pinpointed.

It's an opportunity for people to interact and for those people involved in it to also meet with foreigners, exchange contact. It strengthens the social connection and it helps to keep the society socially alive (P3).

4.6 Relevance of the institution to cultural tourism

In defining the chieftaincy institution's role and relevance to responsible cultural tourism, the participants pivoted their capacity to be monitoring body on the process of cultural tourism and its activities. They elaborated on serving on advisory roles refuting cultural deviations and appropriation.

The Chiefs can function in terms of advising the natives and non-natives on abiding to the do's and don'ts of our culture (P1).

As the communication bridge between government and indigenes, it was highlighted that appointments into the tourism decision making organizations and initiatives to serve as stakeholders would expedite the proper representation of the grass root and insight. This attests to their role as ambassadors, which they proffered can be incorporated as part of tourism experience design.

Appoint them into boards and offices where they can be resource persons also and also you want them, so they can pass on their knowledge to those who want to document them for posterity (P2).

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This research revealed that the chieftaincy institution can be leveraged as a key driver for cultural heritage preservation in the region. As theorized previously (UNESCO 2006; UNESCO 2003), these title holders are living heritages themselves and through this study they have been found to be key players in the cultural heritage preservation efforts in the region. The research also highlighted the pivot role the chieftaincy institution has and continues to play as a facilitator for informal education about the region's culture and its operations (UNESCO, 2003).

In answering the first research question on the institutions relevance whilst minimizing negative impact, it was discovered that their roles and functions such as conflict mediators, moral compass, custodian of knowledge, representative of the grand monarchy, community leadership, communication channels, and accomplished writers all embody the expressions of intangible expressions of cultural heritage. While addressing the possibility of negative impacts that could emerge from their inclusion in cultural heritage preservation, the data from this study discovered non in that regard. It rather exposed the current relegation of the institutions authority and functionality owing to the infringement of politics in cultural efforts as well as the diluting of cultural observations, customs and values due to the negative influences of globalization. Over the years, the topic of globalization and its influences have sparked trivial debates. While it has propelled unparallel developments, it also has enabled cultural dilution, appropriations and other concerns (Taptiani et al, 2024: Urbaite, 2024).

The duality of the above phenomena has also been the catalyst for the chieftaincy institutions continued relevance, resilience and efforts in ensuring the regions culture is preserved. These efforts included the recalibration of the region's language as core subjects across schools in the region,

emphasis on the continuity of annual festivals, soliciting for social reforms that buttress the regard for human life, sane society, equity and uniformity of purpose as a region.

Furthermore, in conceptualizing the role the chieftaincy institution must play in propagating responsible tourism practices that rest on the triple bottom principle, (UNWTO, 2017, Zhenhua, 2003; Elkington, 1990), this study together with existing knowledge base can proffer these strategies or recommendations; the inclusive development tourism strategy is recommended to address the chieftaincy institutions' incapacitation due to limited constitutional jurisdiction in the region. This concept emphasizes the deliberate inclusion of local needs and local key holders into the harnessing and development of tourism (see Partanen, 2024). The author revealed a strategy that allows for the development of a holistic tourism from the grassroot upwards (bottom-up approach).

In applying this to the region under research, it will ensure the adaptation of the chieftaincy institution and its benefits into the development of responsible cultural tourism. In contrast, this strategy is more feasible in implementation than anticipating the enactment and ratification of the bill proposed by the National Council of traditional rulers (NCTR) for constitutional rights for traditional rulers in (Vanguard, 2024). In merits, this strategy is implementable by the state ministry for culture and arts and would curtail the derogation of the chieftaincy institutions authority.

As a further recommendation, the inclusive development tourism strategy would pave way for the research, design and establishment of a regional tourism destination management strategy and subsequently the establishment of Destination management organizations (DMOs). Regional tourism destination management strategy is key for capacitating the development of destinations. The approach cumulates the various tourism development needs, restructurings, and projection of the destination's major attractions. It complies with traditional management study approach which

emphasizes on increasing destination visibility and appeal to target audience, harnessing and marketing destination core offerings as focal branding, and ties to sustainability (Paddison, 2022). This approach is accented as important for the region under research, on the grounds of inclusivity of a diverse body of participants in the creation of the strategy; regional tourism councils, governmental agencies, educational institutions with valuable information, and indigenous tourism businesses with data (Visit Jyvaskyla, 2025). The adoption of this approach will ensure the utility of the wealth of knowledge the chieftaincy institution possesses.

