

Exploring The Cultural Capital Of Minna Hill For Tourism Development Among Students And Lifelong Learners In Minna, Niger State

Bashiru Bako Umar, Shawulu Mazadu, Hussaini Mohammed, Dorcas Yisa,
Ibrahim Liman, Shuaibu Awaisu

*Department Of Social Studies,
Department Of Christian Religious Studies,
Department Of Islamic Religious Studies,
Department Of Geography,
Department Of History, Niger State College Of Education, Minna*

Abstract:

This study aims to identify and document the cultural assets present at the ancient Minna Hill settlement that can be leveraged for tourism development in Niger State, Nigeria. To achieve the above objective, a qualitative research design was employed, and five respondents who are descendants of ancient Minna hill inhabitants, were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data collection in this research was conducted through individual interviews and follow-up interviews (where necessary), observations, and document analysis. Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection, and where there were grey areas, additional data was collected until a point of saturation was reached. Finally, the findings revealed that the city wall and its gate, Shakodna and Baidna springs, the Etsu palace, the royal cemetery, and the mysterious Baobab tree were discovered as tangible cultural assets. On the part of the intangible cultural assets, rituals and festivals like the new fire, rite of passage for girls, Madawa, and marriage ceremonies are identified. In addition, Gbagyi language is acknowledged as a repository of oral traditions and Gyefu musical performance as a performing art. Part of the recommendations includes the annual commemoration of Minna Day, archaeological exploration of the site for artifacts, and protection of the site against unauthorized human activities.

Key Word: Cultural Capital, Tourism Development, Minna Hill.

Date of Submission: 12-10-2025

Date of Acceptance: 22-10-2025

I. Introduction

Cultural capital refers to community resources that contribute to its identity and heritage, which comprises assets such as education, intellect, style of speech, style of dress, houses, arts, customs, and utensils (Idoko, 2024; Anosike, Amadi, & Ubah, 2025). When harnessed effectively, cultural capital can become a powerful tool for educational tourism development, attracting visitors interested in experiencing and learning about the cultural uniqueness of a place (Tunde, Okunade, & Omojola, 2022). Educational Tourism, which is a form of tourism, is that travel to cultural, historical, social and other destinations of learning that is aimed at providing the tourist experiences and knowledge that are personal, educational, or professional in nature (Franco, Sánchez, & López, 2022).

Recently, the focus on sustainable educational tourism development has intensified, aiming to establish tourism activities that, as they educate, also conserve resources and safeguard the environment and cultural integrity of host communities. This tourism approach balances economic gains with the preservation of cultural and natural heritage, thereby ensuring that tourism benefits both visitors and residents (Idoko, 2024). This approach emphasizes responsible travel practices that enhance the well-being of local communities while offering enriching experiences to young students and lifelong tourists.

Nigeria, with its rich cultural and natural landmarks, has several exemplary sites where sustainable cultural tourism principles need to be practiced. Zuma Rock, for instance, often referred to as the Gateway to Abuja, is not just a geological wonder but also a site of immense cultural significance for both pleasure and knowledge. Sadly, it is not explored to its full potential, and in view of this, efforts to promote it as a tourist destination focusing on preserving its natural beauty while highlighting its historical and cultural narratives and thus attracting both domestic and international tourists should be intensified (Abah, Adah; Chikelo, & Chinelo, 2020). However, the Olumo Rock Tourist Centre in Abeokuta is a prime example of where sustainable tourism principles are being applied. According to Ayodeji (2024), this site, steeped in history and legend, serves as a

symbol of the resilience and heritage of the Egba people. Sustainable tourism initiatives at Olumo Rock include guided tours that educate visitors about the rock's cultural importance, ensuring that tourism enhances local pride and economic development without compromising the site's integrity.

Similarly, the Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State, harnesses its unique cultural and natural assets to promote tourism. Known for its stunning landscapes and rich biodiversity, the resort integrates eco-friendly practices with cultural tourism. Visitors are not only drawn to the scenic beauty and adventure activities but also to the opportunity to engage with the local culture through festivals, crafts, and traditional cuisine. These examples illustrate how places with significant cultural and natural heritage can be effectively developed for educational tourism, ensuring long-term benefits for both the environment and the host communities (The Guardian Nigeria, 2023).

However, Minna Hill, situated in Minna capital city of Niger State, hasn't enjoyed the attention the above examples of the Olumo Rock and the Obudu Mountain Resort mentioned above got, even though it is equally a site of immense cultural heritage and historical significance. Although some articles have been written on the history of Minna (Galadima & Aliyu, 2019; Ibrahim and Sabri, 2018), there has been a notable silence regarding exploring the huge potentials of the Minna hill to serve as a local, national and international educational tourism hot spot and paradise that is capable of providing economic benefits to the local community and the state as well as cultural knowledge and experiences for students and lifelong learners. It is against this backdrop that this study intends to fill this gap by exploring the unique cultural capital, both tangible and intangible, of the Gbagyi community, who once inhabited the Minna hill for educational and lifelong tourism.

II. Literature Review

Cultural Capital

Culture refers to the totality of diverse and interconnected aspects of community life that broadly consist of material aspects like relics, buildings, artifacts, and non-material aspects like values, beliefs, habits, norms, visions, systems, and symbols (Umar et.al, 2021). Cultural capital encompasses the social assets such as education, intellect, beliefs, style of speech, artifacts, and dress, as well as social connections that contribute to the identity and heritage of a certain community (Harper-Scott & Samson, 2009; Barker & Chris, 2024). It functions within a system of social exchange, where certain knowledge, behaviors, and assets are valued for the status and power they confer.

Cultural capital is categorized into tangible and intangible (UNWTO, 2017; Du Cros & McKercher, 2014), material and symbolic assets (Harper-Scott & Samson, 2009), and embodied, objectified, and institutionalized (Barker & Chris, 2024).

