

# Innovations

## Community Perspectives on Sustainable Tourism Development: Potentials and Challenges of the Osun-Osogbo Grove

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the community perspectives of the potentials and challenges of sustainable tourism development at the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a major cultural tourism destination in Nigeria. A mixed-methods research design was adopted. Data were collected from 120 local residents through structured questionnaires. In-depth interviews with 20 respondents and 2 focus group discussion sessions were conducted. The study examined the grove's perceived potentials and assessed major challenges to sustainability. Qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings reveal that the cultural and recreational potential (84%) of the grove is the most widely acknowledged. While tourism was seen to generate income and employment, especially during the Osun Osogbo Festival, challenges such as poor infrastructure (78%) and limited community involvement (38%) significantly hinder sustainable development. Chi-square analysis confirmed statistically significant relationships between sociodemographic characteristics (education, occupation, and age) and perceptions of tourism development ( $p < 0.05$ ). This validates the importance of localized and inclusive planning. The results of the qualitative study indicated exclusion of ordinary community members from decision-making regarding tourism management and festival planning. The study concludes that although the Osun Osogbo Grove holds substantial potential for sustainable tourism, these benefits are unevenly realized due to institutional gaps and exclusionary governance. It recommends stronger community participation, environmental education, and a shift towards community-based tourism models to balance heritage preservation with inclusive development.*

**Keywords:** *Community Perception, Constraints, Cultural Heritage, Sustainable Tourism Development, Tourism Potentials*

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## Introduction

Sustainable tourism has emerged as a vital strategy in balancing environmental conservation with socio-economic development, particularly in culturally significant destinations. In Nigeria, one of the most emblematic examples of this intersection is the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site renowned for its spiritual significance, cultural heritage, and biodiversity (UNESCO, 2023). As tourism in the grove continues to grow, the importance of incorporating local perspectives into its development plans has gained increasing attention (Orelaja and Ajayi, 2024). The sustainable management of heritage sites like Osun Grove depends not only on state-led interventions but also on community participation, local perceptions, and cultural ownership (Adebayo, et al., 2025).

The Osun-Osogbo Grove, located in Osun State, Southwest Nigeria, attracts both domestic and international tourists due to its annual Osun-Osogbo Festival, which blends Yoruba spirituality with tourism (UNESCO, 2023). However, while the economic potential of the site is evident, several constraints challenge its sustainable development. These include weak infrastructure, inadequate community involvement, commercialization of cultural practices, and environmental degradation (Iyanda and Olatunji 2024). Local communities, who serve as custodians of the site, often possess nuanced insights into both the opportunities and challenges confronting the grove, but their voices remain underrepresented in formal policy and tourism development discourse (Ara, et al., 2024).

Moreover, research indicates that when local communities perceive tangible benefits like employment opportunity, infrastructure development, and cultural preservation, they are more prone to support conservation efforts and tourism-related activities (Mteti, et al., 2025). Conversely, when development is externally driven without grassroots engagement, it can lead to cultural alienation, conflicts of interest, unmanageable conflicts and unsustainable practices (Hart, 2024).

This study, therefore, aims to explore the potentials and constraints of sustainable tourism development in the Osun Osogbo Grove from the perspectives of the local community. By adopting both qualitative and quantitative approaches, it investigates how local stakeholders perceive tourism development, what socio-cultural and economic opportunities it presents, and what barriers hinder its sustainability. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Identify the perceived potentials of tourism development among local residents and stakeholders in the Osun Osogbo Grove.
- Evaluate the level of local community participation and awareness in the planning and management of tourism activities within the grove.
- Assess the perceived challenges affecting sustainable tourism development in the area.

- Examine the relationship between socio-demographic variables (such as age, education, occupation) and perceptions of tourism development.
- Recommend community-based strategies to enhance sustainable tourism development and cultural preservation in the Osun Osogbo Grove.