As a last recommendation, this study has reflected the magnitude of work to be done in order to for the region to attain the status of a responsible cultural tourism destination for this to occur a holistic approach is needed. The previous recommendations will give room for the establishment of destination management organization. The establishment of a DMO in this case will serve as an enforcer and driver for the tourism pursuit as prescribed by the regional tourism destination management strategy. DMO plays a focal role in directing the various development efforts from various stakeholders, under a systematic and comprehensible plan of execution while aligning to common goals (UNWTO, 2025). In practicality it will serve as an organization that is tied to the state and local government, charged with educating travelers on the destination's service offerings, enable destination visibility, liaise with various tourism and stakeholders, act as communication channels for informing both indigenes and tourists on tourism content, sustainability and crisis management (Hartog, 2021; Toubes et al, 2021).

The existence of a DMO in the region under study will ensure continued collaboration between the chieftaincy institution and other stakeholders, facilitate the ideas of interinstitutional submits and conference on cultural heritage preservation efforts and showcase the results. It will serve as

the structured body needed to ensure the continued relevance of the chief desi institution in its efforts to sustain the region's culture and impact cultural tourism.

Ethicality and Limitation of Research

The ethical considerations recognized in this research includes the use of consent forms to establish the voluntary participation of the interviewees, provision of equal information consisting of the research history, the university's approval to research and data management practices. In addition, ethical considerations were made to ensure the accurate representation of traditional names by representing them in italics to differentiate them from other terms used. It is necessary to state that approval was given to use the participants names and titles for this research, however, to ensure ethicality of research, the researcher introduced the titles in the categorical data table and subsequently anonymized each participant i.e. P1, P2 etc.

This research is not without its limitation. One of such limitations of this study includes the limited data (six participants). While it was ensured that there was diversity in their roles and jurisdiction it may not have fully represented the entire institution. In addition, the recommendations are limited in deductive analysis on the ease of its implementation, which is subject to acceptance by the various stakeholders needed for its enactment. Similarly, another limitation is the time frame needed or prescribed for actualizing the recommended strategies especially in the face of the rapid changes in the region due to external influences (globalization, trends and governmental changes) and on the global front as well.

Hence, there is the necessity for further research exposing detailed steps on the implementation of the proffered strategies with concise time frames and design structure. Similarly, the topic of

sustainability in tourism and destination management practice is also evolving and subsequent research on its practicality and adaptation to the confines of the culture would be insightful. In addition, another perspective of research is the application of the regenerative tourism approach in the region which centers on indigenizing the tourism efforts, retracing roots and the pursuit of community-based development (Inverini et al, 2023). Lastly, the area of effecting and adapting the constitutional jurisdiction the institution would have when the NCTR bill is enacted would be a viable research path. This would elaborate on their continued relevance and perhaps develop new roles that can further develop cultural tourism and cultural heritage preservation in the region.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Semi-structured Interview Outline

Section 1: Greetings & Pleasantries

1. Tell me about your position as a chief (How long have you been a chief / over what clan or region)
2. In your Opinion, what aspects of our Benin culture is under threat (what is the most important parts of our culture in Benin that must be kept alive)

Section 2: How Chiefs Help Protect Culture

4. In what ways have the chieftaincy institutions protected our traditions and culture?
5. What are the customs or traditions that chiefs have helped sustain?
6. What are some problems encountered by the chieftaincy institution in keeping our traditions?
7. How has globalization changed the way chieftaincy and traditions are practiced today?
8. Do chiefs work with the government or other groups to help protect our culture? If yes, how?

Section 3: Chiefs and Tourism

9. In what ways can tourism benefit your community?
10. How has it affected your community so far?
11. In your opinion what is the relations between chiefs and tourism development in Benin? (Are Chiefs able to influence tourism and in what ways?)
12. Can you give examples of festivals or events led by chiefs that attract tourists?
13. What do chiefs do to make sure tourism promotes our culture without harming it?
14. In your opinion, how does promoting tourism help bring money into the community for cultural preservation?
15. What are your opinions on environmental preservation in regard to tourism activities in Benin?
16. What are your opinions on the social impact of tourism activities in Benin?
17. What is your opinion: is culture commodified / sold or respected within / through tourism?

Section 4: Challenges and Ideas for the Future

14. In your opinion what presents the most challenge in keeping our culture strong while also welcoming tourists?
15. What kind of support do chiefs need from the government and businesses to protect culture and support tourism?
16. What are your opinions on how chieftaincy can remain relevant and help with tourism in the future (inclusion in the MOWAA project).