ROLE OF FINE ART IN PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE WITHIN RAPIDLY DEVELOPING URBAN AREAS IN DELTA STATE

OJIEH, Valentina Edna Owalegba[1], OJOH, Collins Oghenekome[2] and OGUM, Uchechukwu[3]
[1, 3]DEPARTMENT OF FINE AND APPLIED ARTS, DENNIS OSADEBAY UNIVERSITY, ASABA, DELTA STATE

[2]DEPARTMENT OF URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING, DENNIS OSADEBAY UNIVERSITY, ASABA, DELTA STATE
Email: valentina.ojieh@dou.edu.ng[1]

KEYWORDS
Fine art, cultural heritage, urban development, Delta State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT
*This study contributes to the field of cultural heritage preservation by critically exploring the underexplored significance of fine art in increasingly urbanising environments in Delta State, Nigeria. Unlike previous studies that have treated art primarily as aesthetic or symbolic, this study uses a multi-method approach qualitative interviews, visual analyses, and quantitative surveys to investigate how fine art functions as a medium for encoding, managing, and communicating cultural identity in three urban centres: Asaba, Warri, and Sapele. Through 399 survey responses and in-depth interviews with artists, urban planners, and cultural stakeholders, the study reveals a complex landscape in which only 34.09% of respondents perceive public art as linked to cultural identity, despite 89.97% acknowledging its potential for transmitting traditional values. Notably, the study identifies systemic barriers such as policy inaction, public disinterest, and funding limitations as critical impediments ($R^2 = 0.975$, $*p* < 0.001$), diverging from existing literature that emphasizes either community apathy or lack of infrastructure in isolation. By foregrounding participatory and site-specific art practices, particularly in Asaba and Sapele, this research contributes a novel analytical framework that situates fine art as an active agent in preserving intangible heritage amid urban change. It recommends culturally embedded art policies and enhanced community engagement as pathways to revitalizing heritage discourse in urban Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

Urbanization constitutes one of the most pervasive forces reshaping human settlements in the twenty-first century. As cities evolve in response to demographic pressures, economic globalization, and technological advancement, they increasingly serve as sites of cultural convergence and transformation (Bhattarai & Yousef, 2025). While numerous studies have emphasized the infrastructural and economic dimensions of urban growth (Olukoju, 2019; Awuah & Hammond, 2020), comparatively less attention has been given to how urbanization affects intangible cultural heritage, particularly in developing contexts where modernization often proceeds without cultural safeguards. This oversight is evident in regions such as Delta State, Nigeria, where urban expansion continues to displace traditional landmarks, weaken indigenous artistic practices, and erode communal memory.

Existing literature has recognized the role of cultural heritage in reinforcing identity and social cohesion (Smith, 2020; Waseem, 2023; Khan, 2024), and studies have examined public art as a tool for urban beautification and tourism promotion (Udechukwu, 2021). However, there remains a significant gap concerning how fine art functions as a strategic medium for preserving cultural narratives within rapidly changing urban environments, especially in Delta State. Moreover, few empirical studies have addressed the declining intergenerational transmission of artistic knowledge, the marginalization of indigenous art forms, and the institutional apathy that constrains cultural sustainability in Nigeria's urban centres.

The study thus adds to existing knowledge by changing the analytical focus away from art as simple adornment and towards art as an active agent of cultural continuity. It investigates how public art forms such as murals, sculptures, installations, and visual expressions mediate between tradition and urban change. This study identifies intricate paths via which cultural memory is stored, challenged, and conserved by examining how artists, planners, and communities interact with fine art in Delta State. The paper criticises the lack of culturally responsive urban planning frameworks and suggests integrative policy mechanisms for incorporating cultural assets into urban development policies. It broadens previous discussions on urban cultural resilience and places fine art at the crossroads of heritage preservation and urban modernisation.

2. Statement of Problem

The function of fine art in maintaining cultural heritage in Delta State's fast increasing metropolitan regions is fraught with interconnected concerns and obstacles that impair its strategic usefulness. A major concern is the marginalisation of fine art as a cultural medium in urban development processes. Despite its ability to serve as a dynamic vehicle for cultural preservation, fine art is frequently viewed as ornamental, with little incorporation into the structural and legislative frameworks that guide urban development in Delta State (Adebayo & Okonkwo, 2021). This superficial interpretation obscures its ability to encode historical memory, cultural values, and social identity in communities experiencing fast demographic and infrastructure change. Urbanisation has resulted in the physical relocation of traditional cultural places and the deterioration of creative activities that formerly thrived in more stable socio-spatial situations. The expansion of modern infrastructure in Warri, Asaba, and Sapele has reduced the visibility and accessibility of public art that represents indigenous traditions. As a result, the potential of fine art to function as a vehicle for cultural transmission is severely limited by geographical displacement and the deterioration of heritage places (Cai et al., 2024). Furthermore, demographic developments associated with urban growth have resulted in cultural heterogeneity and social fragmentation, calling into question public artworks' ability to express coherent narratives of identity and tradition (Bhattarai & Yousef, 2025).