## **Literature review**

### **Conceptualizing sustainable tourism**

Sustainable tourism is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022) as tourism that "takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities." It seeks a balance between tourism development, the preservation of cultural and environmental resources. Several studies by Hart, (2024), Ara, et al., (2024), Adebayo, et al., (2025) suggested that sustainable tourism must be effective, inclusive, participatory, and tailored to local realities to achieve long-term benefits.

In developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, sustainable tourism is often viewed as a viable strategy for promoting local economic growth, environmental conservation, and cultural revitalization (Betts, et al., 2024). However, achieving this balance is often challenged by weak institutions, lack of infrastructure, and poor community engagement (Iyanda and Olatunji, 2024; Nwagba, 2020).

In heritage-rich contexts such as the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove, sustainable tourism is a strategic tool for conserving sacred landscapes and improving the livelihood of local communities. The grove is both an ecological sanctuary and a sacred cultural landscape which is deeply embedded in Yoruba cosmology. This dual identity makes it particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of uncontrolled tourism, such as environmental degradation, commercialization of rituals, and the erosion of cultural values (Ewalefoh, 2025; Lameed, et al., 2024). In this vein, sustainable tourism should extend beyond economic gains to include the cultural preservation, responsible environmental practices, and community empowerment. The major principles guiding sustainable tourism in the grove should be active community involvement, effective environmental management, cultural awareness, and economic resilience.

Heritage tourism focuses on sites with historical, cultural, religious, and ecological significance. In Nigeria, the Osun Osogbo Grove is a primary example of a site with deep cultural and religious meaning, associated with the Yoruba deity Osun. The grove is not only a religious center but also a repository of indigenous knowledge, art, and biodiversity (Oladeji and Olatuyi, 2020). It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005 due to its outstanding universal value (UNESCO, 2023). Heritage tourism, when managed sustainably, can serve as a tool for cultural education, national identity promotion, and foreign exchange earnings (Madandola and Boussaa, 2023). However, if improperly managed, it can lead to commodification of

culture, erosion of traditions, and local disenfranchisement. The inclusion of local communities in the planning and implementation of tourism initiatives has been widely acknowledged as a core principle of sustainable tourism. Community-based tourism promotes equity, cultural preservation, and a sense of ownership, which are essential for long-term sustainability (Sapkota et al., 2024).

In Nigeria, however, tourism development often adopts a top-down approach, with limited involvement of local stakeholders in decision-making. Several studies have emphasized that when communities are not involved or adequately informed, they may become resistant or indifferent, thereby threatening the sustainability of the project (Mteti, et al., 2025).

Studies found that local residents around the Osun Grove felt excluded from tourism benefits and decision-making (Oladeji and Olatuyi, (2020). Others have noted that the socio-cultural knowledge of local custodians is underutilized in tourism management, leading to tensions between traditional leaders and formal tourism agencies (Zikargae, et al., 2022).

The Osun Grove holds vast potential for sustainable tourism due to its unique combination of natural beauty, spiritual importance, and international appeal. Opportunities exist in ecotourism, cultural tourism, and educational tourism (Ebiegberi, 2022). Economic opportunities include employment, business development, and infrastructural improvements.

However, the grove faces numerous constraints. These include inadequate maintenance, environmental degradation due to visitor pressure, security issues during festivals, inadequate interpretation facilities, and conflicts between traditional custodians and government agencies. Additionally, the monetization of cultural rituals has sparked concerns among traditionalists about loss of authenticity (Nwagbara, 2024). Meanwhile, despite the growing body of literature on sustainable and heritage tourism in Nigeria, several gaps remain, such as limited empirical studies on local perceptions. While the Osun Osogbo Grove has been extensively studied for its religious and cultural significance, there is a scarcity of empirical studies focusing specifically on local community perspectives regarding tourism development. Also, most existing research tends to focus on economic benefits or environmental issues, often neglecting the deeper social and cultural impacts of tourism on indigenous practices, belief systems, and communal values.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Community-based tourism (cbt) model**

CBT is a participatory development framework that emphasizes the empowerment of local communities in the planning, ownership, and control of tourism ventures (Habiba and Lina, 2023). The model highlights local empowerment and benefit-sharing, cultural authenticity and identity preservation, environmental stewardship

by indigenous custodians, and collaborative decision-making among all stakeholders.