The tangible objectified or symbolic cultural capital are aspects of culture that are concrete in nature, as some of them can be seen and feel (UNWTO, 2017; Barker & Chris, 2024; Du Cros & McKercher, 2014; Harper-Scott & Samson, 2009). They include physical objects that signify cultural value, such as relics, artwork, sites, and other concrete historical attributes that connect tourists to the physical past heritage of an area (Barker & Chris, 2024; Du Cros & McKercher, 2014). Even though these items can be bought and sold, providing both economic value and a symbol of cultural knowledge, ownership alone does not convey full cultural capital, as one must understand the cultural or historical context of these objects to fully appreciate their significance (Barker & Chris, 2024). For example, possessing a piece of art signifies cultural capital only if the owner understands its meaning and context.

Intangible, embodied, or symbolic cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills and expressions that individuals, groups, and societies consider an essential part of their way of life, which are acquired over time through a process known as socialization (UNWTO, 2017; Barker & Chris, 2024; Du Cros & McKercher, (2014; Harper-Scott & Samson, 2009). This form of cultural capital is not directly transferable but accumulates within an individual's character and worldview, shaping their thoughts and behaviors, for example, proficiency in language and communication, which is acquired through immersion in national or cultural traditions, enabling individuals to express and present themselves effectively (Barker & Chris, 2024).

The Institutionalized Cultural Capital involves formal acknowledgment from institutions, such as academic degrees or professional certifications. This form of capital is significant in the labor market, where qualifications serve as measurable indicators of an individual's cultural capital. Institutional recognition allows individuals to convert their cultural capital into economic advantages, as credentials act as a practical tool to showcase cultural expertise and social status (Barker & Chris, 2024).

Cultural Capital Tourism Development.

Cultural tourism is "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" (World Tourism Organization, 2017). It plays a pivotal role in tourism development by enhancing the appeal of destinations through unique cultural offerings that attract visitors seeking authentic and meaningful

experiences. Cultural tourism encompasses intangible assets like traditions, language, rituals, and artistic expressions that make a place distinctive, providing tourists with a deep cultural immersion (Smith & Robinson, 2021; Hannam & Knox, 2019). When harnessed effectively, cultural capital can become a powerful tool for tourism development, attracting visitors interested in experiencing and learning about the cultural uniqueness of a place and thus increasing its economic benefits (Harper-Scott & Samson, 2009).

Importantly, cultural capital also promotes community engagement by involving local residents in tourism activities, such as guiding, performing traditional crafts, or sharing folklore, thereby ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are distributed within the community. Furthermore, tourism based on cultural capital fosters cultural preservation, as communities find incentives to maintain their traditions and heritage in response to tourist interest (Richards, 2020). This type of tourism has been shown to support sustainable development by encouraging responsible tourism practices that respect local customs and minimize adverse impacts on the cultural environment (Smith & Robinson, 2021). Therefore, cultural capital is a foundational element in sustainable tourism development, creating value for tourists while preserving the identity and heritage of host communities. Successful cultural tourism initiatives ensure the involvement of local communities in tourism development and ensure they benefit economically, as that would motivate them to preserve their heritage. Authenticity here is vital as tourists seek genuine experiences, and destinations that uphold traditional practices and unique cultural elements are more appealing to tourists.

Educational and Lifelong Learning Tourism.

Unlike the traditional view of tourism, which is simply travelling for relaxation and sightseeing, educational tourism involves “gaining knowledge and insight while experiencing new cultures, landscapes, and communities” (Market Research Future, 2023). It offers an unmatched mixture of adventure and learning through many different forms, such as visiting traditional/cultural sites, attending lectures, taking part in workshops, or participating in hands-on experiences (such as festivals) that would lead to the acquisition of knowledge, cultural absorption or immersion, and responsible exploration. An essential aspect of educational tourism is that it has the potential to positively transform the education and travel industries as it reshapes the way tourists perceive the location, learn from it, and contribute to its well-being.

Nowadays, educational tourism is no longer restricted to young holidaymakers or students who are on educational visits, but also retirees, professionals from different walks of life, and other lifelong learners are increasingly being provided opportunities to expand their skills and knowledge while discovering new destinations and adventures (MRFR, 2023). This means educational tourism now offers different activities that take care of diverse interests and age groups.

Culture and Sustainable Educational Tourism.

Cultural tourism has witnessed success in many regions by emphasizing unique cultural experiences that attract global visitors. In Japan, for instance, Kyoto has effectively leveraged its rich cultural assets, such as ancient temples, tea ceremonies, and traditional festivals, attracting millions of tourists each year and ensuring that they experience authentic Japanese heritage (Kyoto, 2022). In Nigeria, the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, a UNESCO World Heritage site, exemplifies successful cultural tourism by celebrating Yoruba spiritual and artistic traditions. The annual Osun-Osogbo Festival attracts local and international visitors, showcasing Yoruba culture and fostering pride within the community (The Guardian Nigeria, 2023). These examples demonstrate that cultural tourism, when centered on preservation and local involvement, can be educative as well as generate economic benefits while safeguarding cultural heritage. In addition, they highlight the need to balance tourism growth with preservation, as over-tourism can degrade cultural sites and disrupt local life. Some sustainable management practices that are essential include limiting visitor numbers, educating tourists on respectful behaviors, and investing in infrastructure that minimizes environmental impact.