The usefulness of fine art in sustaining local identity and increasing historical awareness is further hampered by the decline in intergenerational transfer of creative expertise. According to participant observations and interviews, younger generations are less engaged with established art forms, resulting in a separation from the cultural meanings and histories buried in public artworks. This cultural gap, worsened by school curriculum and media consumption habits that prioritise Western aesthetics, jeopardises the continuation of

indigenous artistic expression (Okonkwo & Eze, 2022). Concerns about how the general public views and interacts with great art are also quite important. Inadequate signage, a lack of contextual narratives, and insufficient community participation in the design of public art installations decrease their efficacy as communicative and educational instruments. Furthermore, structural restrictions limit the function of fine art in urban cultural preservation. Among them, financing shortages remain a major restriction. The budgetary allocation for cultural initiatives in Delta State is low, restricting the commissioning, upkeep, and strategic placement of artworks in high-traffic metropolitan areas. This paucity of resources is exacerbated by inadequate urban planning methods that fail to identify cultural zones or include public art into infrastructure construction. Cultural separation, caused by both policy negligence and citizens' lack of respect for history, further separates great art from mainstream urban priorities (Eze & Adebanjo, 2022). Despite successful participatory art initiatives, these practices are underutilized due to bureaucratic inertia and lack of political will. Policy gaps and institutional weaknesses also hinder the cultural responsiveness of urban development in Delta State. Current policies lack specific provisions for safeguarding intangible heritage through artistic mediums, perpetuating the marginal role of fine art and ignoring its importance in sustaining communal memory and promoting cultural resilience.

2. Empirical Review

The relationship between fine art and cultural heritage preservation has garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly in the context of urbanization. Rapid urban growth often leads to the demolition of historic structures, the displacement of traditional practices, and the alteration of urban landscapes. Such changes present challenges for the conservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, prompting concerns over the erosion of local identities. Fine art, however, is increasingly recognized as a crucial tool in navigating the complex intersection of development and preservation. Scholars like Ren and Wu (2023) highlighted how urbanization and industrialization can undermine traditional cultural expressions, which are deeply tied to historical and communal contexts. They argue that urban expansion tends to prioritize modernity over the preservation of cultural landmarks, leading to the loss of local customs, oral histories, and traditional craftsmanship. Nevertheless, they also suggest that art can play a vital role in counteracting this trend by preserving, reinterpreting, and presenting these cultural expressions in contemporary contexts.

Public art, as emphasized by Andrzejewski and Malisze-wska (2022), offers another avenue for preserving cultural narratives. Through murals, sculptures, and installations, public art creates spaces for expressing historical and cultural stories within urban settings. Carter asserts that public art not only enhances the aesthetic of cities but also fosters communal engagement, encouraging dialogue about collective memory and identity. By integrating cultural narratives into the urban landscape, public art makes heritage more visible and accessible, promoting intercultural understanding. Fan et al (2023) further examines the role of art in urban planning, proposing that the integration of artistic elements into urban design can help preserve historical memory while accommodating growth. Art can provide a cultural context for urban development, ensuring that new infrastructure respects a community's heritage while addressing modern needs. Lee's work emphasizes that heritage conservation need not be static; instead, art can bridge the gap between past and present, contributing to the creation of spaces that honour both history and contemporary life. Recent studies, such as Malik (2024), demonstrate the role of urban public art in fostering a sense of community identity. In multicultural cities, public art initiatives, particularly those designed with community input, can promote social cohesion and collective understanding. Turner suggests that these projects not only preserve cultural heritage but also contribute to social integration, as they offer communities a platform to share their narratives. By strengthening social bonds, public art can instil a sense of ownership and pride in local spaces, often leading to increased civic engagement.

Jiawei and Sangiamvibool (2025) explores participatory art practices in heritage conservation, focusing on how artists collaborate with local communities to preserve and revitalize cultural sites. Such collaborations

empower communities by allowing them to contribute their own perspectives and histories to the conservation process. Ke and Mustafa (2024) argues that participatory art can breathe new life into threatened heritage sites, transforming them into active spaces that engage both locals and visitors. Art has also been identified as a response to gentrification and urban displacement. Tedesco and Davies (2022) examine how art can safeguard cultural spaces from being erased by urban development. By creating public art that resonates with local identities, communities can assert their presence and resist the homogenizing effects of gentrification. Art, in this context, becomes a form of cultural resistance, ensuring the continued vitality and diversity of urban environments. Despite increased scholarly interest in cultural heritage and urban change, a fundamental gap remains in comprehending the functional integration of fine art within urban development frameworks in Nigeria's rapidly changing cities, notably in Delta State. Existing literature has emphasised public art's aesthetic and economic components (Miles, 1997; Brokalaki & Comunian, 2021), but there has been little study into fine art as a strategic tool for protecting intangible heritage in the face of urbanisation. Fine art's marginalisation in policy discourse and spatial planning continues to reduce its visibility and efficacy as a channel for cultural continuity (Adebayo & Okonkwo, 2021).