In the context of the Osun-Osogbo Grove, this model reinforces the need for the involvement of traditional leaders, cultural custodians, and local entrepreneurs in shaping tourism policies and practices.

Based on the objectives, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

- **H<sub>0</sub> (Null Hypothesis):** There is no significant relationship between socio-demographic characteristics of local residents and their perspective of the potentials and challenges of sustainable tourism development in the Osun Osogbo Grove.
- **H<sub>1</sub> (Alternative Hypothesis):** There is a significant relationship between socio-demographic characteristics of local residents and their perspective of the potentials and constraints of sustainable tourism development in the Osun Osogbo Grove.

## Methodology

### Study area

The study was conducted at the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove, situated on the southeastern outskirts of Osogbo, the capital of Osun State, Nigeria. The Sacred Grove is located at approximately latitude 7°45'N and longitude 4°34'E, and it covers an area of about 75 hectares along the banks of the Osun River (National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), 2020). It is known as one of the last remaining sacred forests in Yoruba land. It is preserved for its spiritual, ecological, and cultural significance. The grove experiences a tropical rainforest climate, characterized by a wet season from March to November and a dry season from November to February. The average annual rainfall is approximately 1,361 mm, and the mean temperature is around 25.5°C (Federal Ministry of Environment (FME), 2015). These climatic conditions support diverse ecosystems, including riparian forests, dry high forests, and derived savannah vegetation (Umuhoza, et al., 2025).

Ecologically, the grove is home to several endangered plant species, sacred trees, and wildlife considered spiritually significant. It also houses over 40 shrines, several sculptures, and sacred spaces used for religious rituals by the Osun worshippers (UNESCO, 2005).

Culturally, the grove is the focal point of the annual Osun Osogbo Festival, held every August in celebration of Osun, the Yoruba goddess of fertility and healing. This event attracts thousands of local and international participants. This strengthens the cultural identity of the host community. Due to its outstanding universal value, the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005 (UNESCO, 2005). It plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism, cultural preservation, and community-based economic development in Osogbo and Osun

State at large (Orelaja and Ajayi, 2024). The town also contains various stakeholders in the tourism value chain, such as traditional leaders, artisans, tour guides, religious custodians, local residents, and government officials.

### **Research design**

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of local perspectives on the potentials and challenges of sustainable tourism development in the Osun Osogbo Grove. The mixed-methods design allowed for triangulation of data, ensuring greater validity and depth in interpreting community perceptions and stakeholder engagement. A total of 120 respondents were selected for the quantitative questionnaire survey using stratified random sampling, ensuring representation across community members, age groups, occupations, and proximity to the grove. This was used to collect quantitative data on community perceptions of the economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions of tourism in the grove. The instrument included both closed and Likert-scale items and was administered face-to-face by trained research assistants. For the qualitative component, 20 participants (traditional custodians, guides, community residents, and government officials) were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interview guides were used to conduct interviews with key informants. These focused on deeper insights into perceived benefits, constraints, involvement in decision-making, cultural concerns, and sustainability issues. And for focus group discussions, two FGD sessions were conducted. One with youths and another with elders and traditional custodians. This was to elicit community-wide perspectives and foster dialogue among stakeholders. This combination ensured that diverse voices were captured, including those often marginalized in formal tourism planning. Quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v26). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and mean scores) were used to summarize responses, while inferential statistics such as chi-square were used to test relationships between demographic variables and perceptions of tourism. For qualitative data, interview and FGD transcripts were thematically analyzed using NVivo software. Major themes such as community participation, cultural preservation, tourism benefits, and constraints were identified through coding and pattern recognition. Triangulation was used to compare findings across methods.

The validity of the research instruments was reviewed by tourism scholars and local experts for cultural sensitivity and clarity. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and asked to give informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw at any point without penalty.