It is important to note that educational tourism offers huge opportunities for different programmes like sustainable and personalized learning experiences that cater to diverse interests and age groups. For instance, sustainable, responsible travel is gaining ground through eco-friendly accommodations, conservation-focused programs, and community-based travel. In the case of personalization, travel plans are customized and tailored towards individual goals, interests, and preferences. Through lifelong learning, educational tourism has expanded travel to cater to diverse age groups, including professionals and retirees seeking knowledge and skill expansion. In addition, through experiential learning, field trips, hands-on experiences, workshops, and exchange programs are gradually becoming common among students and young learners.

III. Material And Methods

Case study type of qualitative research is employed in this study because it provides an opportunity for an in-depth exploration of an individual, process, activity, program, or event, with the help of multiple data gathering instruments, administered over a continuous period. A total of five participants, all of whom are

descendants of ancient Minna hill dwellers, and one who is the secretary of Shako district (one of the hamlets and king maker of the Minna hill settlement) were purposely selected as participants in this study through snowballing. Since qualitative research generally relies on the integration of data from a multiplicity of methods and sources of information, a triangulation of individual interviews and follow-up interviews (where necessary), observations, and document analysis was done to moderate the danger of systematic prejudices or inadequacies of a particular method.

NVIVO qualitative research software was used for the analysis and management of data. During coding, references were made to the field study note and cultural tourism documents, and after the coding, a series of matrix coding queries were conducted to explore the intersection of several nodes and attributes. Later, some of the nodes were renamed and some were subsumed under others as appropriate, to come up with realistic themes and sub-themes that serve as research findings. The data analysis was followed by a discussion of findings that involved moving back and forth between the data from this study and the literature that relates to cultural tourism development. In addition, quotations were provided to support or refute the findings to test the prospective theme and sub-theme of the study.

(b) The City Gate Door (Dobuko)

This is a huge mysterious rock that measures approximately 10,000 kilograms, which serves as the door to the gate of the wall. Aside from being the door that controlled the entry and exit in and out of the settlement, it had many other significances in the life of the ancient Minna hilltop dwellers. First, it served as a weapon of war against invaders, as it was used to push down to crush invading enemies. According to Ahmadu, since the settlement was walled, the only way to enter it was through the gate. As the invaders climbed up the hill toward the gate, the hilltop dwellers would easily see them due to the advantage the elevation gave them. They would push down the huge rock to crush the invaders before they got to the gate. Later, they would go down to carry back the huge rock and put it in its position.

When asked as to how realistic it was for a huge rock of that magnitude to be carried back to the top of the hill by men using bear hands, Ahmed said, “it was not ordinary, as our forefathers used to offer sacrifice to the stone in the form of blood of chicken and animals, and that was why it submitted to their wishes. Salihu added that “Our ancestors were well-built and strong because of the food they ate and the lifestyle they lived, which gave them extraordinary power to do a lot of wonderful things, such as building the city wall, carrying items from the bottom to the top of the hill. The second significance of Dokubo is that it was used to test the readiness of girls for marriage during the rite of passage for girls (this is analyzed as a festival under intangible cultural assets).

(c) The two springs (Shakodna and Baidna)

They were the main sources of water for both humans and animals on the hilltop settlement, and according to Salihu, “the two springs are called Shakodna (Bamboo Spring), and Baidna (Fig-Mulberry Spring) because of the presence of Bamboo and Fig-Mulberry, respectively, close to the source”. Commenting on the uses of the springs, Yusuf explained further that “Water from Shakodna and Baidna was used by both human and animals’ inhabitants of the settlement all year round” Ahmed further explains that “We believe that water from the two springs has healing power to cure different kinds of ailments and diseases. Commenting on the magical power of the springs, Salihu stated that “whenever a new king was installed, part of the tradition was that for seven days, he would live on the water from the spring and birth with it. The reason was that he would last long and flourish like the spring”. However, during the field visit, the researchers observed that the two springs are no longer what they were, as they are increasingly being threatened by human activities, making their flow seasonal. This is attributed to practices of land use such as farming, logging, and quarry activities, among others, that destroyed the vegetation around the springs, which in turn affects the retention of water in the soil.

(d) The Palace of the King (Etsu)

The palace, which was fenced with stone as blocks, was where the Etsu (the King) administered the affairs of the settlement and the center of worship. It is located at the center of the settlement and lies at the foot of a legendary giant Baobab tree, called Kwaikuchi, which provided shade to the palace, and whose massive hole was said to have provided shelter for women and children during an enemy attack. Many stone-carved seats of different sizes, arranged in hierarchical order, are located at the palace, with the biggest as the throne of the king, and the others according to the ranks of the members of the palace. According to Amadu, “the biggest seat is that of the king, while others were for his cabinet members such as Machin Jankpa, Gadima Paidna, Shaba Kpasi, Gadima Tayi, Shaba Dabo, Dami-dami Fadnai, and Muabai nayi.”

(e) The Royal Cemetery

A little distance away from the palace lies the graves of royal family members. According to Salihu, late leaders and royalty were not customarily buried together with the public, and as such, a separate cemetery was

created for them within or close to the palace. He added that “the graveyard was still in use even after more than one hundred years of migration from the hilltop. The recent one was when Makun Gadaima, the chief of Shako was buried there in the year 1999 on his instruction that after he dies, his remains be taken to the hilltop and be laid to rest in the royal graveyard together with other past royalties”.

(f) The mysterious Baobab tree (Kwaikuchi)

This tree with a large hole served as a bunker for women and children against external aggression. According to Amadu, anytime there was an attack from external aggressors, women, children, and other vulnerable members of the settlement used to be hidden in a hole in the trunk of a large Baobab tree, located in the palace, while able men faced the aggressors. When further probed on the possibility of hiding in the trunk of a tree that ordinarily cannot accommodate more than two people and was said to have accommodated hundreds of people at a time whenever there was an attack by enemies, Amadu explained, “It is not ordinary for that to have happened. In fact, our ancestors used to worship and offer sacrifices to it, and that was why it possessed magical power to accommodate many people in its trunk.”

