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AN EVALUATION OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES: THE CASE OF IKOGOSI RESORT, EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the socio-economic contributions of Ikogosi Resort to local communities in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The impacts of urban development and environmental threats on the preservation of sacred cultural sites, the role of indigenous knowledge and community participation in sustaining these sites, and the extent of policy and institutional support available for their safeguarding. A descriptive research design was adopted, and primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 150 respondents. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlational techniques, while Cochran's equation of finite population was used to determine the sample size. The findings revealed that urban expansion, infrastructure development, and environmental pollution have significantly compromised the physical integrity and sacred values of cultural sites. Although elders and traditional leaders continue to play a vital role in heritage preservation, the transmission of indigenous knowledge to younger generations is weakening due to modernization, religious change, and socio-economic pressures. The study further found that community participation remains central to effective sacred site management but is constrained by limited government engagement and weak institutional collaboration. It concludes that integrated heritage management approaches combining indigenous knowledge, active community involvement, and stronger institutional support are essential for the sustainable preservation of sacred cultural sites in rapidly urbanizing environments.

Keywords: Community participation, Cultural heritage preservation, Indigenous knowledge, Sacred cultural sites, Urbanization

Introduction

Nigeria, often lauded as the "Giant of Africa," is a nation richly endowed with a vast mosaic of cultural and natural heritage that reflects its diverse history, complex ethnic composition, and enduring spiritual traditions. With over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 indigenous languages, Nigeria boasts an unparalleled cultural diversity that has evolved across centuries (Falola & Heaton, 2008). This diversity is embodied in both tangible and intangible heritage—ranging from archaeological monuments, sacred groves, traditional architecture, and ritual artifacts to oral traditions, folklore, music, festivals, spiritual beliefs, and indigenous knowledge systems (Okpoko & Eze-Uzomaka, 2019; Aremu, 2021). These cultural expressions are not relics of the past but living practices that continue to shape the values, worldview, and socio-political organization of Nigerian communities. Heritage in Nigeria is thus uniquely positioned at the intersection of tradition and modernity. While forces such as globalization, urbanization, and religious shifts pose existential threats to indigenous practices and sacred ecological sites, increasing attention is being given to their potential for sustainable tourism, community development, and environmental conservation (Ogunleye, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). Among Nigeria's 36 federating states, Ekiti State, located in the southwestern region, offers a compelling case study of the interconnectedness between faith, culture, and nature. Predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group, Ekiti is widely recognized for its resilient cultural traditions, deep spiritual consciousness, and a historical legacy that is vividly expressed through festivals, oral poetry, traditional crafts, and sacred landscapes (Adeyemi, 2020; Adebayo & Oni, 2023). The cultural landscape of Ekiti is rich and multifaceted. It features vibrant festivals such as the Ogun, Olosunta, and Udiroko festivals; oral genres like Ijala and Ewi poetry; textile traditions such as Adire Ekiti; and sacred sites preserved through a combination of spiritual devotion and traditional ecological knowledge. The Yoruba of Ekiti maintain a cosmological worldview where the spiritual and physical realms are interwoven. Rivers, forests, hills, and groves are often revered as the abodes of orisa (deities) or ancestral spirits. These sacred landscapes not only serve religious functions but also reinforce communal identity, environmental stewardship, and cultural continuity (Omolola, 2023). Two notable heritage sites that exemplify this intersection in Ekiti State are the Ikogosi Warm Springs and the Efon-Alaye Sacred Forest. Both sites offer profound insights into how faith and ecology are fused in Yoruba cosmology and provide compelling models for cultural sustainability in Nigeria. Located in the serene town of Ikogosi-Ekiti, the Ikogosi Warm Springs is a rare natural phenomenon where warm and cold springs emerge side by side without mixing. While scientists have studied this geological anomaly with interest (Ajayi, 2015), for the local people, its significance transcends scientific curiosity. According to Yoruba oral tradition, the two streams represent the spiritual transformation of two co-wives of a powerful hunter, whose emotional conflict led to their metamorphosis into water bodies—one warm, the other cold. This myth, passed down through generations, imbues the site with symbolic meanings of balance, healing, and divine justice (Ojo, 2021; Adebayo, 2022). Today, Ikogosi Warm Springs is more than a natural wonder it is a pilgrimage site, a cultural landmark, and a symbol of spiritual duality. In recent years, the Ekiti State Government and private entities have collaborated to transform the site into a model of eco-cultural tourism. Notably, the partnership with Cavista Holdings has led to infrastructural upgrades, including eco-lodges, a cultural craft market, and a renewed focus on promoting Adire Ekiti as a local cultural product (Cavista Holdings, 2024). These initiatives blend cultural preservation with economic development, demonstrating how heritage sites can be leveraged for sustainable tourism without eroding their spiritual significance. The Ikogosi Warm Springs illustrate the profound ways in which cultural landscapes serve as sites of identity, spiritual nourishment, and environmental responsibility. They represent how indigenous worldviews can offer alternative paradigms of sustainability that are deeply rooted in local values, spiritual belief systems, and community participation. As Nigeria aspires to diversify its economy through cultural tourism and ecological protection, these heritage sites offer promising models. They raise critical questions about the roles of traditional custodians, local communities, and government agencies in safeguarding sacred ecologies in the face of modernization, climate change, and religious transformation (UNESCO, 2023; Akinyemi & Afolabi, 2024).