## Results and discussion

### Demographic characteristics of respondents

The demographic composition of the 120 respondents provides critical insights into community engagement with tourism at the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove. A near gender balance (52% male, 48% female) reflects inclusive participation, while the dominant age group (26–35 years, 35%) suggests that economically active adults are most involved in tourism activities. Educational levels vary, with 38% having secondary education and 27% with tertiary education, indicating a generally literate population, though the 12% with no formal education highlights the need for community-based awareness and training. This concurred with the study by Ajani et al., (2025) that host communities around Osun-Osogbo Grove have 52.3% with tertiary qualifications and 24.4% with secondary education, which symbolizes a population with high literacy. A significant proportion (58%) work in tourism-related occupations reinforcing the sector's economic importance. The predominance of indigenes (72%) underscores the cultural and spiritual ties to the Grove, influencing perspectives on its management. These demographics emphasize the need for gender-sensitive and youth-inclusive policies, non-formal education strategies, and the integration of local knowledge into sustainable tourism planning.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 120)**

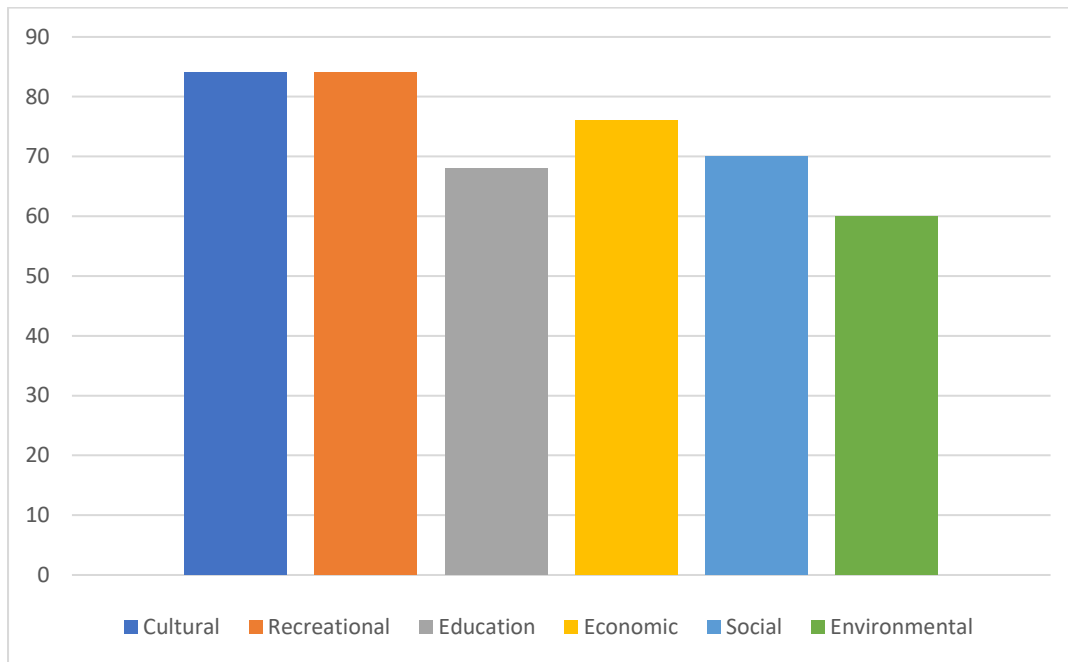
Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	62	52.0
	Female	58	48.0
Age Group	18–25	18	15.0
	26–35	42	35.0
	36–45	30	25.0
	46 and above	30	25.0
Education Level	No formal education	14	12.0
	Primary education	28	23.0
	Secondary education	45	38.0
	Tertiary education	33	27.0
Occupation	Tourism-related (e.g., guide, artisan)	70	58.0
	Non-tourism (e.g., trader, civil servant)	50	42.0
Place of Origin	Indigene	86	72.0
	Non-indigene	34	28.0