While studies acknowledge the loss of cultural identity as a result of modernisation (Olukoju, 2019; Smith, 2020), few have investigated how public art bridges the gap between tradition and modernity in metropolitan Nigeria. Furthermore, the lack of empirical evidence on public perception, interpretative involvement, and intergenerational transfer of artistic knowledge limits academic understanding of fine art's contribution to legacy sustainability (Okonkwo & Eze, 2022). Institutional indifference, and cultural alienation remain unexplored in the intersection of fine art and heritage policy, particularly in secondary cities like Warri, Sapele, and Asaba. This gap underscores the need for a multidisciplinary investigation into how fine art can function as an active agent of cultural resilience. The present study addresses this conceptual and empirical void by examining the intersections between fine art, urban development, and cultural heritage preservation within Delta State's dynamic urban contexts.

3. Materials and Method

Delta State lies between latitudes 5°00'N and 6°30'N and longitudes 5°00'E and 5°45'E, located in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone, is a region with a diverse population from various ethnic groups (Figure 1). In Delta State, the integration of fine art into public spaces, community initiatives, and institutional frameworks is essential for reinforcing cultural continuity while accommodating urban change. The study employs a multi-method research design to investigate the role of fine art in preserving cultural heritage amid rapid urban development in Delta State, Nigeria. By integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches, the methodology offers a comprehensive analysis of how fine art intersects with heritage preservation within evolving urban contexts. Case studies were selected from three urban centres (Asaba, Warri, and Sapele) each characterized by distinct cultural and developmental trajectories (see Figure 1). Asaba, the state capital, features commemorative artworks reflecting its historical and political significance; Warri, a commercial hub, is noted for its expressive public art and cultural diversity; while Sapele's rich festival traditions provide insights into indigenous artistic integration in urban cultural events. These sites facilitate comparative analysis of artistic strategies employed for cultural conservation.

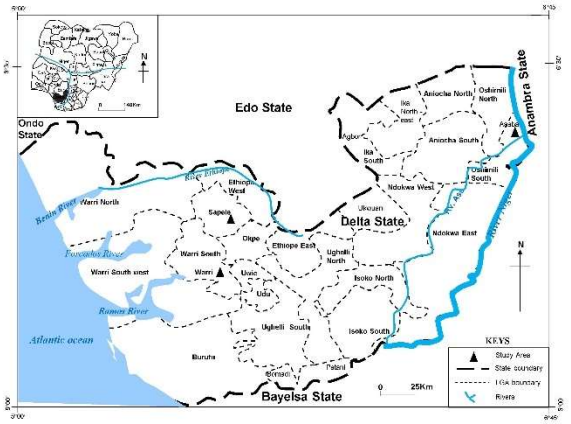


Figure 1: Map Showing Study Area

Source: Cartography Unit of Urban and Regional Planning Department, Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria

Primary qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected stakeholders, including professional artists, cultural heritage experts, and urban planners. These participants included professional artists, cultural heritage experts, and urban planners whose insights were instrumental in elucidating the mechanisms through which fine art encodes, safeguards, and spatially manages cultural expressions in Delta State. Visual analysis of public murals, sculptures, and installations examined their symbolism, interpretative depth, and audience engagement, with observations focusing on public interactions and social responses. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was utilized to select key informants who possess specialized knowledge and experience relevant to the intersection of fine art, urban development, and cultural heritage. This sampling technique ensured that data were sourced from stakeholders with direct involvement in cultural production and policy implementation, thereby enhancing the depth and contextual relevance of the findings.

Quantitative data were gathered via structured surveys administered to residents across the three cities. The survey assessed public perceptions of cultural heritage, awareness of fine art in urban spaces, and attitudes toward its role in shaping local identity. The study population comprised approximately 1,376,839 individuals (Table 1), with a calculated sample size of 399 respondents determined using Yamane's formula (Equation 1).

