

MUSEUMS AS CATALYSTS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN CAMEROON: HISTORICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract

This article assesses the Buea Public Museum's economic role in society. The Buea Public Museum remains the sole state cultural heritage institution in Buea, Southwest region, Cameroon. This museum exhibits cultural artefacts and antiquities from the region and other parts of Cameroon. This is to enhance the preservation of Cameroon's cultural landscape for public visibility. Even though this museum makes significant contributions to the region and the entire country of Cameroon, inadequate attention has been paid to the museum's development. This article argues that the museum's objective in preserving cultural artefacts has transcended to economic sustainability. This article employs qualitative research designs, consulting primary and secondary sources, which were analysed through descriptive and thematic approaches. This article employs cultural economic theory to address a research gap aligned with its objective. The findings reveal that the Buea Public Museum is a source of economic opportunities, an essential tourist destination, and a hub for cultural diffusion in the Southwest region, Cameroon. The article recommends that the museum can enhance the region's economic viability if stakeholders, community administrators, and local and international partners give it the proper attention.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Economic Asset, Economic Role, Museum.

INTRODUCTION

Museum scholarship in Africa, especially in Cameroon, is gaining popularity among both domestic and international visitors eager to learn about people's culture and ways of life. According to Ngwira & Bello (2018), museums are custodians of human identity, heritage, and history, while their collections and display of artefacts connect visitors to past ages. Today, museums are seen as multifunctional institutions because of public interest. Therefore, museums play a role in preserving cultural heritage, promoting socio-economic development, and raising public awareness worldwide. Recent research proves that museums have shifted from their traditional role as custodians of memory and identity to active institutions that generate cultural income, boost tourism, and support local and national economies. Globally, cultural heritage has been recognised as both a fragile legacy of the past and a vital resource for sustainable development, attracting growing academic and policy attention to its preservation and utilisation (Zhang et al., 2023). This transition anchored museums as an institutional background where heritage is conserved, interpreted, and transformed into economic value, such as the Buea Public Museum. For example, in America, the museum sector alone contributed approximately \$50 billion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and offered 726,000 jobs in 2016 (NEMO, 2018). In England, more than 2,635 other sites generate a GDP of 2.64 billion in income and employ more than 38,000 people (Kamla-Chaoui & Keller, 2019). In this capacity, the national economy gains financially from the museum industry. These results

emphasize that museums are cultural institutions and economic structures that support institutional capacity, governance, and policy implementation.

Historically, the development of museums in Africa was linked to colonization, which is often seen as a colonial legacy (Asombang, 1990). The main objective of establishing museums in Africa by colonial masters was to protect cultural artefacts from chiefdoms and fondoms in specialized buildings at the urban outskirts. Today, African countries have adapted to managing museums not only to preserve cultural artefacts but also to promote their identity and boost economic growth. For example, in Southern and North Africa, museum institutions are considered key drivers of the country's economic development and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In South Africa, the Cultural and Creative Industries, including heritage sectors like museums, arts, and culture, contributed nearly 3% to GDP and created almost 1 million jobs (South African Cultural Observatory, 2025). Similarly, in Egypt, museums are a vital part of the economy, making up to 8.5% of Egypt's GDP recently. Major museum projects like the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) have recently increased foreign earnings, employment, and local business activity (Magdy, 2025). Museums serve as major economic drivers, contributing to GDP, creating employment, and boosting tourism worldwide.

Even though museums boost economic growth and development in Africa, they also have a modest economic impact on some African countries, despite their vital role in cultural heritage preservation. For example, in Ghana, museums have a modest economic impact due to limited public engagement and underutilisation of heritage assets, suggesting untapped potential for museums to stimulate local economies (Dekumwine, 2012). However, museums foster tourism demand, which contributes to wider economic activity through visitor spending on accommodation, transport, food, and souvenirs, thereby stimulating secondary economic sectors (Muulila, 2022; Adeniji & Ekanem, 2013). Unlike Cameroonian museums, some are experiencing dilapidation and have been undermined by institutional neglect, inadequate funding, and weak policy implementation, despite their implications in the country's economic development. For example, the current phase of the Buea Public Museum is unattractive to the public, yet its establishment stimulated economic growth and development in Cameroon's Southwest region. Against this backdrop, the Buea Public Museum in Anglophone Cameroon provides a critical case for assessing the museum's economic role in society.