Intangible Cultural Assets

Unlike the material assets that are physical in nature, intangible assets are non-material aspects of societal culture that are significant and, as such, are passed to the next generation through different ways. Three sub-themes are derived from the data, and they are analyzed below:

(a) Rituals and Festivals

These are celebrations and practices that are performed to strengthen community bonds and cultural identity. When asked, “Were there ritual/ceremonies that were performed at the hilltop settlement during ancient times that reinforced community ties and showcased the cultural identity of the Gbagy people? and if yes, describe them?” The respondents answered in the affirmative and further mentioned and explained the following:

(i) The new fire festival: This festival took place during the dry season, after harvest of agricultural produce. It should be noted that the festival is an important event because in ancient times, fire was a vital element of living. In view of that, it was never allowed to die out because of the difficulty to ignite it, and since firewood was available, every household continually burn fire throughout the year even when not in use. Explaining how the festival was celebrated, Salihu stated that:

On the evening of the day before the new fire festival, all fire in every household in the settlement would be extinguished. The next day, which is the D-day, people will flood to a village called Zagi, where a new fire will be ignited during a ceremony that starts with sacrifices to please the gods, to be followed by prayers for bless, long life and prosperity for the Gbagyis. After prayers, music and dance follow and at the end of the gathering, everyone present at the festival will take a log of firewood back home and that is the fire that will be used throughout that year, until the next fire festival.

(ii) The rite of passage ceremony for girls: This ceremony was used to test the readiness of girls for marriage. According to Amadu, during the ceremony, a stalk of guinea corn weighing about 50 kilograms would be presented, and with the bunch on their head or shoulder, girls would attempt to climb up the huge mysterious rock (Dokubo). Whoever was able to accomplish the task would be married off that year. Salihu added that the ceremony used to be held during the dry season, immediately after the harvest of crops. “Since the hilltop inhabitants were farmers, they used to be engaged during the rainy season, and after the harvest of the crop, they became less occupied, and with food available to entertain guests, ceremonies like this were held.” All girls in the settlement eagerly await that ceremony to prove that they are ripe enough to be married off.

(iii) Madawa: This is another festival observed by the Gbagyis of Minna hill, which usually comes up toward the end of the rainy season. The celebration usually lasts for two days and was performed to remove evil spirits, diseases, and other calamities from the land. It was a cult group consisting mostly of women, who were the principal characters in the Madawa, with a few men acting as the chief priests, who conducted the proceedings. Describing how the Madawa festival takes place, Salihu stated that

Whenever there was calamity in the land, this festival would be organized to find a solution to the problem bedeviling the people. As part of the preparation for the ceremony, a lot of activities were done such as preparation of food and drinks and on the day of the ceremony, starts with musicians taking turns playing different songs and music and whoever kind of music and song was played among the cult members, the person would be possessed by spirit, come forward dancing and chanting incantations and begin to make revelations as to the cause of the calamity and its solution. At the end of the ceremony, the chief priest would help to dispossess them of the spirits.

When asked if they observe these rituals/ceremonies up to today, Amadu answered, “From time to time, we take our children and grandchildren up the hill to see our cultural heritage at the site. However, because of the influence of religion, some of these festivals are not celebrated, and most of the rituals are not performed”

(iv) Marriage ceremony: This is another event that was eagerly awaited by the people of the settlement, and it usually happened during the dry season, after agricultural produce was harvested, as people at that time were less occupied and food was available for merriment. This ceremony lasts a total of 14 days, starting at the bride’s house and lasting for seven days, after which it moves to the bridegroom’s house for another seven days. During these periods, a series of activities, both social and spiritual, take place in both houses to prepare the bride and bridegroom for the married life they are going into. A high point of the marriage ceremony among Gbagys is the Gefu music display, to which the couple and their friends dance to the admiration of well-wishers. Throughout the occasion, food and drinks are never in short supply, as they are prepared by the host and served to the guests on both sides. In addition, gifts from both sides are presented to the couple, and prayers are said for peace to reign in the couple’s matrimonial home and have a fruitful relationship.

(b) Oral Traditions

When asked how Gbagyi people store their history, knowledge, beliefs, and values and transmit them from one generation to the next, Amadu stated that they do that through their spoken language, which is Gbagyi. He added that they use Gbagyi to sing their traditional songs, tell stories, and proverbs, among others. Using the history of the settlement as an example of oral tradition, Amadu explains that “the first Ruler that reigned on the Minna hilltop settlement, known as Minna Kunku in Gbagyi language, was called Etsu Gbaku between 1750 – 1777, who was said to be a blacksmith”. Just like many other similar ancient settlements, the hilltop settlement dwellers lived on the hilltop for safety and security, as that period was characterized by wars and slave raids. According to Yakubu, “the settlement was very vibrant, with socio-economic as well as political activities. Seven hamlets constituted the hilltop settlement, and they served as the kingmakers as well”. He further stated that it was during the reign of Etsu Bwoba in the 1920s, when it was clear that there was no longer security threat from war and slave raiding as it used to be, that the inhabitants of the hilltop settlement decided to come down from the hilltop and live in different locations, that now constitute parts of present-day Minna town, the capital city of Niger State, Nigeria.

The seven hamlets of the settlement, which doubled as the king makers and their location within the present-day Minna are as follows: Machin Jakpa established Nikangbe, Gagma Pinna moved from the hilltop to present-day Shango, Shaba Kpasi created Shakwata village, and Gadima Tayi founded the Tayi area of present-day Minna. Shaba Dabo is in the present-day Talba Farm area, Dami-dami Padna established the Kadna area, while Wan Baidnaye is in the present-day Tagwai dam area.

