Socio-spatial Implications of Sustainable Cultural Tourism in Ikwerre Local Government Area,Rivers State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Cultural sustainability involves the preservation of cultural practices, beliefs, and heritage of a people and this sustainability, practices, beliefs, and heritage are preserved for the benefit of the present and future generations. The socio-economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development are enabled and driven by the conservation of the cultural and creative industries which can be encourage through cultural tourism. This study assessed the socio-spatial impact of sustainable cultural tourism in Ikwerre LGA, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study adopted the mixed method research approach where qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently from the study area. A sample size of 100 households was arrived at with the aid of Taro Yamane formula. Univariate summary statistic was used to extract and analysed data collected from the field through questionnaires administration, while content analysis and revalidation techniques was used to analysed data from key informants. The study revealed that the major cultural activities of the Ikwerre people are Egelege (Wrestling),Owhri (Dancing) , New Yam festival and the Masquerade festival. Also, the study showed that there are high accessibility, community integration and open spaces while there are low planned designated cultural centres, planned environment and infrastructural development. It is therefore recommended that to have a sustainable cultural tourism development, it requires all relevant stakeholders such as community leaders, local government authorities and planners to foster cultural tourism development through preservation of cultural heritages, policies and implementation and proper physical planning for rural communities.

Keywords: Spatial Planning, Culture, Tourism, Cultural heritage, Sustainability

1.1 Introduction

Every human being has an insatiable thirst for culture, as everyone has what they identify with, which is their cultural values and norms. Cities flourish because they can provide their residents with a blend of civilization and cultural values, which balances life in both the city and the countryside. For this reason, cultural tourism is a vital component of the world's cultural heritage (Brooks, 2011).

Local communities are rapidly urbanizing and could threaten cultural heritage. As communities urbanises, there is bound to be cultural diffusion and heterogeneity leading to disappearance of the indigenous cultural heritage. This of course has been the very scenario of most model cities in Nigeria where their cultural heritage has been eroded due to urbanisation and the most talk about civilization. Spatial planning which looks at the way things are arranged in space and time therefore becomes imperative considering the planning and management of the people culture, value system and their social living through the preservation and conservation of cultural resources.

Tourism has been part of human history and a component of life sustainability. It is the activity of people who take short trips to places outside of their communities. In many countries, it is a major source of income generation and employment (Quan-Baffour, 2023). The International Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism viewed cultural tourism as an activity that enables people to fully immerse themselves in the various lifestyles of other people to gain firsthand knowledge of their customs, traditions, physical surroundings, and knowledge of concepts and architectural, historic, archaeological, and other culturally significant locations that have been preserved from earlier times. Cultural tourism, as opposed to leisure travel, seeks to understand, or value the destination's distinctive features (Ddictvi & Kajzar,2014).

Ikwerre LGA is an emergent town in Greater Port Harcourt city frequently bath with diversity of cultural tourism and practices that need to be sustained. The socio-economic implication of sustaining the diversity of cultural tourism in the area cannot be overemphasized as it creates wealth. income, social tier, unity, including community growth and development. Although the implication of the benefit of cultural tourism to the people of Ikwerre LGA and the socio-spatial extent is hardly ascertained, hence this study.