In postcolonial Cameroon, researchers have worked hard to document museum scholarship, giving attention to issues of interpretation, cultural tourism, symbolism, and object provenance (Ndambi, 2004; Ngitir, 2011; Abam, 2019; Wihbongale, 2024). Others center on museum provenance, royal collections, inventory, and cataloguing (Notué, 2006; Ngitir, 2011; Ngitir, 2018; Ngitir & Monteh, 2012; Njinwo, 2015; Mancho, 2023; Wihbongale, 2024). Some scholars examine museums and setbacks (Ndambi, 2004; Baneh, 2020; Ngitir, 2012; Ngitir, 2021; Wihbongale & Tum, 2023; Wihbongale, 2024). Even though this extant literature contributes to the current study of museum scholarship in Cameroon, there is a research gap on the Buea Public Museum's role as an economic

asset in Cameroon's Southwest region. This article primarily fills an empirical gap because there is very limited evidence-based research that specifically examines and documents the economic contributions of museums in Cameroon, particularly the Buea Public Museum. This article significantly contributes to museum historiography by expanding the understanding of the economic value of museums in Cameroon and demonstrating how museums can support community development and national economic growth.

Theoretical Framework

The article is anchored in the idea that cultural economics theory, promulgated by D. Throsby, which views cultural heritage as a resource of symbolic and economic value that serves as the foundation for this investigation. Throsby (2001, 2010) argues that heritage institutions such as museums generate dual values: cultural value rooted in identity, memory, and historical significance and economic value expressed through tourism, employment, and local development. This theory is relevant to this article because it explains how the Buea Public Museum has evolved from a heritage institution to an economic asset.

For example, addressing how artefacts contribute to tourism revenue, promoting local economic development, and enhancing the intersection between heritage and economic sustainability. The anchor of this theory examines how the Buea Public Museum has served a dual function: cultural repository and economic institution since 1975. Complementing this perspective, institutional theory was employed to explain how governance structures, policies, and administrative practices shape the performance and sustainability of cultural institutions (North, 1990; Scott, 2001). However, the museum is suffering from neglect due to the futile implementation of heritage laws, which constrain its economic potential in Cameroon's heritage sector. The article assesses the museum's economic role in society against this backdrop.

METHODS

This study assesses the Buea Public Museum's economic role in society using a qualitative methodology with a focus on purposive sampling. Participant observation, in-depth interviews with museum curators, employees, researchers, teachers, students, and archive material were used to gather primary data (Museum Visitor's Book). In particular, secondary sources were used to accompany the 16 informants. Books, dissertations, and scholarly articles fall under this category of secondary sources. Participants were chosen based on two inclusion criteria: one at the institutional (museum) level and one at the respondent level. The first criterion was to choose people having expertise in museum administration, such as curators, museum attendants, and staff members who were actively involved in administration, education, or exhibitions. Teachers, academic researchers, and students who use the museum space for research or scholarly inquiry were among the responders who were targeted by the second criterion. Depending on the participant, interviews were performed in both French and English. A section of the

inner part was photographed to enhance the visibility of the museum exhibition in the article. In addition to providing replicable models for museum investigation in African contexts, this methodological rigor guarantees both depth and reliability. Comprehensive evidence of the Buea Public Museum's economic significance was made possible by this selection process, which ensured that the viewpoints collected represented the museum's operational and instructional aspects. To investigate how the museum provides a substantial economic advantage while gathering participant perspectives and experiences, this study uses descriptive and thematic research methods. The research appropriately uses descriptive analysis, which focuses on observations, interviews, and documents. Key elements of the research themes were arranged and interpreted by the researchers using thematic analysis. The article's descriptive and thematic analyses are appropriate for evaluating the economic contribution of the Buea Public Museum to society. A variety of sources (triangulation), including opinions, interviews, and museum records, were used to validate results, improving validity and dependability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Buea Public Museum and Its Genesis, Cameroon