(c) Performing Arts

On performing arts, respondents were asked to describe the music and dance commonly performed by the inhabitants of the Minna hill settlement. They acknowledged that Gyefu is an important type of Gbagyi music that is performed whenever there is a ceremony, be it a wedding, naming, or any other gathering to celebrate happy moments. Salihu described a typical Gyefu musical band as consisting of the following singers: a lead vocalist, who is usually a male called Gbajzah, and who typically holds a cow's hairy tail known as Nako Sisi that he uses to command the band, and a whistle, which he blows to signal the start and the end of a musical season. While the backing vocalists, who consist of male and female, are called Ayiyai provide vocal synchronizations to support the lead vocalist to enhance the overall musical experience.

On the other hand, the musical instruments and their players in a Gyefu musical band consist of the following: a big drum (Nyaknu-moiyi) and three small drums (Kido) which are usually placed on the ground and played by the lead drummer (Nyajzah), who also strap jingle bell (Suangwa) on his wrist and uses a drumstick (Busibi) to play the drums. Another drum of medium size (Gbalo) is played using hands, a talking drum (Galangu), and a Flautist (Mmoyijzah) blows a long flute (Mmoyi), who dictates the tone.

IV. Result

After data were collected from the field using the research methods as earlier explained in the methodology, the findings are organized and presented as themes and sub-themes according to the research question. Two themes emerged from the data: the Tangible and Intangible cultural assets and are presented below.

Tangible cultural assets

These include relics, objects, sites, and other concrete historical attributes discovered at the ancient hilltop settlement. Under this theme, six subthemes emerged and are analyzed below.

(a) The City Wall

This is a fence that surrounds the entire Minna hilltop settlement, which spans about six square kilometers. It was said to have been constructed during the reign of the first King, Etsu Gbaku and the motive, according to Amadu was “to protect the settlement from external aggression, because that period was characterized by a series of wars, fueled by the need for slaves to satisfy the slave market”. Salihu added that “The wall was constructed with stones as the main building blocks, with clay as the choking cement, and it took many years to be complete”. A physical inspection of the remains of the Settlement wall by the researchers during the field work shows that it was indeed made up of stones that were carefully placed and arranged on top of one another meticulously. This was made easier because of the availability of stones across the length and breadth of the hilltop settlement. However, much of the wall is now in ruins because of natural occurrences, such as weathering, and human activities, such as quarry work of breaking down rocks into pieces for construction purposes.

V. Discussion

According to UNWTO (2017), cultural tourism is a branch of tourism whereby the tourist aims to see and learn from material and immaterial cultural products of a certain place, such as buildings, artifacts, music, archaeological sites, arts, food, literary works, as well as traditional lifestyle, beliefs, and value systems. It provides tourists with the opportunity to have first-hand information about a place as well as appreciate the essential character and its culture (Tunde, Okunade, and Omojola, 2022). Findings from the data analysis obtained regarding cultural items found on Minna hilltop settlement disclose two themes - tangible and intangible - and they are discussed below:

Tangible cultural assets

Tangible cultural assets, according to Du Cros and McKercher (2014), comprise “all assets that have some physical embodiment of cultural values such as heritage cities, historic towns, buildings, archaeological sites, cultural landscapes, cultural objects, collections, and museums.” They are aspects of culture that are concrete in nature, as some of them can be seen and felt (Du Cros and McKercher, 2014). Under this theme, six subthemes emerged as findings of this study, and they are discussed as follows:

(a) The City Wall

One of the findings of the current study shows that the entire ancient Minna hilltop settlement was walled and the motive was to protect the settlement from external aggression, because that period was characterized by a series of wars, fueled by the need for slaves to satisfy the slave trade market that was booming at that time. The above finding agrees with Madandola and Boussaa (2023), who stated that “in most ancient civilizations’ practices, the wall enclosure serves as a defensive barrier to protect the city from wars and encroachments.” Similarly, Gawo (2017) stated that the walls of ancient Zariya, Katsina, and Kano, which were built with mud and burnt bricks, signified awareness and willingness to jointly make efforts toward self-protection in the face of devastating realities of war. However, unlike the walls that surrounded ancient cities of Zariya, Katsina, and Kano that were built with mud and burnt bricks, the Minna wall was constructed with stones as the main building blocks, with clay as the choking cement. A physical inspection of the remains of the city wall by the researchers during the field work shows that it was indeed made up of stones that were carefully placed and arranged on top of one another meticulously.

(b) The City Gate Door

In many ancient cities, walls were built with several gates that were used to regulate people’s movement in and out of the cities. For instance, the ancient Katsina wall has nine gates (Gawo, 2017), while the gates of ancient Kano were said to be 15 in number (Adeyemi, & Bappah, 2021). However, the wall of the ancient Minna hilltop settlement had only one gate that was used to regulate the movement in and out of the settlement. In addition, the door to the Minna wall gate was unique in the sense that it is a huge mysterious rock that measures approximately 10,000 kilograms, which not only serves as a door to the city gate, but also a weapon of war used to be pushed down to crush invading enemies, and to test the readiness of girls for marriage. In the same vein, Ibrahim and Sabri (2018) reported that ancient settlements that lived on hills and mountain tops had the advantage of easily seeing invading enemies and defending themselves by rolling down heavy rocks to crush the enemies.

(c) The Shakodna and Baidna Springs

Throughout human history, the availability of adequate water sources has served as a key determinant in the establishment of human settlements. Even in ancient times, settlements that lived on hills and mountainous terrains depended on natural sources such as rainfall, springs, streams, and lakes to ensure a constant supply of water required for human, animal, and plant survival. (Mays, Koutsoyiannis, & Angelakis, 2007). Findings from

the current study show that aside from the rainfall, the Shakodna (Bamboo Spring) and Baidna (Fig-Mulberry Spring) were the two springs that served as a source of water for both humans and animals. Apart from the normal domestic purposes the water served, water from the two springs was said to have healing power for different kinds of ailments. The springs flowed all year round, and at the peak of the rainy season, they created a spectacular scenery of waterfalls that provided aesthetic beauty to the area.