1.2 Study Area.

Ikwerre Local Government Area (LGA) is one of the twenty-three LGA in Rivers State, located at the North-Eastern part of Rivers State and South-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It is one of the sub-ethnicities of the Ihuruoha Kingdom in Rivers State. Ikwerre LGA lies between latitudes 4°58' 33" N and longitudes 6°53' 21''E. The Local Government Area covers 530 km² (1,380sqm). The study area is bounded by Obio/Akpor (Local Government Area) to the south, Etche to the east, Emohua to the west and Imo State to the north. The Ikwerre migrated from the Akalaka descendants from the Benin Kingdom and speaks the Ihwuruohna language and have economic potential as the terrain has both land and rivers that fosters large scale farming and fishing as their basic occupation. The people are known for their traditional wrestling, festival displays, dance, masquerade, rites of passage and hospitality (Lawrence-Hart, 2022).
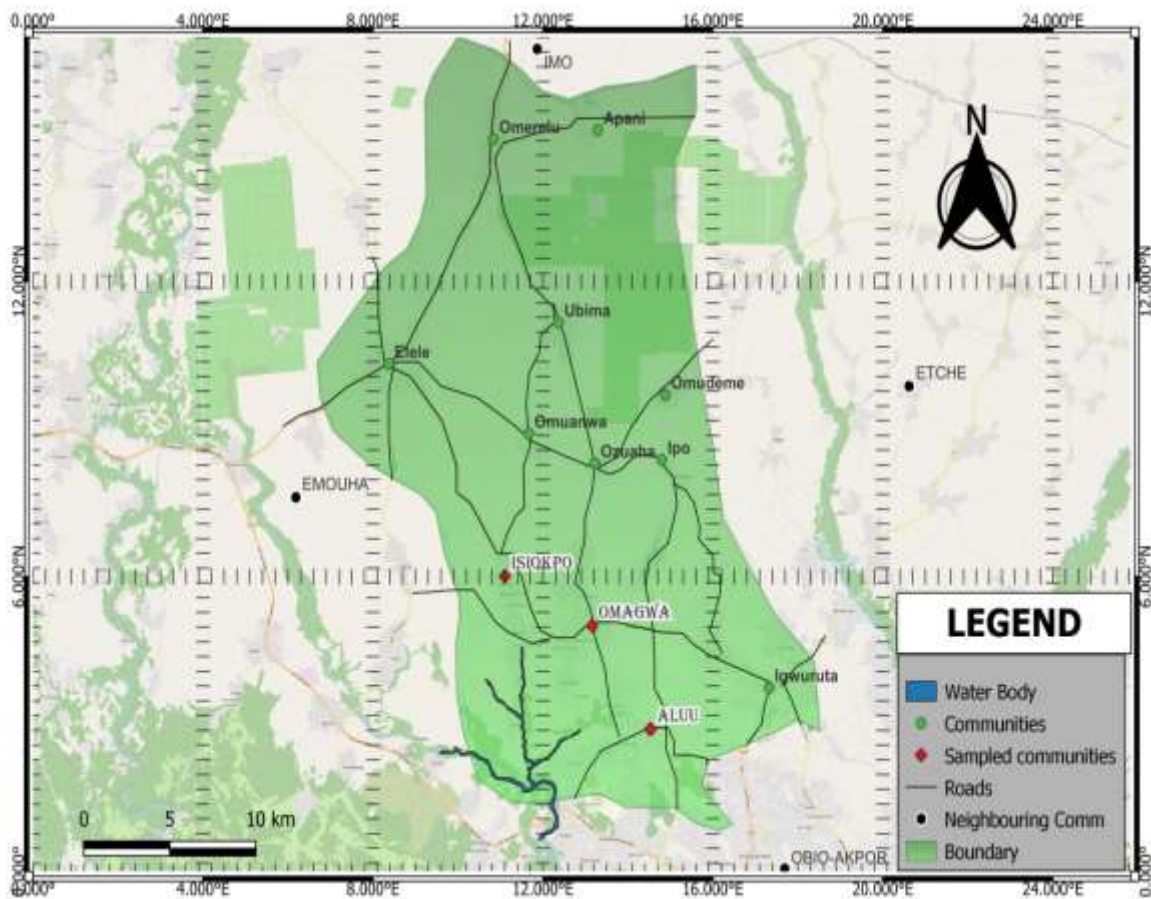

Fig. 1:   **Ikwerre LGA Rivers State**

Source: Researchers' Design (QGIS), 2023

2.0 Conceptual Review

2.1 Concept of Culture

The concept of culture is probably indispensable, yet it cannot be defined definitively (Raeff, Allison, Reddy & Mascolo, 2020). It is a complex whole that provides a unifying concept for the extensively varied ways of life (Bujdoso, 2015). Culture is a term that refers to a large and diverse set of mostly intangible aspects of social life. Culture consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share and that can be used to define them as a collective (Cole, 2019). Culture also includes the material objects that are common to that group or society. Culture is distinct from social structure and economic aspects of society, but it is connected to them both continuously informing them and being informed by them (Cole, 2019).