Table 1: Population of Study

Registered Artist in Delta State 2020	Numbers
Warri	**987,000**
Sapele	**232,020**
Asaba	**157,819**
Total	1,376,839

Taro Yamane Formula is written as;

$n=N / (1+Ne^2)$ – (Equation 1)

Where: n=Number of Samples; N=Total Population; e=Error Tolerance (Level) (0.05)

= 1376839 / (1+1376839*0.052) – (Equation 2)

=399

For the quantitative component, a stratified proportional sampling technique was employed to ensure demographic representation across the three major urban centres in Delta State: Warri, Sapele, and Asaba. Based on the total population of 1,376,839 residents across these cities, a representative sample size of 399 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula at a 5 percent margin of error. Each city contributed 133 respondents, enabling equitable distribution and facilitating comparative analysis across urban contexts. Structured questionnaires were administered using a five-point Likert scale to assess residents' perceptions of cultural heritage, awareness of public art, and attitudes toward fine art's role in preserving local identity. The reliability of the survey instrument was confirmed through

Cronbach's alpha analysis, which yielded a coefficient of 0.955, indicating high internal consistency (see Table 2). This rigorous sampling framework ensures methodological robustness and enhances the validity of the study's inferences (Younas et al., 2025).

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.955	0.967	2

Ethical considerations included informed consent, data confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity in artwork interpretation to respect diverse identities. Data were analysed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and multiple regression techniques via SPSS version 27 to test hypotheses concerning differences in residents' perceptions of public artworks' reflection of cultural identity and the relationship between fine art prioritization and hindering factors in heritage preservation.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 3: Public artworks in your city reflect the cultural identity a community

Option	Response	Percentage
Strongly Agree	60	15.04
Agree	76	19.05
Disagree	93	23.31
Strongly Disagree	77	19.30
Neutral	93	23.31
Total	399	100

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

The data presented in Table 3 indicates a divided perception among respondents regarding the extent to which public artworks reflect the cultural identity of their communities. While 34.09% (Strongly Agree and Agree combined) acknowledge a connection between public art and cultural identity, a larger proportion either disagrees (42.61%) or remains neutral (23.31%). This ambivalence suggests that many residents of Asaba, Warri, and Sapele may not perceive public art as an effective medium for expressing or preserving cultural heritage. The high neutrality and disagreement levels may reflect insufficient cultural representation in urban art or a disconnect between art initiatives and community values. These findings underscore the need for inclusive urban art policies that align with local cultural narratives, actively involve community stakeholders, and reinforce the role of fine art as a strategic tool in heritage preservation amid urban development pressures (Adejumo, 2020).

Table 4: Mean distribution of public artworks reflecting the cultural identity in Delta State

Locations	N	Mean	Decision
Warri	133	2.57	Not Satisfactory
Sapele	133	2.91	Not Satisfactory
Asaba	133	3.02	Satisfactory
Total	**399**	**2.83**	**Not Satisfactory**

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 4 presents the mean distribution of respondents' perceptions regarding the extent to which public artworks reflect cultural identity across three urban centres in Delta State. Asaba recorded the highest mean score (3.02), marginally meeting the threshold for a satisfactory rating, while Sapele (2.91) and Warri (2.57) fell below this benchmark. The overall mean of 2.83 indicates a general perception that public artworks across the studied cities do not adequately reflect cultural identity. This finding implies a gap in the integration of culturally relevant art within public spaces, particularly in Warri and Sapele. Such a shortfall may hinder the role of fine art as a tool for cultural preservation in rapidly urbanizing contexts. The data underscores the necessity for targeted policy interventions to promote culturally resonant artistic expressions in urban development plans (Okonkwo & Eze, 2021).

Table 5: Difference in public artworks reflecting cultural identity across urban areas in Delta State

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14.291	2	7.145	3.827	.023
Within Groups	739.459	396	1.867		
Total	753.749	398			

Source: SPSS Computation

Table 5 presents the results of an ANOVA test assessing differences in perceptions of how public artworks reflect cultural identity across Asaba, Warri, and Sapele. The analysis reveals a statistically significant difference between the urban areas ($F(2, 396) = 3.827$, $p = 0.023$), indicating that residents' evaluations vary meaningfully depending on their location. This finding suggests that the visibility and cultural relevance of public artworks are not uniformly distributed across the cities studied. Asaba appears to have a relatively higher perception of culturally reflective artworks, as indicated in earlier tables, while Warri and Sapele lag behind. The implication is that urban planning and cultural policies may be more effective in some areas than others. Therefore, targeted investment and policy interventions are needed

in cities like Warri and Sapele to enhance the role of fine art in preserving cultural identity amid rapid urban development (Adebayo & Uche, 2022).