(d) The Etsu palace

The Palace of ancient settlements is built to serve different purposes, among which are religious, administrative, historical, and sociocultural functions (UNESCO, 2007). For instance, the palace of ancient Kano was built during the reign of Muhammadu Rumfa (1479 – 1482), houses the administrative buildings, courthouse, place of worship, houses of emir's family members, and the servants' quarters (Adamu et al., 2024). This study found that the palace of Minna hilltop settlement, which is located at the center of the settlement and lies at the foot of a legendary giant Baobab tree, was where the Etsu (the King) administered the political, spiritual, and cultural affairs of the settlement. It was fenced with stone walls and had many stone-carved seats of different sizes, arranged in hierarchical order, with the biggest as the throne of the king, and the others according to the rank of the members of the palace. Similarly, Ibrahim & Sabri (2018) confirm that the ancient hilltop settlement was said to have housed a spiritual serpent and multiple deities in one of its caves, which was worshiped by the inhabitants and offered goats to swallow as sacrifice.

(e) The Royal Cemetery

Findings from the study show that late leaders and royalty were not customarily buried together with the public, and as such, a separate cemetery was created for them close to the palace. This is the place where deceased royal family members were laid to rest. The graveyard was last used in 1999, when Makun Gadaima, the chief of Shako was buried on his instruction that after he dies, his remains should be taken to the hilltop and be laid to rest in the royal graveyard together with other past royalties. Suhud, Allan, Hoo, & Azinuddin (2024) report that a burial ground in Imogiri, java in Indonesia, where only Sultans that ruled the area are buried is considered as an important historical and cultural asset that attracts hundreds of visitors who flood the area all year round and particularly on days that are significant to the Javanese calendar. that visit this place throughout the year, especially on dates that have great significance in the Islamic and Javanese calendars.

(f) The mysterious Baobab tree

In Many traditional societies, some trees are culturally and spiritually significant in the everyday life of the people. For instance, among the Gbagyi of Gonnin Gora, the Gyeiyi tree (silk-cotton or kapok tree) is a highly valued symbol of their identity and a center of social activities like ceremonies, meetings, and worship for the community. The Gyeiyi tree that is located at the village square in Gonnin Gora is not seen as a tree but a "king tree", that possesses spirit and is "a masquerade, but it covers itself with leaves, hence, most of the ritual rites take place" (Sarki & Jeremiah, 2021). Similarly, the Baobab tree located in the palace of Etsu on the Minna hill was significant to the life of the Gbagyis of the settlement. In the event of an enemy attack, the large hole in its trunk served as a bunker for women, children, and other vulnerable members of the settlement, while able men faced the aggressors. The tree was the center of worship for the inhabitants of the settlement, and it is believed to have possessed spirits that were offered sacrifices, and in turn, those spirits endowed the tree with magical powers to accommodate many people inside its trunk.

Intangible Cultural Assets

Intangible cultural assets are practices, Knowledge, skills, and expressions that individuals, groups, and societies consider essential to their way of life and strive to transmit them to the next generation so that they are not lost (Du Cros and McKercher, 2014). Unlike the material assets that are physical in nature, intangible assets are non-material aspects of societal culture that are significant and, as such, are passed to the next generation through different means. Five sub-themes are derived from the data, and they are discussed below:

(a) Rituals and Festivals

These are traditional events that provide a group of individuals with the opportunity to come together to commemorate certain happenings in the life of their community, during which ancestral spirits are honored through music, dance, incantation, and sacrifice to the gods (Tunde, Okunade, & Omojola, 2022; Sarki & Jeremiah, 2021). There are more than 365 cultural festivals in Nigeria (Tunde, Okunade, and Omojola, 2022), several of which began as a local event and have today become international festivals, attracting tourists from far and near, providing hundreds of people with jobs and the country with hard-earned foreign exchange. Festivals like the Argungu International fishing festival, the annual display of horsemanship in Kano, Katsina, and Zazzau called durbar, the celebration of the new yam festival in Owerri, Onitsha, Nsukka, Nnewi, and Awka, the

Masquerade festival in Lagos, and the Osun-Oshogbo traditional commemoration of the river goddess are some good examples of such festivals (Tunde, Okunade, and Omojola, 2022). Findings from the current study show festivals like New Fire, Rite of Passage for Girls, Wedding, and Madawa as celebrated on Minna hilltop and are discussed below: effects

(i) The new fire festival: Part of the findings of this study show that the new fire festival was one of the annual festivals celebrated by the inhabitants of Minna hill, where old fires are extinguished and new ones are ignited and used throughout that year, until the next fire festival. Ibrahim & Sabri (2018) confirm that, indeed Minna hilltop settlement had an annual tradition of putting out all fires in all households, and a new fire made by the king, which would be distributed to every household for use throughout that year. This tradition was well celebrated through prayers and sacrifices for a good harvest and a prosperous year ahead. In the same vein, this traditional yearly festival of building and spreading new fire by Gbagyis was also reported by The City (2023), who state that during the ceremony, they “assembled at their ancestral village of Bodi, near Kataeregi, around a huge fire launched as a renewal of new seasons. There, the new fire was fetched and brought back to Minna hill, from where the spreading of fire was held as each clan or hamlet fetched its share of new fire back to its locality, passing onwards to various households to usher in new farming or planting seasons.”