This research investigates the intersection of faith, culture, and nature through a case study analysis of the Ikogosi Warm Springs. By exploring how these sites function as spiritual centers, cultural archives, and ecological sanctuaries, the study contributes to broader discourses on cultural sustainability, environmental conservation, and the protection of intangible heritage in Africa.The Ikogosi Warm Springs exemplify a symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment mediated through spiritual belief. They are not only revered for their physical attributes but are also valued for the deep cultural meanings they carry. As custodians of indigenous knowledge and identity, these sites serve as powerful reminders of how sacred ecologies can be mobilized in the service of national heritage, ecological stewardship, and sustainable development. The first problem is threats from urbanization and environmental degradation. The natural features of Ikogosi Warm Springs face increasing threats from urban encroachment, logging, and poor environmental management. These developments compromise the ecological integrity and sacred value of these spaces, which are essential not only for biodiversity but also for their cultural and spiritual roles in the community. The second problem is the generational loss of indigenous knowledge and practices. As younger generations become more influenced by globalization, digital culture, and mainstream religions, there is a significant decline in the transmission of indigenous knowledge, beliefs, and cultural practices associated with these sacred sites. Without proper documentation and educational inclusion, the unique narratives, taboos, rituals, and meanings tied to these places risk being lost permanently. This study aims to evaluate the impact of urbanization and environmental threats on sacred cultural sites while investigating how indigenous knowledge and community participation help sustain them.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted for this study is a case study approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. This was selected for this research as it facilitated the exploration of primary data derived from response from participants through the use of a structured survey questionnaire.

Area of Study

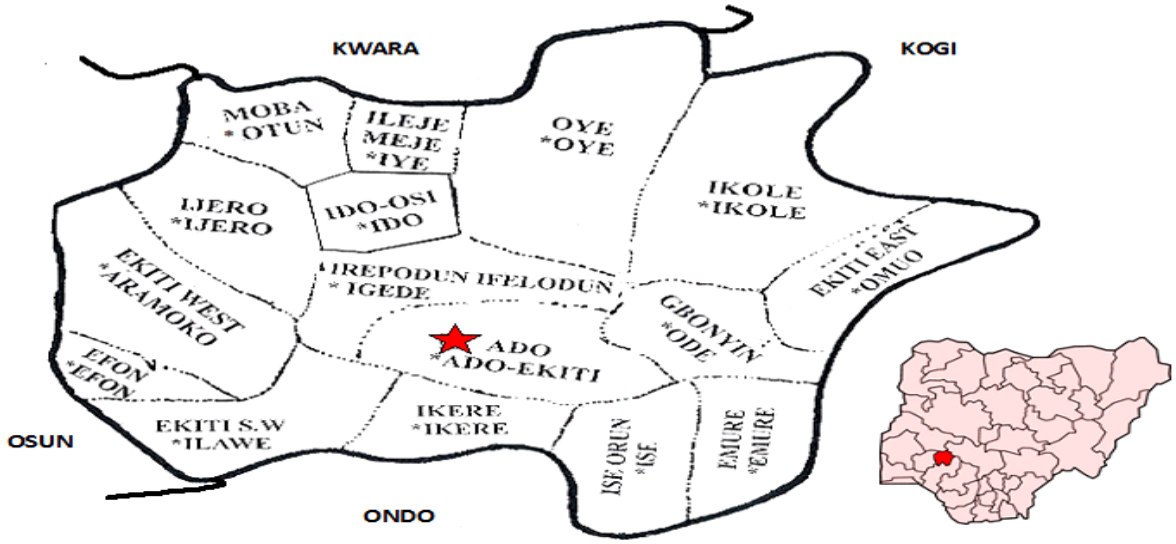
The study was carried out at southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria, within the Ekiti West Local Government Area of Ekiti State located at latitude: 7° 34′ 59″ N (7.5833° N) and longitude: 4° 58′ 59″ E (4.9833° E) with an elevation: ~475 meters (1,558 feet)