Table 6: Multiple Comparisons of artworks reflecting cultural identity across urban areas in Delta State

Tukey HSD

(I) Urban Areas	(J) Urban Areas	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
1 Warri	2 Sapele	-.338	.168	.109	-.73	.06
	3 Asaba	-.444*	.168	.023	-.84	-.05
2 Sapele	1 Warri	.338	.168	.109	-.06	.73
	3 Asaba	-.105	.168	.805	-.50	.29
3 Asaba	1 Warri	.444*	.168	.023	.05	.84
	2 Sapele	.105	.168	.805	-.29	.50

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: SPSS Computation

Table 6 presents the results of a Tukey HSD post-hoc test comparing perceptions of how public artworks reflect cultural identity across Asaba, Warri, and Sapele. The analysis shows a statistically significant difference between Warri and Asaba (Mean Difference = -0.444, p = 0.023), indicating that residents of Asaba perceive public artworks as more reflective of their cultural identity than those in Warri. However, no significant differences were observed between Warri and Sapele or between Sapele and Asaba. These findings imply that Asaba demonstrates greater integration of fine art in preserving cultural heritage compared to Warri. The results underscore the need for improved cultural policy implementation and public art initiatives in Warri to bridge the disparity. Enhancing artistic representation in public spaces could strengthen community identity and cultural continuity amid rapid urbanization (Eze & Okonkwo, 2021).

Table 7: Effectiveness of fine art in communicating traditional cultural values to the public

Option	Response	Percentage
Very Effective	109	32.15
Effective	196	57.82
Ineffective	18	5.31
Very Ineffective	12	3.54
Neutral	4	1.18
Total	339	100

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 7 reveals that a significant majority of respondents perceive fine art as an effective medium for communicating traditional cultural values. Specifically, 57.82% rated it as "Effective" and 32.15% as "Very Effective," collectively accounting for 89.97% of the responses. Only a small fraction found it "Ineffective" (5.31%) or "Very Ineffective" (3.54%), while 1.18% remained neutral. These findings suggest that fine art plays a vital role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage within urban contexts like Asaba, Warri, and Sapele. This underscores the importance of integrating fine art into urban development strategies as a tool for cultural education and identity reinforcement. Policymakers and urban planners should leverage this public perception to promote art-based cultural preservation initiatives in rapidly developing cities (Okonkwo & Eze, 2022).

Table 8: Fine art should be prioritized in city development plans to help protect cultural traditions

Option	Response	Percentage
Strongly Agree	23	17.29
Agree	47	35.34
Disagree	16	12.03
Strongly Disagree	31	23.31
Neutral	16	12.03
Total	133	100

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 8 presents the distribution of respondents' views on whether fine art should be prioritized in city development plans to safeguard cultural traditions. A combined 52.63% (17.29% strongly agree and 35.34% agree) support this prioritization, indicating a majority endorsement for integrating fine art into urban planning strategies. However, a considerable portion (35.34%) either disagreed (12.03%), strongly disagreed (23.31%), or were neutral (12.03%), revealing a divided perception. This split suggests that while there is broad recognition of fine art's role in cultural preservation, scepticism or lack of awareness persists among some urban stakeholders. The implication is that cultural advocacy and public sensitization must accompany policy initiatives to foster wider acceptance and integration of fine art in urban development across Asaba, Warri, and Sapele (Adebayo & Okonkwo, 2021).

Table 9: Cultural themes represented in public artworks in city

Option	Response	Percentage
Historical events	89	26.25
Indigenous festivals	142	41.89
Folklore	23	6.78
Traditional leadership	67	19.76
Environmental symbols	18	5.31
Total	339	100

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 9 reveals the cultural themes most prominently represented in public artworks across urban areas in Delta State. Indigenous festivals emerged as the most frequently depicted theme (41.89%), followed by historical events (26.25%) and traditional leadership (19.76%). Folklore (6.78%) and environmental symbols (5.31%) were less commonly portrayed. These findings suggest a focused but limited thematic range in the artistic representation of cultural heritage. While the emphasis on festivals and history highlights communal identity and shared memory, the underrepresentation of folklore and environmental themes indicates gaps in conveying the full spectrum of cultural narratives. This suggests a need for more inclusive curatorial practices that reflect diverse aspects of Delta State's intangible heritage. Expanding the thematic scope of public artworks can enhance cultural continuity and foster broader community engagement, particularly in rapidly urbanizing contexts like Asaba, Warri, and Sapele.

Table 10: Public art increases local history and traditions Awareness

Option	Response	Percentage
Yes	213	62.83
No	24	7.08
Not Sure	102	30.09
Total	339	100

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 10 shows that a significant proportion of respondents (62.83%) affirm that public art enhances their awareness of local history and traditions, while only 7.08% disagree, and 30.09% remain uncertain. This suggests that public art plays a crucial role in cultural education and memory preservation within urban environments in Delta State. The data supports the argument that fine art functions as a communicative tool that reinforces cultural identity amidst urban development pressures. The high positive response reflects public receptivity to cultural expression through art and implies that integrating art into cityscapes can foster greater cultural consciousness. However, the notable percentage of uncertainty highlights a potential gap in either the visibility or interpretive clarity of existing artworks. This calls for more inclusive and contextualized artistic interventions in urban planning to ensure that public art remains accessible and culturally resonant (Okonkwo, 2021).