(ii) The rite of passage for girls, wedding ceremony, and Gyefu musical performance: Three complementary findings from the current study are the rite of passage, a ceremony used to test the readiness of girls to be bride, and the marriage ceremony, during which series of activities, both social and spiritual, take place in both houses to prepare the bride and bridegroom for the marriage life they are going into. A high point of the marriage ceremony among Gbagys was the Gyefu music display, in which musical instruments such as drums of different sizes, whistles, bells, and long flutes are used to entertain the couple, their friends, and well-wishers gathered. Similarly, Sarki & Jeremiah (2021) report that the aspect of the ZhiBaje is also performed to entertain guests during wedding ceremonies or other ceremonial rites, which are performed by the Gbagyis of Gonnin Gora in Kaduna State.

(iii) Madawa festival: This study reveals that the Madawa festival involves spirit possession, music, dance and healing, was organized purposely to cleanse the land of evil spirits and provide solutions to any problem bedeviling the Minna hilltop dwellers. Similarly, Sarki and Jeremiah (2021) report that the Gbagyis of Gonin Gora, of Kaduna State, Nigeria, celebrate the ZhiBaje ritual festival at the end of every year to “usher in the new planting season and to cleanse the community from any potential danger ahead of the coming season.” Backing up the claim that in ancient hilltop settlements like that of Minna, cult activities and spirit possession were common practices, Ibrahim and Sabri (2019) report that Dalla hill in Kano and Kufena and Turunku hills in Zazzau possessed spirits called Iskokis, and cult practices have had a tremendous influence on the day-to-day lives of the people.

(b) Oral Tradition

This is described by VijayaKumarin (2018) as “a repository of culture as well as its vehicle.” It is the practice of communicating societal practices, such as history, skills, knowledge, beliefs, and values, from one generation to another, orally, as in the case of songs, spoken words, and non-verbal or non-written forms. This study discovers that the Gbagyi language serves as a means of preserving the cultural memory and cultural identity of the Minna hilltop dwellers. They used it to store their history, knowledge, beliefs, and values, and transmit them from one generation to the next. Regarding the history of Minna, findings of this study show that the first Ruler who reigned on the Minna hilltop settlement, known as Minna Kunku in Gbagy language, was called Etsu Gbaku between 1750 - 1777, who was said to be a blacksmith. This is corroborated by Adamu, Abe, & Yahaya (2025), who stated that the ancient Gbagyis of Minna were indeed hill-top dwellers and that their downhill movement to the present Minna, located on the plain land, started as early as 1906. Just like many other similar ancient settlements, such as ancient Zazzau, which was on top of Turunku and Kufena hills, and ancient Kano, which was on top of Dala hill for security reasons (Ibrahim & Sabri, 2019), the ancient Minna was also located on the hilltop for safety and security, as that period was characterized by wars and slave raiding.

VI. Conclusion

Minna Hill, situated in Minna, Niger State, Nigeria, is a site of enormous cultural heritage and historical significance. Today, the hill stands as a prominent geographical landmark and an identity of the people who have lived there. Findings from the study show that, in addition to the elevation serving as a natural defense against invaders, the settlement on the hilltop was walled, and the heavy rock that served as the gate also served as a weapon of war, which was rolled down to crush enemies. Other tangible assets are Shakodna and Baidna springs, the Etsu palace, the royal cemetery, and the mysterious Baobab tree. On the other hand, the intangible cultural

assets discovered include rituals and festivals like the new fire, the rite of passage for girls, the Madawa, and the marriage celebration. In addition, the Gbagyi language is found to be the repository of Gbagyi oral traditions and Gyefu musical performance as a major Gbagyi performing art. It is believed that the above cultural assets of Minna Hill would provide students and lifelong learners with an enriched experience of Gbagyi cultural heritage.

VII. Recommendation

Considering the above findings, the researchers recommend the following:

- a. A day should be set aside by the descendants of the Minna hilltop dwellers in conjunction with the local authorities, to be celebrated annually, as Minna Day commemoration, where the public would be invited to grace the occasion at the hilltop site. During the occasion, music, dance, cultural exhibitions, tours to important settlement sites, and other tangible and intangible cultural assets would be showcased, just as it happens during the Argungu fishing festival, the Osun-Osogbo River festival, and the Zaria annual durbar festival.
- b. Archeological activities should be carried out on the hilltop settlement with a view to discovering artifacts and other cultural assets that might have been buried in the ground. This would go a long way in populating the cultural assets of Minna Hill settlement, which in turn enriches students and lifelong tourists with the knowledge and experiences about the history and culture of the Gbagyi people of Minna.
- c. The ancient Minna hilltop settlement should be fenced to protect the site against unauthorized human activities. During the field work, the researchers noticed that human infringement, such as cutting down trees for firewood, construction of residential buildings and places of worship, agricultural activities, as well as breaking down of rocks for construction purposes, are fast destroying the cultural legacies of the site. Unless this is done fast, there may not be any cultural heritage left at the site in a few years.
- d. In view of the sorry state that the ancient hilltop settlement is presently in, further research should be conducted, centering on preserving the remaining cultural heritage and developing a sustainable tourism action plan for the site.

