



INTEGRATION OF URHOB0 CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE DESIGN OF A CULTURAL CENTRE FOR URHOB0 PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT: *The broad objective of the study was to examine the possibilities of integrating Urhobo Cultural Identity in the Design of a Cultural Centre. A total population of 770 traditional leaders in Urhobo Province was used for the purpose of the research where a sample of 261 of them was selected and questionnaires were administered to them. The study employed a quantitative and qualitative research design where focus group discussion and case studies were used to gather and analyse the data. The focus group discussion interview questions were used to gather qualitative research data where the researcher identified the most prominent responses from different responses put forward by the researcher. Case studies were used to identify the differences and similarities between the design of open theatres, auditoria, multipurpose halls, museums and the Urhobo cultural centre in which this study is based. Tangible elements of Urhobo culture were identified for the purpose of this study. Also, the result of the findings from the case studies carried out reflected the cultural identity of their regions by featuring different cultural identity elements through their spatial organization, building materials and techniques, building forms and decorative styles. The study concludes that there were several strategies employed by architects to express cultural identity in their work. The study recommends that when designing any building in any region, architects should try to express the cultural identity of the region so as to create a sense of belonging of the region to the building, thereby making people appreciate the resident culture. Additionally, in-depth studies should be carried out on the resident/local cultures and their traditional architecture so as to understand them inside-out in order to create a standard for the contemporary design of cultural centres. Awareness should be created about designing buildings that showcase the cultural character and identity of a region at the same time throwing challenges that will serve as reference points for contemporary vernacular architecture. The Theory of Place was adopted and found relevant as the underpinning theory for the study.*

KEYWORDS: Urhobo Cultural Identity, Cultural Centre



INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Culture is defined as a set of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that characterize a group or society (Anthropological Research, 2012). Culture can be seen as the way of life of a society, encompassing its beliefs, values, and customs, as well as its language, art, and institutions (Ng, 2015). Culture plays a significant role in shaping individual and group identity and perceptions (Greenfeld, 2012). Culture is constantly evolving and adapting to changes in the external environment (Greenfeld, 2012). The exchange of ideas and cultural practices between different societies and groups has led to the rich diversity of cultural expressions throughout human history (Sandell, 2013). Culture also serves as a shared reference point, providing individuals with a sense of belonging, purpose, and direction (Nussbaum, 2016). Culture is a complex and multifaceted concept that influences all aspects of human life. A deep understanding of culture is important for individuals and societies alike, as it can help promote cultural awareness, appreciation and respect, and foster a more inclusive society.

Aim and Objectives

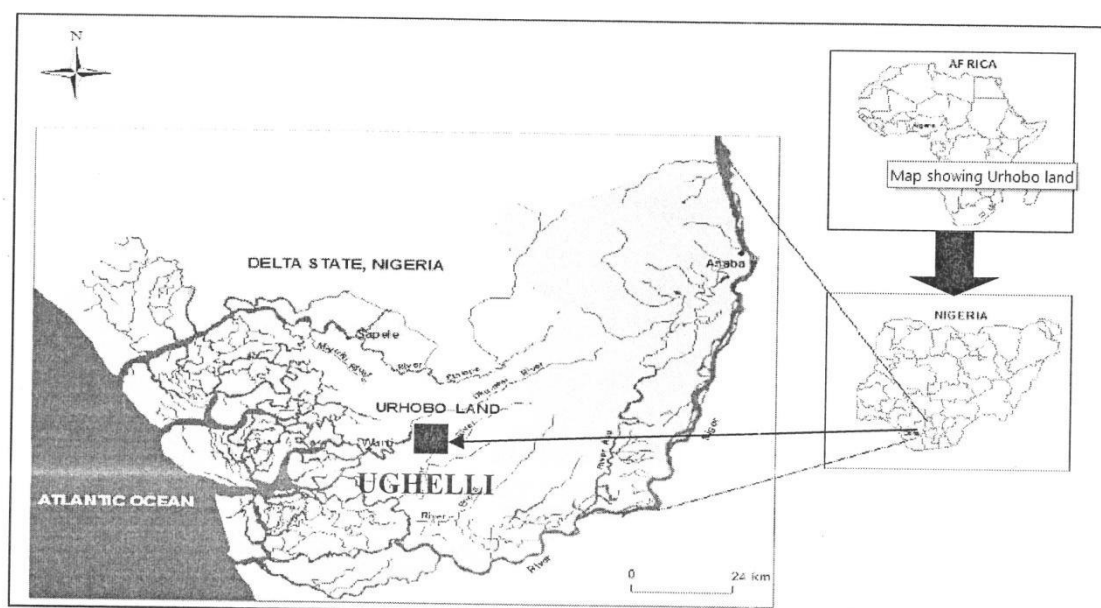
The aim of the research is to integrate Urhobo Cultural Identity in the Design of a Cultural Centre for Urhobos with a view to improving social cohesion and showcasing rich tangible and intangible cultural elements of the Urhobo People.

- **Objectives**

The research intends to achieve the aim through the following objectives:

- i. To determine the perception of the people on the different elements of cultural identity of the Urhobo people.
- ii. To identify the acceptable tangible and intangible cultural elements of Urhobo people.
- iii. To demonstrate how to integrate the cultural identity in the design of the cultural centre.