2.2 Cultural Sustainability

The Brundtland Report from 1987 defined sustainable development as a form of development in which the needs of the present generation is met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs (United Nations, 1987). Development considers the interdependence of humans and the

environment, and to achieve this; the built environment, the natural world, and people's psycho-social well-being cannot be separated. The environmental, economic, and social dimensions, three distinct but related pillars formed the foundation of sustainability at first (Earth Summit, 1992). However, Culture was presented as the fourth pillar of sustainable development during the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit.

Cultural sustainability, as it relates to sustainability or sustainable development, is the preservation of cultural customs, values, and legacy. According to Soini, Katriina, Birkland, and Inger (2014), it entails considering culture as a discrete entity and the question of whether any culture would survive into the future. The notion of cultural sustainability, on the other hand, holds that cultural customs, values, and legacy be conserved for the benefit of present and future generations. Furthermore, the cultural and creative industries facilitate and propel the economic, social, and environmental facets of sustainable development. This, in turn, promotes cultural tourism as tourists come to witness the customs and legacy that have been conserved through the community's implementation of sustainability. The area's economic development is facilitated by this.

2.3 The Concept of Placing-Making

Hague and Jenkins (2005) define place making as the main objective of spatial planning, which aims to create, duplicate, or mold a place's identity by the management of many activities, feelings, meanings, and other components that combine to produce a place's identity. This approach has brought attention to the need for communities to intentionally embrace planning to attract cultural tourism and promote the long-term growth of culture.

The concepts of place- making and spatial planning are derived from the writings of notable authors such as (Jacobs 1961; Whyte,1968) on how urban development negatively affects people's behaviour. A collective effort by residents of a specific area is one definition of place making (Boeri, 2017). It is called collective endeavour when people collaborate to redefine their environment (Beza, 2016).

Repurposing living spaces to serve more aesthetically pleasant uses is prevalent. "Functions" in this sense refer to place-related activities that contribute to the setting's uniqueness; site-specific elements including social interaction, historical educational components, and community-based arts usually reinforce the setting's uniqueness. (Thomas, Pate & Ranson, 2015).

2.4 Cultural Heritage Conservation

Cultural heritage includes the sites, things, and practices a society regards as old, important, and worthy of conservation (Brumann, 2015). Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of society inherited from past generations. Physical artifacts include works of art, literature, music, archaeological and historical artifacts, as well as buildings, monuments, and historic places, whilst intangible attributes comprise social customs, traditions, and practices often grounded in aesthetic and spiritual beliefs and oral traditions (Willis, 2014).

Heritage conservation includes all actions aimed at maintaining the cultural significance of a heritage object or place, a process that starts the moment a place is attributed cultural values and singled out for protection (Torre,2013). Settlements and communities that maintain a variety of qualities, such as historical and symbolic, artistic, and aesthetic, anthropological, and scientific, and social relevance, are considered to have cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2009).

The intangible manifestations of cultural heritage such as performing arts, oral traditions, social practices, knowledge, rituals, and celebratory events are now included in the conceptual framework of cultural heritage and are officially protected by UNESCO's 2003 Convention. Furthermore, legacy can be national, regional, or local, but it can also maintain its outstanding universal value for humanity and qualify as UNESCO World legacy (Pereira,2019). Since they have a distinct cultural significance and vibrant communities, urban and/or rural settlements should be preserved and protected to strengthen the four pillars of sustainable development: environmental sustainability, inclusive social development, inclusive economic development, and cultural vitality. (Oers & Bandarin, 2012).

3.0 Materials and Methods

This study adopted the mixed method research approach utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data. Survey research design was used to guide the study process. The simple random sampling technique was used to select three communities for sample (Aluu, Isiokpo and Omagwa). Qualitative data was gotten from key informant interview while quantitative data was gotten through questionnaires administration to household heads. The Univariate summary statistic was used to analyse data collected from the field through questionnaire administration, while content analysis was used to analysed data collected from key informants.

The rating was done using the probability percentages of the availability of the socio-spatial indicators in the community.