Population of the Study

The population of this study consists of various stakeholders directly or indirectly connected to the operations of the Ikogosi in Ekiti State, Nigeria

Sampling Unit

The sampling unit for this study includes individuals and organizations actively involved with the Ikogosi in Ekiti State, Nigeria



Picture 1. Map of the study area

Sample Size

Cochran's equation of finite population was used to determine the sample of the study. The formula is stated below:

$$N_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2 N}$$

$$N_0 = \frac{SS}{1+\frac{(SS-1)}{Pop}}$$

Where

SS = Sample size

Pop = Population

n = sample size

Z = Z value of confidence level.

P = Estimated proportion of an attribute present in the population

q = 1-p

e = Desired level of precision expressed in decimal.

N= Population size.

Using a 90% confidence interval; Z = 1.645

e = ± 10% = 0.1

p = 0.5 (maximum variable)

q = 1- 0.5 = 0.5

N = 0.5

$$N_0 = \frac{(1.645)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.10)^2} = 150$$

Sampling Procedure

The sampling procedure combines probability and non-probability sampling techniques to ensure diverse and representative data collection.

Sampling Method

The study employed structured questionnaires as the primary sampling method, both online and offline, to gather primary data.

Research Instrument

The researcher used primary data. The research instrument used for data collection was through structured questionnaire administered on the respondents.

Test of Hypothesis

Spearman's ranking correlation coefficient was used in this study. The null hypothesis and the alternative hypotheses were defined in terms of the distribution as a whole. Spearman's ranking correlation coefficient also measures how the observed value fits with the expected values. We should anticipate if the null hypothesis is in fact true. The distribution changes as the sample size changes referred to as the degree of freedom. With the number of degrees of freedom expressed as;

V= n-1

Where;

V= degree of freedom

N= number of observations in the sample

Statistical Method for Data Analysis

Due to the nature and number of the variables involved in this study, quantitative data analysis was used to process the data. For the quantitative analysis Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 17) was used to process the data.

Results

Section A: Personal Details of Respondents

The demographic distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 1. The results show that out of the 100 respondents surveyed, 53% were female, while 47% were male. This indicates a slight predominance of female participants in the study, suggesting that women were more represented or more willing to participate in the survey. In terms of age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents (33%) fell within the age bracket of 26–30 years, followed by 27% within the 21–25 years category. Respondents aged 31–35 years accounted for 23%, while those between 36–40 years represented 10%. The smallest age group comprised respondents aged 41 years and above (7%). This age pattern suggests that the majority of participants were young adults, reflecting a youthful population actively engaged in the study area. Regarding educational attainment, 40% of the respondents possessed a Bachelor's degree (B.Sc/B.Ed), while 27% held NCE/OND qualifications. About 20% had completed SSCE, and a smaller percentage (7%) held Ph.D. degrees. Another 7% of the respondents reported having no formal education. This implies that the majority of participants were well-educated, which could influence their level of awareness, perception, and responses to issues related to the study. With respect to marital status, the data reveal that 53% of the respondents were single, while 47% were married.

This distribution suggests that a larger portion of the sample consisted of unmarried individuals, which may reflect the relatively young age profile of the respondents. Finally, the religious affiliation of the respondents shows that Christianity was the dominant religion, accounting for 67% of the total sample. Islam followed with 27%, while 5% identified with traditional religion, and 1% practiced other faiths. This distribution reflects the religious diversity of the study population, with a clear majority identifying as Christians. Overall, the demographic analysis indicates that the respondents were predominantly young, educated, and Christian, with a fairly balanced gender and marital status representation. These demographic characteristics provide an important background for interpreting the subsequent findings of the study.