Table 11: Factors that hinders the use of fine art in preserving cultural heritage in urban areas

Factors	Mean	N	Decisions
Lack of funding	3.71	133	Satisfactory
Public disinterest	3.76	133	Satisfactory
Poor urban planning	3.66	133	Satisfactory
Cultural disconnection	3.05	133	Satisfactory
Government inaction	3.52	133	Satisfactory

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 11 identifies key factors hindering the use of fine art in preserving cultural heritage within urban areas of Delta State. All five variables; lack of funding (M = 3.71), public disinterest (M = 3.76), poor urban planning (M = 3.66), cultural disconnection (M = 3.05), and government inaction (M = 3.52) recorded mean values above 3.00, indicating respondents perceive them as significant barriers. Public disinterest emerged as the most pronounced factor, closely followed by lack of funding and poor urban planning. These findings underscore the systemic challenges facing the integration of fine art into urban development frameworks. The implications suggest an urgent need for increased government involvement, enhanced urban design policies, and community engagement strategies to promote cultural relevance and sustainability in urban art initiatives. Proactively addressing these constraints can elevate the role of fine art in fostering cultural continuity in rapidly urbanizing environments (Eze & Adebanjo, 2022).

Table 12: Cultural art in public spaces foster a stronger sense of community belonging

Option	Response	Percentage
Strongly Agree	27	7.96
Agree	148	43.66
Disagree	32	9.44
Strongly Disagree	9	2.65
Neutral	123	36.28
Total	339	100

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 12 reveals perceptions of the impact of cultural art in public spaces on community belonging in urban areas of Delta State. A majority of respondents agreed (43.66%) or strongly agreed (7.96%) that such art fosters a stronger sense of community. However, a significant portion (36.28%) remained neutral, indicating varying levels of awareness or engagement with public art. Only a minority disagreed (9.44%) or strongly disagreed (2.65%). These findings suggest that cultural art contributes positively to social cohesion and identity formation in urban environments,

though its influence may not be uniformly recognized or felt. The high neutrality rate underscores the need for more inclusive and visible cultural art initiatives to strengthen communal ties. Prioritizing public art in urban planning may enhance civic pride and reinforce shared cultural heritage amidst rapid urban development (Okonkwo & Ayodele, 2021).

Table 13: Regression Analysis on the relationship between fine art prioritization and factors hindering its role in preserving cultural heritage within the urban areas in Delta State

				Change Statistics				
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
.987[a]	.975	.974	.212	.975	989.845	5	127	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Government inaction, Poor urban planning, Lack of funding, Cultural disconnection, public disinterest

Source: SPSS Computation

Table 13 presents a regression analysis examining the relationship between prioritizing fine art in urban development and factors impeding its role in preserving cultural heritage in Delta State. The model reveals a very strong correlation ($R = 0.987$) with an R^2 of 0.975, indicating that 97.5% of the variance in fine art prioritization can be explained by the predictors: government inaction, poor urban planning, lack of funding, cultural disconnection, and public disinterest. The F-change value (989.845, $p < 0.001$) confirms the model's statistical significance. These findings imply that addressing these hindering factors is crucial for enhancing the integration of fine art into urban planning, thereby improving cultural heritage preservation. The strong predictive power underscores the multifaceted challenges facing fine art initiatives, suggesting that comprehensive, coordinated policy interventions are necessary for effective cultural conservation in rapidly urbanizing Delta State (Okoro & Diri, 2020).

Table 14: Coefficients

			Standardized Coefficients			Correlations		
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	-10.593	.573		-18.488	.000			
Lack of funding	.088	.026	.075	3.429	.001	.563	.291	.048
Public disinterest	1.162	.058	.945	20.081	.000	-.183	.872	.282

Poor urban planning	.620	.046	.665	13.524	.000	-.746	.768	.190
Cultural disconnection	1.702	.052	1.449	32.753	.000	.881	.946	.460
Government inaction	.472	.035	.500	13.512	.000	.650	.768	.190

a. Dependent Variable: Fine art should be prioritized in city development plans

Source: SPSS Computation

Table 14 presents the standardized coefficients from a multiple regression analysis assessing the influence of various factors hindering fine art's role in preserving cultural heritage on the prioritization of fine art in city development plans. All predictors, lack of funding ($\beta = 0.075$, $p = 0.001$), public disinterest ($\beta = 0.945$, $p < 0.001$), poor urban planning ($\beta = 0.665$, $p < 0.001$), cultural disconnection ($\beta = 1.449$, $p < 0.001$), and government inaction ($\beta = 0.500$, $p < 0.001$) significantly predict prioritization. Notably, cultural disconnection and public disinterest exhibit the strongest positive effects, suggesting that societal engagement and cultural integration critically shape attitudes toward fine art prioritization. The high t-values and significance levels indicate robust relationships. These findings imply that overcoming socio-cultural barriers is as vital as addressing structural and financial challenges for effective incorporation of fine art in urban development, thereby enhancing cultural heritage preservation in rapidly urbanizing Delta State (Okoro & Diri, 2020).