Probability Percentage of cultural impact rating

High Impact ………… ≥ 80-100%

Medium Impact………. ≥60- 80%

Low Impact   ………….≤ 0-30%

4.0 Findings

4.1 Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

4.1.1 Gender of Respondents

Fig 2 shows the gender of respondents in the study area. The data showed that 57% of the respondents were male while 43% were female. This signifies that the ratio of gender was represented.
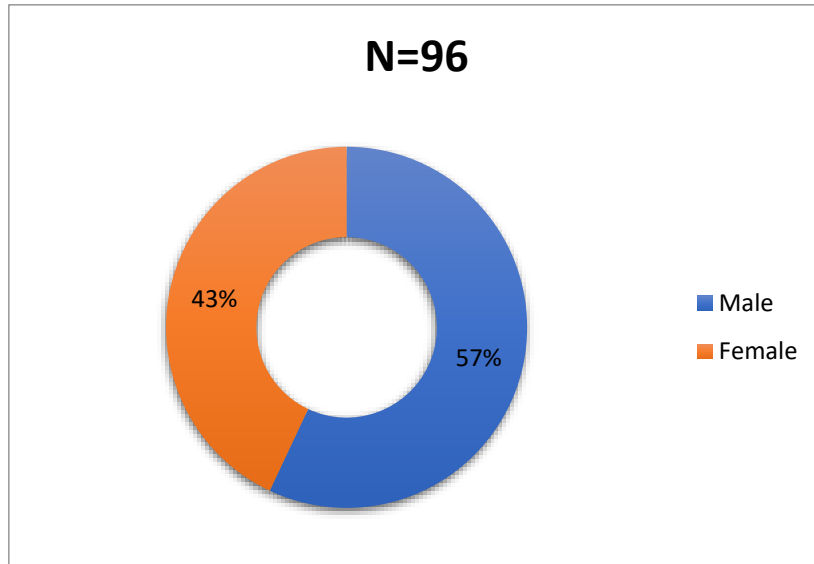

Fig 2: Gender of Respondents

Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2023

4.1.2 Age of Respondents

Table1 shows the age category of respondents in the study area. The data showed that 42% which is the highest in the age bracket represents 30-39 years, followed by age bracket 40-49 years representing 33%, and 18-29 years which is having the least representing 25%.

Table 1 Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-29 Years	24	25
30-39Years	40	42
40-49 Years	32	33
50-59Years	0	0
60-69 Years	0	0
70-79 Years	0	0
80+ Years	0	0
Total	96	100

Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2023

4.1.3 Educational Level of Respondents

Table 2 shows the educational level of respondents. The highest percentage of the respondents are graduate that has completed tertiary institution with 42%, followed by respondents that has completed secondary school with 31%, while tertiary uncompleted has 18%, and lastly primary school completed has the lowest which is 9%.

Table 2. Educational Level of Respondents

Educational level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No formal education	0	0
Primary school completed	9	9
Primary school uncompleted	0	0
Secondary school uncompleted	0	0
Secondary school completed	30	31
Tertiary completed	40	42
Tertiary uncompleted	17	18
Others specify	0	0
Total	**96**	**100**

Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2023

4.14. *Monthly Income of Respondents*

Table 3 shows the monthly income level of respondent in the study area. The data revealed that 38% of the respondents earns N41,000 – N50,000, 17% of the respondent earns N31,000-N40,000, while respondents earning N51,000-N60,000 has 16%. 10% of the respondents earn less than N30,000 and 11% of the respondents earns N61,000-N70,000 in the study area, 5% of the respondent earns N71,000-N80,000 and 3% of the respondents were not applicable as they were students and does not have a monthly income. The monthly income is above the poverty line.

Table 3: Monthly Income of Respondents

Monthly income of Respondent	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than N30,000	10	10
N31,000-N40,000	16	17
N41,000-N50,000	36	38
N51,000-N60,000	15	16
N61,000-N70,000	11	11
N71,000-N80,000	5	5
N81,000-N90,000	0	0
N91,000-N100,000	0	0
N101,000-N109,000	0	0
N110,000+	0	0
Not Applicable	3	3
Total	**96**	**100**

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2023

4.2 Types of Cultural Festival Celebrated in Ikwerre LGA

Table 4 shows the various cultural festival celebrated in the study area. Data obtained from sampled respondents showed that they include the Egelege (wrestling festival) which is celebrated from May – October, New yam festival celebrated from May to September, the masquerade festival which is celebrated December 26th, the bicycle carnival which is celebrated December 31st and the end of farming season festival (Okporo) which is celebrated August ending – September.