Table 1: Personal details of respondent during the course of this study

Variables	Categories	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Female	87	53.0
	Male	63	47.0
		150	**100**
Age Bracket	21–25 years	67	27.0
	26–30 years	43	33.0
	31–35 years	23	23.0
	36–40 years	10	10.0
	41 and above	7	7.0
	Total	**150**	**100**
Educational Attainment	SSCE	20	20.0
	NCE/OND	27	27.0
	B.Sc/B.Ed	40	40.0
	Ph.D	7	7.0
	No formal education	7	7.0
	Total	**150**	**100**
Marital Status	Married	107	67.0
	Single	43	33.0
	Total	**150**	**100**
Religion	Christianity	97	69.0
	Islam	38	28.0
	Traditional	5	1.0
	Other	10	2.0
	Total	**150**	**100**

(Field Survey, 2026)

Table 2 Opinion of the respondents on the impact of urbanization and environmental threats on the preservation of sacred cultural sites

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Urban development has negatively affected the condition of sacred sites in this area.	75 (50.0%)	45 (30.0%)	15 (10.0%)	10 (6.7%)	5 (3.3%)
Sacred sites are being encroached upon by buildings, roads, or other infrastructure.	80 (53.3%)	40 (26.7%)	15 (10.0%)	10 (6.7%)	5 (3.3%)
Pollution and environmental degradation are major threats to Ikogosi	70 (46.7%)	50 (33.3%)	15 (10.0%)	10 (6.7%)	5 (3.3%)
Government and developers rarely consider the sacred value of these places before construction.	65 (43.3%)	45 (30.0%)	20 (13.3%)	15 (10.0%)	5 (3.3%)
Sacred natural sites are less protected today than they were a decade ago.	60 (40.0%)	50 (33.3%)	20 (13.3%)	15 (10.0%)	5 (3.3%)

(Field Survey, 2026)

The findings in Table 2 indicate a strong consensus among respondents that urbanization and environmental pressures are significantly affecting the preservation of sacred cultural sites in the study area. A notable 105 respondents (70.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that urban development has negatively affected sacred sites, while an even higher proportion, 120 respondents (80.0%), confirmed that sacred sites are being encroached upon by buildings, roads, and other infrastructure. This suggests that physical expansion of urban settlements is one of the most immediate threats to cultural and spiritual landscapes. Similarly, 120 respondents (80.0%) agreed that pollution and environmental degradation pose major threats to Ikogosi, indicating that environmental factors are perceived as equally damaging as physical encroachment. This reflects growing awareness of ecological pressures affecting heritage sustainability. Furthermore, 110 respondents (73.3%) agreed that government and developers rarely consider the sacred value of these sites before construction. This points to perceived gaps in planning policies and inadequate integration of cultural heritage considerations into development decisions. Finally, 110 respondents (73.3%) also agreed that sacred natural sites are less protected today than they were a decade ago, suggesting a perceived decline in conservation effectiveness over time. Overall, the results clearly demonstrate that respondents view urbanization, infrastructure expansion, and environmental degradation as serious and growing threats to the preservation of sacred cultural sites.

Table 3 Opinion of the respondents on the role of indigenous knowledge and community participation in sustaining sacred cultural heritage

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Elders and traditional leaders still play a central role in preserving our sacred cultural heritage.	85 (56.7%)	40 (26.7%)	15 (10.0%)	7 (4.7%)	3 (2.0%)
Indigenous knowledge about sacred sites is being passed down to younger generations.	60 (40.0%)	45 (30.0%)	25 (16.7%)	15 (10.0%)	5 (3.3%)
Community members are actively involved in maintaining and protecting sacred sites.	70 (46.7%)	45 (30.0%)	20 (13.3%)	10 (6.7%)	5 (3.3%)
Rituals and cultural practices associated with these sites are still widely observed.	65 (43.3%)	50 (33.3%)	20 (13.3%)	10 (6.7%)	5 (3.3%)
Without local community involvement, the preservation of sacred sites would not be effective.	90 (60.0%)	35 (23.3%)	15 (10.0%)	7 (4.7%)	3 (2.0%)