### **Tourism Potentials of the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove**

Figure 1 represents the community's perception of various tourism potentials at the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove. Among the six dimensions evaluated, cultural (i.e., traditional worship, festivals and ceremonies, exhibitions, etc.) and recreational potentials (i.e., nature walks, sightseeing, etc.) received the highest ratings, each at approximately 84%. This reflects the Grove's strong cultural identity rooted in spiritual rituals, festivals, and heritage practices. The Osun Osogbo Festival, for instance, is both a sacred and recreational event that attracts thousands of tourists annually, serving as a major avenue for cultural display and social interaction (Asifat et al., 2025). The economic potential is rated at about 76%. This highlights the community's recognition of tourism as a source of livelihood, with significant benefits in job creation, craftwork, and small-scale hospitality services. Tourism has provided economic gains by creating macro employment, particularly during peak tourism seasons, providing temporary but meaningful income for local guides, artisans, traders, and the populace, thereby reducing income inequality (Simorangkir et al., 2024). However, the educational potential is rated lower, around 68%, suggesting that while the Grove is known for its cultural and spiritual value, its role as a center for research, learning, and academic excursion (conferences, workshops) is underutilized. This may be due to limited collaboration between the site and educational institutions or a lack of structured programs that engage local communities in heritage education and conservation training.

Lastly, the environmental potential (forest conservation, ecotourism, awareness) was lowest, 60%, pointing to a gap in community awareness regarding the ecological benefits of sustainable tourism. Despite the Grove being a UNESCO-listed sacred forest with high biodiversity, many respondents may not associate tourism with conservation, eco-tourism, or environmental education. This calls for increased environmental sensitization and integration of green tourism practices to ensure long-term ecological sustainability (Betts and Zheng, 2024).





**Figure 1:** Tourism Potentials in Osun Osogbo sacred Grove

### **Community Participation and Awareness in the Planning and Management of Tourism Activities**

The level of community participation and awareness was shown in Table 3, in which 38% of respondents have participated in tourism-related decision-making or planning while 62% have not. Community participation has increasingly gained global recognition as a crucial component of the development process, highlighting the critical role of inclusive and participatory principles like equality, awareness, empowerment, and sustainable development (Ezeudu & Ezekwelu, 2024). A clear majority, 45%, have attended tourism stakeholder or community meetings. This indicates inadequate stakeholder mobilization. According to Zikargae (2022), the community was excluded from both the planning phase and validation workshop of the projects, eroding trust. Though other stakeholders were invited to the workshop, they lacked direct involvement or roles in implementation.

About 35% of the respondents believed that government agencies value their opinions, while 65% disagreed. This perception of neglect aligns with global literature demonstrating that communities disengage when they feel ignored, even in recognized heritage sites. Local voices in heritage planning are essential for legitimacy and sustainability (UNESCO, 2023). A strong 79% of the respondents expressed that locals should have more control over site management. Indicating a clear appetite for community-based governance. This aspiration reflects global trends highlighting local stewardship as critical for maintaining heritage integrity and sustainability.

**Table 2: Level of Community Participation and Awareness in Tourism Governance**

Indicator of Participation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Yes	No
Participated in tourism decision-making or planning.	38.0	62.0
Attended stakeholder or community meetings on tourism.	45.0	55.0
Believes community opinions are valued by government.	35.0	65.0
Involved in Osun Osogbo Festival organization.	41.0	59.0
Thinks locals should have more control in site management.	79.0	21.0

**Perceived Challenges to Sustainable Tourism**

A large majority (78%) identified poor infrastructure, especially roads and visitor amenities (restrooms, restaurants, and information and interpretation centers), as the most pressing challenge to tourism development. This finding aligns with Ebiegberi (2022) that many tourist destinations have antiquated and poor infrastructure. Inadequate government support was indicated by 71% of respondents, pointing to weak policy frameworks, underfunding, and lack of institutional coordination. This mirrors UNESCO's (2024) State of Conservation report, which highlighted funding delays and limited public investment in heritage site maintenance (UNESCO, 2024).