The list of cultural practices as identified in table 4.3 has shown that Ikwerre LGA parade lots of cultural practices with kin interest in tourism. The study revealed that the essence of a myriad of the cultural practices in the area is to sustain the way of life of the people and to encourage social tiers and

enhance social organisation. Culture is the way of life of a group of people, therefore show- casing several cultural practices in the study area implies that the people of Ikwerre LGA is still upholding the way of life of the people despite the gradual disappearance of cultural value and norms occasioned by rapid rate of urbanisation in the area.

Table 4. Types of Cultural Festival Celebrated in the study area.

S/N	Name of Festival	Month of Celebration
1	Egelege (wrestling) Festival	May – October
2	New yam festival	May – September
3	Masquerade festival	December 26th
4	Bicycle carnival	December 31st
5	End of farming season festival (Okporo)	August ending – September

Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2023

The performance and celebration of the various social activities as noted by (Onu, 2018), brings the people together all the year round and help to sustain cultural practices and tourism in the area. Some of these basic socio-cultural activities as noted before include; '*Egelege*' (Wrestling), '*Eri'* (Music) and '*Owhi*' (Masquerade). The "*Eri*" and "*Owhi*" are cultural dance groups. The cultural performances of these cultural activities help to foster unity and identity among the people, see plate 1.

Plate 1: Cultural Wrestling Festival in Omagwa

Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2023

4.3 Assessing the Socio-spatial Impacts of Cultural Tourism in Ikwerre LGA

The study utilised various socio-spatial indicators to assess the impacts of cultural tourism in the study area. The rating was done using key socio-spatial indicators against the various community's development attributes. The indicators are accessibility, designated cultural centres, basic infrastructures, community integration, planned community, hospitability/ attraction and crime and other social vices amongst others. These where rated high, medium, and low respectively as shown in table 5.

Table 5. Rating of socio-spatial Impact of Cultural Tourism

S/No	Socio-Spatial Indicators	Communities								
		Isiokpo			Aluu			Omagwa.		
		L	M	H	L	M	H	L	M	H
1	Accessibility (Road)Primary and local distributors			High			High		Medium	
2	Designated cultural centre		Medium			Medium		Low		
3	Available infrastructure E.g. electricity, health care, pipe borne water		Medium			Medium		Low		
4	Open spaces			High			High			High
5	Planned community		Medium			Medium		Low		
6	Crime and social vices	Low				Medium			Medium	
7	Attraction of visitors/ Hospitality			High			High		Medium	
8	Cultural heritages			High		Medium			Medium	
9	Community identity		Medium					Low		
10	Community image building			High				Low		
11	Community integration			High			High		Medium	

 High   Medium   Low

Source: Researchers, computation work, 2023.

5.0 Discussions

5.1. Cultural Practices in Ikwerre LGA

The study revealed that the Egelege (wrestling festival), New yam festival, the masquerade festival, the bicycle carnival which is a branded tourism and the end of farming season festival (Okporo). These cultural festivals foster unity and integration in the communities.

5.2 Socio-spatial Impacts of Cultural Tourism in Ikwerre LGA

Findings from table 5 showed the socio-spatial impact of cultural tourism in the study area. Accessibility (road) has a high impact while designated cultural centre was rated medium, available infrastructure was medium. This indicated that there is neglect of rural areas of basic amenities, open spaces were rated high also indicating that there are undeveloped land and can encourage planning that can integrate sustainable cultural tourism development. The indicators are highlighted as follows:

5.2.1 **Accessibility (High):** Accessibility is a major factor that influences tourism. The accessibility of the tourist destination is enhanced by the development of transportation infrastructure(s) network or by improving connectivity between the network and tourist facilities. The sampled communities are rated high due to their accessibility by road and air infrastructure proxy to these communities.

5.2.2 **Available Basic Amenities (Low):** Tourist requires a range of services and amenities within a location to fulfil their needs and expectations. These foster their comfort and pleasantness of visitors both domestic and international. The various public amenities include water, electricity, wastewater, refuse collection, car parking or transport hubs, toilets, signage, wayfinding. However, in developing countries rural areas are deprived of basic amenities and therefore concomitate cultural tourism.