The analysis of the case studies during interviews, and visual observations reveals that fine art plays a critical role in both preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of identity within urban areas undergoing rapid development. In cities such as Asaba, Warri, and Sapele, public art installations have become central to engaging local communities with their cultural roots and histories. In Asaba, for example, murals and sculptures reflecting the city's political and historical importance, particularly during the Nigerian Civil War, have sparked increased dialogue among locals about their shared heritage. Similarly, Warri, with its multicultural and industrial background, has seen a rise in the integration of traditional ethnic symbols into public art. This helps to preserve and celebrate the region's diversity, notably through murals that incorporate motifs from the Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Ijaw cultures. In Sapele, the use of participatory art, where local communities collaborate with artists, has led to the creation of works that reflect local traditions, folklore, and historical figures, reinforcing the community's cultural memory. The incorporation of such public art helps residents feel more connected to their heritage, even in the face of rapid urbanization and the encroachment of modern infrastructure. The results also indicate that fine art serves as an accessible form of heritage conservation, bringing cultural narratives to the public in a way that traditional forms of preservation, such as architectural conservation, may not. Murals, sculptures, and installations located in high-traffic urban spaces make cultural heritage visible and engaging, thereby increasing public awareness and appreciation, especially among younger generations. These artworks not only educate but also provide opportunities for reflection on the evolution of cultural identities in an urbanized context.

The findings reveal a complex and often ambivalent perception of public art's role in reflecting cultural identity across urban centres in Delta State. While a modest proportion of respondents (34.09%) acknowledged a connection between public art and cultural heritage, the majority expressed disagreement or neutrality, suggesting a disconnect between public artworks and community values (Adejumo, 2020). Quantitative data corroborate this trend: Asaba recorded a marginally satisfactory perception score ($M = 3.02$), whereas Warri ($M = 2.57$) and Sapele ($M = 2.91$) lagged behind, with statistically significant

differences among cities (F (2, 396) = 3.827, p = 0.023), particularly between Warri and Asaba (p = 0.023). Despite this, an overwhelming majority (89.97%) perceived fine art as an effective medium for transmitting traditional values as earlier posited by Okonkwo and Eze (2022), and 52.63% supported its integration into urban development plans (Adebayo & Okonkwo, 2021). Public artworks predominantly feature indigenous festivals and historical themes but neglect folklore and environmental motifs, indicating a narrow thematic scope. Most respondents (62.83%) acknowledged art's role in enhancing historical awareness, though high neutrality suggests gaps in accessibility or interpretive clarity (Okonkwo, 2021).

Systemic barriers (public disinterest, inadequate funding, poor urban planning, cultural disconnection, and governmental inaction) significantly hinder fine art's role in heritage preservation (Eze & Adebanjo, 2022). Regression analyses confirmed these predictors strongly influence fine art prioritization (R^2 = 0.975, $p < 0.001$), with cultural disconnection and public disinterest exerting the greatest effect (Okoro & Diri, 2020). Case studies affirm that fine art, through murals and participatory installations, strengthens cultural identity and fosters engagement in urban spaces. Particularly in Asaba and Sapele, artworks serve as accessible tools for cultural transmission and communal memory, demonstrating fine art's strategic role in preserving intangible heritage amidst urbanization.

5. Conclusion

The study offers conceptual and theoretical insights into the role of fine art as a culturally embedded medium for preserving heritage in rapidly developing urban environments. Theoretically, the study reaffirms the position of fine art within the cultural sustainability framework, which views artistic expressions not merely as aesthetic enhancements but as strategic tools for safeguarding intangible heritage. Conceptually, the research challenges the traditional ornamental framing of public art by demonstrating its potential as a conduit for cultural continuity and identity formation. The evidence from Asaba and Sapele reveals that when public artworks are participatory and contextually grounded, they serve as effective vehicles for communal memory and intergenerational knowledge transmission. In contrast to previous studies that largely emphasized fine art's tourism and beautification value, this study identifies critical structural gaps such as institutional apathy, limited funding, and weak public engagement that impede fine art's strategic integration into urban development in Delta State. However, the findings support the assertions that fine art retains communicative efficacy in transmitting traditional values. The divergence lies in the discovery that despite positive public perception in certain areas, systemic and spatial disconnection remains a significant barrier to cultural relevance. This study thus contributes to theory by advocating a paradigm shift toward art-centered urban planning for cultural resilience.