Over-commercialization of cultural rituals was another concern raised by 66% of respondents, reflecting fears that spiritual practices are being commodified for tourist consumption. Environmental degradation such as litter, pollution, and mining impacts was noted by 63% of respondents. About 59% felt excluded from tourism planning, reinforcing concerns over top-down governance. UNESCO (2024) emphasizes that genuine community inclusion is essential for sustainable destination management. About 58% of the respondents agreed that security of the site is adequate during the off-peak, while it has generally maintained a reputation for peaceful cultural expression. But concerns over inadequate surveillance, limited law enforcement presence, and crowd control during peak festival periods remain at stake.

Lastly, stakeholder conflict was indicated by 52%, especially between custodians and government agencies. Tensions over land use and site control have been flagged in previous UNESCO reports.

**Table 3: Perceived Challenges to Sustainable Tourism**

<b>Perceived Challenges</b>	<b>Agreed (%)</b>	<b>Disagreed (%)</b>	<b>Neutral (%)</b>
Poor infrastructure (roads, facilities)	78.0	12.0	10.0
Inadequate government/public sector support	71.0	16.0	13.0
Over-commercialization of cultural rituals	66.0	20.0	14.0
Environmental degradation (e.g., littering)	63.0	22.0	15.0
Exclusion from tourism planning	59.0	25.0	16.0
Conflicts between stakeholders (e.g., custodians, government)	52.0	28.0	20.0
Security	58.0	27.0	15.0

### **Chi-Square Analysis: Relationship between Socio-Demographics and Perspectives of Respondents**

The analysis reveals several key relationships between demographic factors (education, occupation, age group, and gender) and perspectives related to tourism. Regarding the educational level and the Perspective of Constraints ( $\chi^2=11.42$ ,  $p=0.023$ ), there is a statistically significant relationship between respondents' educational levels and their perspective of tourism constraints. Individuals with higher education are more likely to identify challenges such as poor infrastructure, inadequate policy support, and environmental degradation. This aligns with Balogun and Ajagunna (2023), who, in a study in Nigeria, found that education enhances the ability of local residents to perceptively assess cultural tourism development issues and advocate for sustainable practices.

Concerning occupation and perspective of tourism potential ( $\chi^2=15.87$ ,  $p=0.009$ ), a significant association exists between a respondent's occupation and their perspective of tourism potential. Those employed in tourism-related fields (e.g., tour guides, artisans, festival workers) tend to view tourism more positively than individuals in non-tourism sectors. According to Elgin and Elveren (2024), direct involvement in tourism often leads to greater reported economic and social benefits, fostering a more optimistic perspective of the industry's long-term viability and sustainability.

On the perspective relating to age group and community participation ( $\chi^2=10.76$ ,  $p=0.031$ ), a statistically significant link occurred between age and levels of community participation. Middle-aged and older people tend to be more actively engaged in tourism planning and heritage activities compared to younger age groups. Also, younger tourists sought for distinctive and unconventional

experiences, meanwhile older tourists preferred more conventional and comfortable travel experiences (Balogun and Ajagunna, 2024). There is an increasing recognition of the need for youth-targeted capacity building and incentives for participation in heritage conservation policies (UNESCO, 2024).

Finally, regarding gender and perspective of involvement ( $\chi^2=4.82$ ,  $p=0.115$ ), the relationship between gender and perspective of tourism involvement is not statistically significant. This means that men and women generally share similar views on their involvement in tourism-related governance. However, this finding does not preclude the presence of gendered experiences or cultural limitations in actual practice. Balogun and Ajagunna (2023) opined that while perspectives might appear neutral across genders, structural inequities in festival planning and heritage management often continue to limit women's influence in decision-making spaces.

**Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis (Relationship between Socio-Demographics and Perspectives of Respondents)**

Variable Compared	Test Statistic ( $\chi^2$ )	p-value	Significance ( $p<0.05$ )
Education level / perception of constraints	11.42	0.023	Significant
Occupation / perception of Tourism Potential	15.87	0.009	Significant
Age group / community participation	10.76	0.031	Significant
Gender / Perception of Involvement	4.82	0.115	Not Significant

### Qualitative Data Analysis: A Thematic Approach

To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative data were gathered through 20 in-depth interviews and 2 focus group discussion sessions involving local stakeholders, such as traditional custodians, tour guides, artisans, youth leaders, and community members. The data were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Three key themes emerged:

#### Theme 1: Cultural Authenticity vs. Commercialization

This theme illustrates a perceived tension between preserving cultural identity and commodifying heritage for tourism.

"Some tourists just want entertainment. They don't care about the meaning behind our customs." (Female, 42, Community Leader)

This confirms the questionnaire survey result where 66% of respondents identified over-commercialization as a major barrier.

### **Theme 2: Marginalization and Lack of Inclusive Participation**

A recurring narrative was the exclusion of ordinary community members from decision-making regarding tourism management and festival planning.

“We are only invited to dance, not to speak. No one asks for our opinion on anything.” (Youth Group Leader, Male, 30)

This supports the quantitative data where 38% of respondents indicated they were involved in tourism-related decision-making, indicating a wide gap in participatory governance.

### **Theme 3: Environmental and Infrastructural Neglect**

Participants raised concerns over the degradation of the sacred forest, citing poor waste management, overcrowding, and inadequate infrastructure such as toilets, signage, and safety facilities.

“After the festival, the forest is full of plastic and dirt. No one cleans it until weeks later. There is need of better roads, toilets, and bins” (Youth, Male, 27)

This aligns with the questionnaire survey results where 78% indicated poor infrastructure as a barrier and 63% acknowledged environmental degradation, reinforcing the need for environmentally responsible planning.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This study explored local views on sustainable tourism at Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, highlighting its cultural, educational, social, economic, and environmental value. These potentials make the site important for Nigeria’s heritage tourism. However, challenges like poor infrastructure, limited government support, over-commercialization, and environmental deterioration threaten its sustainability. Quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that socio-demographic factors such as education, age, and occupation affect community perceptions and participation in tourism governance. Despite recognizing the Grove’s value, many residents feel excluded from decision-making, emphasizing the need for more community-driven approaches aligned with global best practices. Hence, the following recommendations:

To unlock the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove’s sustainable tourism potential, a comprehensive, inclusive approach is essential. First, establishment of a Community-Based Tourism Management Committee with diverse local stakeholders such as traditional custodians, youth, women leaders, and artisans will ensure inclusive decision-making. Regular town hall meetings and capacity-building workshops should raise awareness of community roles in tourism governance.

Environmental conservation must be prioritized through a resilient waste management system, eco-friendly infrastructure, and collaborations with NGOs and academic institutions to promote biodiversity and sustainable land use. Eco-tours

and educational campaigns can further enhance environmental awareness among visitors and locals.

The Grove's educational and research value should be harnessed by partnering with universities and cultural organizations. Initiatives like a cultural center, research access, and academic events can enhance its profile as a hub for heritage and intercultural dialogue.

Infrastructure needs to be upgraded by improving access roads, signage, sanitation, and digital services. Providing multilingual guides, mobile apps, virtual tours, and trained local guides will improve visitor experience and attract more international tourists. Collaboration among government, tourism agencies, and stakeholders is crucial for continuous infrastructure development and operational efficiency, including streamlined immigration and transportation services.

Strong institutional support is crucial. The Osun State Ministry of Culture and Tourism should allocate dedicated funds, enforce regulations safeguarding the Grove's spiritual and ecological integrity, and develop a tourism policy aligned with UNESCO guidelines and policies.

Diversifying activities beyond the annual festival such as sculpture workshops, forest walks, storytelling, and retreats. This can attract visitors year-round and generate sustainable income. Monitoring and evaluation systems engaging the community with the use of surveys and scorecards. This ensures that tourism benefits are inclusive, culturally respectful, and environmentally sustainable.

An integrated strategy focusing on local participation, heritage preservation, infrastructure, and long-term governance will position the Grove as a premier cultural and eco-tourism destination locally, nationally, and globally.

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