(Field Survey, 2026)

The findings in Table 3 indicate a strong consensus that indigenous knowledge systems and community participation remain central to the sustainability of sacred cultural heritage in the study area. A significant 125 respondents (83.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that elders and traditional leaders play a central role in preserving sacred cultural heritage, highlighting the continued authority of indigenous governance structures. Similarly, 105 respondents (70.0%) affirmed that indigenous knowledge is being passed down to younger generations, although the presence of neutral and dissenting views suggests that intergenerational transmission may be weakening in some contexts. Furthermore, 115 respondents (76.7%) agreed that community members are actively involved in maintaining and protecting sacred sites, indicating strong grassroots participation in heritage conservation. In addition, 115 respondents (76.6%) also confirmed that rituals and cultural practices associated with these sites are still widely observed, suggesting that living traditions remain an important component of cultural continuity. The strongest level of agreement was recorded for the statement that without local community involvement, preservation would not be effective, where 125 respondents (83.3%) agreed or strongly agreed. This underscores the perceived indispensability of community participation in safeguarding sacred heritage. Overall, the findings demonstrate that indigenous knowledge systems, traditional leadership, and community engagement are widely regarded as essential pillars for the preservation of sacred cultural sites. However, moderate levels of neutrality and disagreement in some responses also indicate emerging concerns about the weakening transmission of indigenous knowledge to younger generations.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1

H_0: Urbanization and environmental threats have no significant impact on the preservation of Ikogosi.

H_3: Urbanization and environmental threats significantly affect the preservation of Ikogosi.

Table 4: Pearson / Spearman Correlation Analysis of Urbanization/Environmental Threats and Preservation of Ikogosi

Variables	ΣX	ΣX^2 ΣY^2	ΣXY	r-val
Urbanization and environmental threats	672	8712	7619	0.54
Impact on the preservation of Ikogosi	372	3613		

Significant 0.05 level, critical r=0.102, df =589 (Field Survey, 2026)

From the result above in Table 4, the calculated r-value of 0.54 is higher than the critical r-value of 0.102 at 0.05 levels of significance and 589 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis which revealed that urbanization and environmental threats significantly affect the preservation of Ikogosi.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis on the Impact of Urbanization and Environmental Threats on the Preservation of Ikogosi

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
		R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2		R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.501[a]	0.183	0.88	0.782	.00000	2.671	11	501	0.000	0.123.

(Field Survey, 2026)

The result of the regression analysis on Table 5 shows a yielded coefficient of regression (R) of 0.501 and a multiple regression R-square (R^2) of 0.501, and adjusted R^2 of 0.88, at 0.01 level of significance, the result is significant, the result also shows that an analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the multiple regressions produced an F-ratio of 2.671, while the f-critical value is 1.91 (2-tailed), since the calculated F-value of 3.467 is greater than the critical F-value of 1.91, at 0.05 significant level, (2-tailed), the result is also significant at 0.05 level. The significance of this result is that Urbanization and environmental threats significantly affect the preservation of Ikogosi.

Hypothesis 2

H_0: Indigenous knowledge and community participation do not significantly contribute to the preservation of sacred sites and practices.

H_4: Indigenous knowledge and community participation significantly contribute to the preservation of sacred sites and practices.

Table 6: **Pearson / Spearman Correlation Analysis of Indigenous Knowledge/Community Participation and Preservation of Sacred Sites**

Variables	ΣX	ΣX^2 ΣY^2	ΣXY	r-val
Indigenous knowledge and community participation	785	6114	6290	0.71
Preservation of sacred sites and practices	236	2215		

(Field Survey, 2026) Significant 0.05 level, critical r = 0.112, df = 543.

From the result in Table 6, the calculated r-value of 0.71 is higher than the critical r-value of 0.112 at 0.05 levels of significance and 543 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis which revealed that indigenous knowledge and community participation significantly contribute to the preservation of sacred sites and practices.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis on the Contribution of Indigenous Knowledge and Community Participation to the Preservation of Sacred Sites

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square		Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
						R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2						
1	0.318[a]	0.183	0.21	0.782	.00000	3.185	11	452	0.000	0.123.