References

Adebayo, M., & Okonkwo, J. (2021). *Urban cultural integration strategies in Nigeria*. Lagos: Civic Press.

Adebayo, T. O., & Uche, M. N. (2022). Art and Urban Identity: Evaluating Cultural Integration in Nigerian Cities. *Journal of Cultural Policy and Development*, *8*(2), 112–125.

Adejumo, O. (2020). *Urban art and cultural identity in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Heritage Books.

Andrzejewski, A., & Malisze-wska, M. (2022). Public Art in (Local) Communities: Multiple Publics and the Dynamic Between Them. *Aisthesis. Pratiche, Linguaggi e Saperi Dell'estetico*, *15*(1), 5-14.

Bhattarai, K., & Yousef, M. (2025). Urbanization and Sustainability in MENA: Challenges and Pathways to Smart Cities. In *The Middle East: Past, Present, and Future* (pp. 167-216). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

Brokalaki, Z., & Comunian, R. (2021). Beyond the hype: Art and the city in economic crisis. *City*, *25*(3-4), 396-418.

Cai, Z., Cai, K., Huang, T., Zhang, G., & Chen, R. (2024). Spatial distribution characteristics and sustainable inheritance strategies of national traditional fine arts intangible cultural heritage in China. *Sustainability*, *16*(11), 4488.

Eze, C. M., & Okonkwo, E. A. (2021). Urban Development and Cultural Heritage: The Role of Public Art in Nigerian Cities. *African Journal of Urban Studies*, *5*(1), 44–58.

Eze, T., & Adebanjo, K. (2022). *Fine art in urban planning: Challenges and opportunities*. Enugu: Urban Arts Forum.

Fan, Z. M., Zhu, B. W., Xiong, L., Huang, S. W., & Tzeng, G. H. (2023). Urban design strategies fostering creative workers' sense of identity in creative and cultural districts in East Asia: An integrated knowledge-driven approach. *cities*, *137*, 104269.

Jiawei, Z., & Sangiamvibool, A. (2025). Empowering Artists and Preserving Heritage the Role of Community-Led Initiatives in the Jade Industry in China. *Pakistan Journal of Life & Social Sciences*, *23*(1).

Ke, Z., & Mustafa, M. (2024). Promoting Public Engagement in Urban Heritage Preservation through Participatory Art Case Studies of Practices and Approaches. *Archives of Design Research*, *37*(5), 221-243.

Khan, S. (2024). Cultural diversity and social cohesion: perspectives from social science. *Physical Education, Health and Social Sciences*, *3*(1), 40-48.

Malik, Z. (2024). The Role of Public Art in Urban Revitalization: A Case Study. *Ma-Hasal*, *1*(1), 25-33.

Okonkwo, C. U. (2021). Urban Art and Cultural Identity in Nigerian Cities. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, *33*(1), 77–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2021.1904289

Okonkwo, E. A., & Eze, C. M. (2022). Fine Art and Cultural Identity in Urban Nigeria: Strategies for Heritage Preservation. *Journal of Cultural Studies and Urbanism*, *6*(2), 113–127.

Okonkwo, E. O., & Eze, P. C. (2021). Urbanization and Cultural Identity in Nigeria: The Role of Art in Heritage Preservation. *Journal of Urban and Regional Planning*, *12*(1), 45–58.

Okonkwo, J., & Ayodele, F. (2021). *Public art and community cohesion*. Warri: South-South Publishers.

Okoro, M., & Diri, K. (2020). *Urbanization and cultural identity in South-South Nigeria*. Port Harcourt: Niger Delta Studies Institute.

Ren, K., & Wu, T. (2023). Analyzing the evolution of a rural construction community in China from the perspective of cultural landscape. *Buildings*, *14*(1), 97.

Smith, J. (2021). Art as Cultural Activism in Rapidly Urbanizing Environments: The Case of Sapele. *Heritage and Urban Spaces*, 10 (2), 210-225.

Tedesco, D., & Davies, M. (2022). Cities as aesthetic subjects. *Globalizations*, 1-17.

Waseem, M. (2023). Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion: Perspectives from Social Science. *Physical Education, Health and Social Sciences*, *2*(2), 49-58.

Yamane, T. (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis* (2nd ed.). Harper & Row.

Younas, A., Fàbregues, S., Munce, S., & Creswell, J. W. (2025). Framework for types of metainferences in mixed methods research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *25*(1), 18.