METHODOLOGY



Map Showing Urhobo Province of Delta State (Source: Ekeh, 2008)

Acceptable Tangible and Intangible Cultural Elements of Urhobo People

S/N	Tangible elements	Intangible elements
1.	Building forms/styles	1. Music and dance
2.	Elephant tusks	2. Festivities
3.	Caps and walking sticks	3. Language
4.	Wooden sculptures	4. Norms and values
		5. Religious beliefs

The basic traditional elements that describe the Urhobo cultural identity are:

a) **Elephant Tusks (Horns)**

The respondents submitted that the elephant tusks are regarded as symbols of royalty, wealth and authority in the Urhobo culture.

b) **Wooden Sculptures**

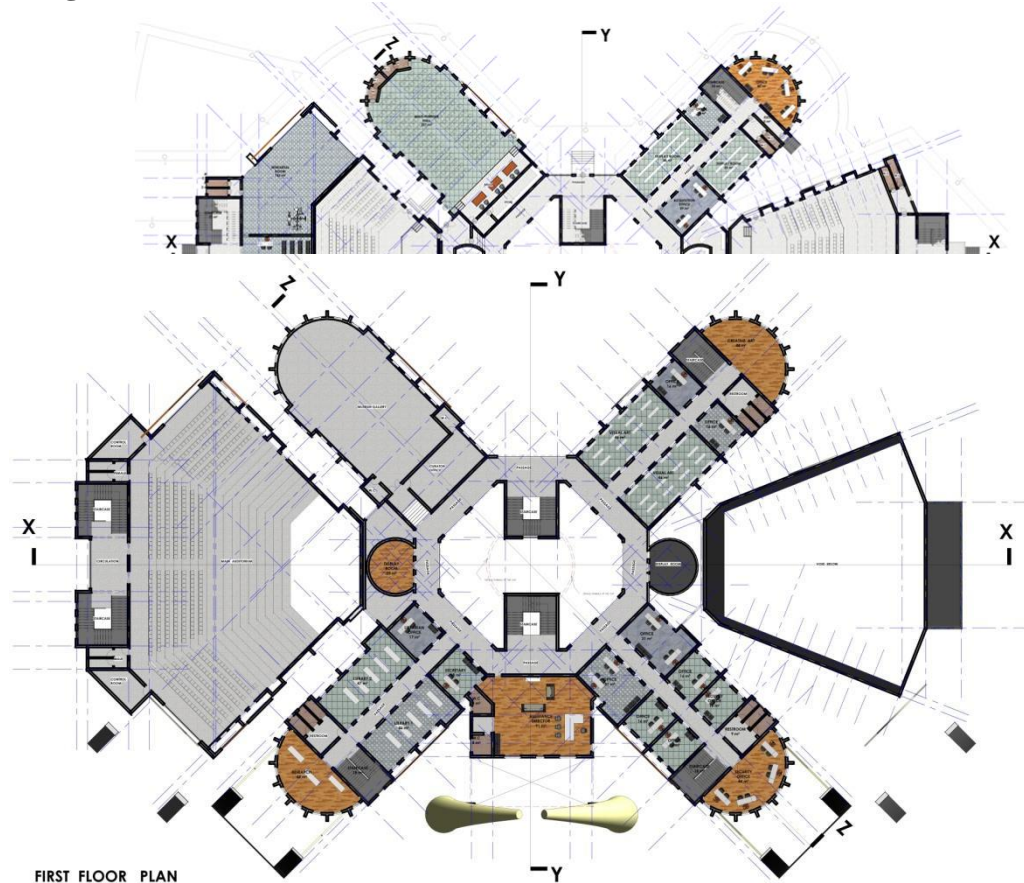
The respondents also submitted that the wooden sculptures or figurines represent different deities in the African Tradition Religion in the 22 Kingdoms of Urhobo.

c) **Caps and Walking Sticks**

Urhobo men prefer to wear caps with a walking stick. They wear long shirts in bright colours, like blue, yellow, orange, green or white. Women prefer to wear long cotton skirts, blouses,

and dresses in a traditional hat. The colours of their clothes are in harmony with the colours of the men's suits. Women also like to wear beaded head crowns and red coral beads.

d) **Building Forms**



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CONCLUSION

The research aimed at providing a basis for reflection of cultural identity in architectural designs. The research sought to find out how best cultural characters can be employed in order to best reflect the cultural identity of a region through architecture. Moreover, the research investigated the perceptions these incorporated characters give to the architecture of the cultural centre. From the research, it has been seen that cultural revival through architecture in Nigeria is diminishing as contemporary cultural centres are becoming generic, as they lack identity and sense of environment to which they belong. It has also been seen that cultural identity of a region can be best reflected on a building through borrowing elements, vocabularies, proportions and materials from the region's traditional architecture.

The study concluded that there were several strategies employed by architects to express cultural identity in their work. Their attempts influence the development of cultural identity expression in contemporary architecture. The use of cultural elements in architectural design will help in reviving lost cultural heritage by utilizing elements from traditional architecture of the region, thereby reducing the problem of debasing culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most contemporary buildings are generic and homogeneous, thereby missing one important ingredient which makes them stand out and also gives them the sense of the environment to which they stand in. That important ingredient is identity or sense of place. Buildings that have the cultural identity of their regions expressed on them easily and communicate the region to which they belong to as such bearing the sense of place to which they belong.



This research recommends the following:

1. When designing any building in any region, architects should try to express or portray the cultural identity of the region so as to create a sense of belonging of the region to the building, thereby making people appreciate the resident culture.
2. In-depth studies should be carried out on the resident/local cultures, their elements, their dimensions and their traditional architecture of their regions so as to understand them inside-out in order to create a standard for the contemporary design of cultural centres.
3. As long as cultural centres still remain the centres for the culmination of cultural activities, they should be designed in such a way as to exhibit the culture of their region from the façade. They should stand to remind the people of their past, show and respond to the present needs and at the same time respond to the future challenges.
4. Awareness should be created about designing buildings that showcase the cultural character and identity of the region at the same time throwing challenges that will serve as reference points for contemporary vernacular architecture—an architecture that belongs to the past, the present and the future.

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