(Field Survey, 2026)

The result of the regression analysis on Table 7 shows a yielded coefficient of regression (R) of 0.452 and a multiple regression R-square (R^2) of 0.318, and adjusted R^2 of 0.21, at 0.01 level of significance, the result is significant, the result also shows that an analysis of variance of the multiple regressions produced an F-ratio of 3.185, while the f-critical value is 1.91 (2-tailed), since the calculated F-value of 3.185 is greater than the critical F-value of 1.91, at 0.05 significant level, (2-tailed), the result is also significant at 0.05 level. The significance of this result is that indigenous knowledge and community participation significantly contribute to the preservation of sacred sites and practices.

Discussion

Findings reveal overwhelming concern about the impact of urbanization, infrastructure development, and environmental degradation on sacred cultural sites. Respondents strongly agreed that sacred sites are encroached upon, polluted, and insufficiently considered in development planning. These findings strongly corroborate earlier studies by Ntiamoa-Baidu et al. (2011) and Dudley et al. (2014), which document how urban expansion and weak regulatory frameworks threaten sacred natural sites across Africa. Similarly, Onyima and Nwankwo (2020) found that economic development priorities in Nigeria frequently override intangible cultural values. The perception that sacred sites are less protected today than a decade ago aligns with Agnew (2017), who argues that globalization and neoliberal development models erode traditional conservation systems. This study is therefore in strong agreement with previous findings that urbanization represents one of the most critical threats to sacred cultural heritage. Importantly, the finding that government and developers rarely consider sacred values before construction reflects structural weaknesses in planning systems, as identified by Adebayo (2021).

This reinforces the argument that sacred heritage protection remains marginal within mainstream development discourse. Findings from the study also highlight the central role of elders, traditional leaders, and community members in sustaining sacred cultural heritage. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that without local involvement, preservation efforts would be ineffective. This finding strongly supports Berkes (2012) and Dei (2015), who emphasize that indigenous knowledge systems integrate spiritual beliefs, moral obligations, and environmental stewardship. The present study is in agreement with Aas et al. (2005), who demonstrated that heritage conservation outcomes improve when communities actively participate in management processes. The continued relevance of rituals and cultural practices observed in this study also aligns with Adom (2016), who found that ritual observance reinforces social cohesion and conservation ethics. However, the mixed responses regarding knowledge transmission to younger generations reflect concerns raised by Mbiti (1990) and Adebanwi (2017) about declining youth engagement with traditional authority structures. Thus, this study confirms previous findings that while indigenous institutions remain influential, they are increasingly challenged by social change, requiring deliberate strategies for cultural education and youth inclusion.

Conclusion

The findings clearly demonstrate that sacred sites in Ekiti State retain profound cultural and spiritual relevance within local communities. Ikogosi Warm Springs is not merely perceived as a recreational or economic tourism resource but as a sacred landscape deeply embedded in indigenous belief systems, oral traditions, rituals, and collective identity. The study further established that indigenous knowledge systems, traditional leadership, and community participation remain the most effective mechanisms for sustaining sacred cultural heritage. Elders and local custodians continue to play a central role in preservation, and respondents overwhelmingly agreed that without community involvement, safeguarding sacred sites would be ineffective. This underscores the importance of culturally embedded governance systems in heritage conservation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations has been proposed:

- Government agencies and heritage institutions should formally recognize and empower local communities, elders, and traditional leaders as primary custodians of sacred sites. Community-based management frameworks should be institutionalized to ensure that indigenous values, rituals, and customary laws guide decision-making processes.
- Urban planners, developers, and environmental agencies should be required to conduct cultural and spiritual impact assessments before initiating development projects near sacred sites. Sacred landscapes should be clearly demarcated and protected within land-use and environmental planning policies to prevent encroachment and degradation.
- Existing heritage protection policies and legal frameworks should be strengthened through improved enforcement mechanisms, adequate funding, and institutional accountability. Dedicated budgetary allocations should be made for the maintenance and protection of sacred natural and cultural sites.
- Tourism development strategies should move beyond symbolic representation of spirituality to deeper engagement with indigenous custodians. Collaboration between tourism planners, spiritual leaders, and local communities should be formalized to ensure that tourism activities respect ritual practices, sacred restrictions, and cultural integrity.

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