References

- [1]. Abah, N., Adah, T., Chikelo, R. & Chinelo, D. (2020). "Zuma Rock Losing Its Face". Leadership. Archived From The Original On 2016-04-22. Retrieved 2016-11-19.
- [2]. Adamu, A., Abe, O. M., & Yahaya, B. (2025). The Foundation Of Infrastructure Development In Minna Town Before 1976. International Journal Of African Development And Sustainable Research. DOI: 10.70382/Nijadsr. V7i2.010.
- [3]. Adamu, S., Bello, A., Yusuf, D. A., Balaya, N. S., & Saleh, T. K. (2024). Conservation Guidelines And Techniques For Historic Urban Landscapes: Promoting Cultural Tourism In Kano Ancient City. Tour. Spectr. Div. Dyn., 1(1), 25-39. <https://doi.org/10.56578/Tsdd010103>.
- [4]. Adeyemi, A., & Bappah, B. A. (2021). Conservation Of Kano Ancient City Wall And Gates: Problems And Prospects In Nigeria. Journal Of Environmental Issues And Agriculture In Developing Countries, Vol. 3(2).
- [5]. Anosike, M. U., Amadi, E. C., & Ubah, C.N. (2025). Cultural Festivals And Sustainable Tourism Indicators In Imo State, Nigeria. International Journal Of African Research Sustainability Studies, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.70382/Caijarss.V7i2.006>
- [6]. Ayodeji, A. (2024 June 3). Olumo Rock: An American Tourist Destination. Nigerian Tribune. Retrieved June 3, 2024.
- [7]. Barker, A. And Chris T. (2024). The Sage Dictionary Of Cultural Studies. London: SAGE Publications.
- [8]. Du Cros, H. And Mckercher, B. (2014). Cultural Tourism. 2nd Edition. Imprint Routledge.
- [9]. Franco, N. T., Sánchez, J. E. O., & López, E. R. A. (2022). Educational Tourism. A Theoretical Review Of The Phenomenon. Journal Of Administrative Science, Vol. (4)7. 26-31.
- [10]. Galadima, N. & Aliyu, M. B. (2019). Modern Minna: 100 Years Anniversary 1910-2010. Lagos: HUETZ Limited.
- [11]. Gawo, L. M. (2017, January 3). Significance Of The Katsina Ancient City Wall And Gates. The Blueprint. <https://blueprint.ng/significance-of-katsina-ancient-city-wall-and-gates/>.
- [12]. Ibrahim, S., & Sabri, A. Z. S. (2019). Migrant Factor In The Historical Development Of Minna Town In Nigeria, 1999-2015. The International Journal Of Humanity And Social Sciences Vol.7 (11).
- [13]. Ibrahim, S., & Sabri, A. Z. S. (2018). Questioning Indigeneity: A Perspective In History Of Minna Town 1910 – 1976. Journal Of Engineering And Applied Science. (Special Edition).
- [14]. Idoko, N. (2024). Importance Of Sustainable Tourism In Nigeria's Economy, Retrieved From <https://disciplines.ng/sustainable-tourism-in-economy/> On 7th June 2024.
- [15]. Kyoto, S. (2022). Kyoto Aims To Preserve Cultural Heritage While Managing Growing Tourism Demand. Kyoto Shimbun Online. Retrieved From Kyoto Shimbun.
- [16]. Madandola, M. And Boussaa, D. (2023). Cultural Heritage Tourism As A Catalyst For Sustainable Development: The Case Of Old Oyo Town In Nigeria. International Journal Of Heritage Studies. Vol. 29(1-2).
- [17]. Market Research Future (MRFR) (2023). The Future Of Educational Tourism: Where Travel And Learning Converge. <https://www.marketresearchfuture.com/reports/educational-tourism-market-12011>.
- [18]. Mays, L. W., Koutsoyiannis, D., & Angelakis, A. N. (2007). A Brief History Of Urban Water Supply In The Antiquity Water Supply. DOI: 10.2166/Ws.2007.001.
- [19]. Richards, G. (2020). Cultural Tourism: A Review Of Recent Research And Trends. Journal Of Tourism And Cultural Change. 18(2), 102-117. Doi:10.1080/14766825.2020.1740482.
- [20]. Sarki, A.P., & Jeremiah, M. (2021). Ritual Festival And The Gbagyi World View. IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal Of Arts And Humanities. Vol. 7. No. 1. ISSN: 2488-9210. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.19482.59846.
- [21]. Smith, M., & Robinson, M. (2021). Cultural Tourism In A Changing World: Politics, Participation And (Re)Presentation. Clevedon: Channel View Publications.

- [22]. Suhud, U., Allan, M., Hoo, W. C., & Azinuddin, M. (2024). Tourists' Intention To Visit Royal Cemetery As A Dark Tourism Destination: The Role Of Destination Image, Self-Congruence, And Destination Personality. *Journal Of Ecohumanism*. 3(7): 2562-2577. DOI:10.62754/Joe.V3i7.4401.
- [23]. The City (2023). Minna: City Of Literature. <https://Minnacityofliterature.Com.Ng/>
- [24]. The Guardian Nigeria. (2023 April 6). Osun-Osogbo Festival: A Celebration Of Yoruba Heritage And Cultural Pride. The Guardian Nigeria. Retrieved From <https://Guardian.Ng/Life/Interesting-Facts-About-The-Osun-Osogbo-Festival/>.
- [25]. Tunde, A. M., Okunade, J. O., Omojola, P. O. (2022). *HATMAN Journal Of Hospitality And Tourism*. Vol.12 (1).
- [26]. Umar, B. B., Steven Eric Krauss, S. E., Ahrari, S., Abu Samah, A., & Abdul Hamid, J. (2021). Socio-Cultural Barriers To Youth Voice In Nigerian School-Based Management Committees: A Multi-Case Analysis. *Partanika Journal Of Social Sciences And Humanities*. Vol. 29(1).
- [27]. Vijayakumari, K. (2018). Oral Tradition As Source Of Construction Of History Of Pre Literate Societies. *Asian Review Of Social Sciences*. Vol.7 (3). Pp. 140-142.
- [28]. World Tourism Organization (2017), *Tourism And The Sustainable Development Goals-Journey To*
- [29]. *2030 Highlights*. Doi: 10.18111/9789284419340. ISBN 978-92-844-1934-0. <https://Www.Unwto.Org/Tourism4development2017>.