5.2.3 Open Spaces (High): Open spaces play several crucial roles in rural communities that improve the environment and the well-being of the local population through community cohesion and social interactions by:

a. **Gathering Places:** Public areas offers space for people to congregate, converse, and take part in a range of activities. Whether it's a neighbourhood park, village square, or community garden, these areas promote interpersonal relationships and build ties within the community.
b. **Cultural Expression:** Individuals exhibit their identities, customs, and cultures in public areas. These places frequently host festivals, fairs, and other cultural events that enable locals to mark their heritage as a community. In rural places, open spaces serve not only practical but also essential to the social fabric of the community. They help to create the region's identity, stimulate interaction among people, and support mental and physical health.

5.2.4 Planned community (Low): Planning fosters cultural tourism. A deliberate planning curbs chaos and in turn attract tourist from near and far. In developing nations one of the issues affecting tourism is lack of spatial planning which contributes to haphazard planned settlement and tourist attraction destination.

Planned community (Low): Planning fosters cultural tourism. A deliberate planning curbs chaos and in turn attract tourist from near and far. In developing nations one of the issues affecting tourism is lack of spatial planning which contributes to haphazard planned settlement and tourist attraction destination.

5.2.5 Crime and social vices (Low): Tourist destination that has low crime rate attracts tourism development. Tourism has both positive and negative impact on the host community since there is interaction between the communities and visitors. It is imperative that cultural tourism fosters mutual learning. The social ambience in terms of crime and social vices, such as hostilities is said to be low, therefore, encourages cultural tourism in the study area.

5.2.6 Attraction of visitors/ Hospitality (High): The Ihuruohna people are said to be hospitable. Hospitality is one of the major factors that fosters tourism. The receptiveness of a community can attract development and promote tourism than a hostile community.

5.2.7 Cultural heritages (High): Cultural heritages that are preserved serves as basis for tourism development. Historical sites, festivals and celebrated events are harnessed to promote cultural tourism development in each region. The rich culture of the Ikwerre such as Egelege (wrestling festival, new yam festivals (gastronomy) is an attractive event that can pull tourist to the given destination.

5.2.8 Building Community Image (High): Community building and image making is important especially in the global world. Projecting rich heritages and cultural attractions fosters tourism, in turn improve the gross domestic product of the area. In the global space through digital aids the ability to create brands by advertising tourism products makes for communities to have the opportunity to build local contents for cultural sustainability. This in turn build bonds, sense of belonging and friendly environment.

5.2.9 Community Integration (High): This forms the basis of cultural background of identity, solidarity, and community. The term community relates to the series of multiple, complex, and emerging social structures and boundaries. The integration of the elements of identity and solidarity, and the physical, spatial, and social-structural frameworks promote a larger sense of community and forms the normative assertion of what makes a community.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

As a tourist destination, Ikwerre Local Government Area hosts several cultural festivals, including the bicycle carnival, the new yam festival, the masquerade festival, and the wrestling festival. These events foster socio-cultural development within the community.

To effectively promote community development, it follows that sustainable and dependable sources of cultural tourism be maintained and practiced in the community. The tools that consciously prepare for the integration of spatial elements that support the growth of cultural tourism sustainably are called physical planning tools. It implies therefore that physical planning of communities is imperative to ensure sustainability of way of life and sources of income of the people.

The recent developments in cultural heritage conservation which include cultural landscapes and historic urban or rural landscapes provide not only intellectual developments, but considers a holistic consideration of cultural resources, vulnerability, and the need for actions both for conservation and development that will include holistic planning of area during plans preparation.

6.2 Recommendations

    I.   From the findings, it is therefore recommended that Community stakeholders, leaders, and spiritual organisation should ensure the preservation and conservation of their cultural heritages as this will boast the socio-economic status of the people in the region.

    II.   There is the need for planners to advocate for rural strategic plans to ensure community needs and requirements are meet for cultural tourism development in their domain.

III.   Local government authorities should establish policies and bylaws that will promote tourism activities and foster cultural sustainability in the region.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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