Historically, the town of Buea conveys significant memories for Cameroonians. First, Buea was one of the former German capitals (1902–1916). Secondly, it harbours colonial edifices such as the Prime Minister's Lodge, the Old Bismarck Fountain, the Old Native Scholl, and the Old German Burial Ground, which are examples of German relics (Ardener, 1996). Following Cameroon's independence in 1960, President Ahmadou Ahidjo reorganized and established new museums across the country as part of a directive to conserve cultural heritage. Federal Law No. 63-22 of June 19, 1963, for instance. This law, according to Akoko, cited by Ndambi (2004), was enacted to emphasize and regulate the organization and conservation of monuments, artwork, and locations of historical, artistic, archeological, and cultural significance to the indigenous people. Correlating with the objective of the law, this law forbids the exportation of material cultural resources and incorporates elements of protecting both immovable and movable property (Ndambi, 2004). President Ahmadou Ahidjo of the United Republic of Cameroon signed another Federal Decree No. 72-DF-216n of 22 April 1972 to protect and preserve the nation's cultural heritage, according to an interview with the Chief of Service for Cultural Heritage and Museum. She adds that the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Vocational Training was reorganized by this decree, permitting the construction of museums in each of Cameroon's seven provincial headquarters at the time (Njie, Personal Communication, December 10, 2024).

Therefore, upon the creation of these museums, some museums experienced structural problems in the early 1970s and 1980s that required aesthetic improvements, particularly in the acquisitions department, according to the South West Region's Regional Delegate of Arts and Culture. The inauguration of the museums led to the creation of new public

and private museums in Cameroon. For example, the Ministry of Information and Culture founded the Yaoundé Museum in 1976 and the Buea Public Museum in 1975 in response to the federal mandate in 1972. Similarly, Paul Biya issued Law No. 91/008 of July 31, 1991, on the protection of national, cultural, and natural patrimony. This regulation places strong emphasis on protecting material remnants from annihilation or exploitation. Thus, this law enhances museum programs as a way forward, creating awareness of the country's cultural heritage internationally (Bie, Personal Communication, December 10, 2024).

Applauding the new public museums, Ndambi (2004) explains that public museums are institutionalized museums that are directly created, owned, controlled, funded, and run by the government and meet the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) requirements for museum functionality. The Buea Public Museum, for example, was one of the newly established museums in the seven provinces at the time of its creation. It aimed to gather and preserve cultural artifacts from the Southwest jurisdiction (Southwest region). These artefacts served as a reminder of the country's origin and reflected the people's past civilization, and were considered a site of memory for posterity (Achimbi, Personal Communication, January 15, 2025).

The Buea Public Museum is located in Buea at the Regional Headquarters of the Southwest Region, Cameroon. It is adjacent to the court junction at the premises of the Regional Delegation of Arts and Culture. It is found in a small space in the delegation building, about 8m by 5m (see figure 1). The items were acquired through purchases, donations, seizures, and interactions with local chiefdoms. It provides distinctive knowledge to some Cameroonians to understand the national and local narratives of the past. Museums serve as a major driver in nation-building and sustainable development (Nanda, 2004).

According to Kome Epule, who had previously served as the Provincial Delegate for Information and Culture in the Southwest Province, who started the museum's expansion and development, cited by Nambi (2004). The museum was officially opened on May 20, 1993, by Oben Peter Ashu, Governor of the Southwest Province. A former museum attendant of the Buea Public Museum, Njualement (Personal Communication, January 20, 2025), alludes that on Tuesday, October 12, 1993, the Provincial Delegation of Culture moved the museum to its current location to present (shown in figure 1). In respect of those who have served in the museum, include one curator and five museum attendants. For example, Mr. Ngole Peter (1975-2002) was the lone curator, while the following served as museum attendants: Achimbi Grace (2003-2007), Ekwoke Margaret (2007-2011), Njualement Quinta Lekeaka (2012-2023), Njie Esongo Josephine (2023-2026), and Kpuyuf Mary Benita Lamnyuy (2026-present).



Figure 1: Buea Public Museum Building

Source: Photographed by Researcher, 2025.

The Buea Public Museum exhibits two categories of objects, antiquities and ethnographic. The first category includes the antiquities objects, containers, wooden bowls, spoons, mortars, stools, baskets, and dance equipment (a mask, rattles, drums, a headdress, and broomsticks). Traps, nets, spearheads, crossbows, dog bells, and dane guns are examples of hunting and fishing gear. Statues of the "Dakat Society" from Fontem and wear such as waist beads (jigija) from the 17th century. The second category of objects is ethnographic items created by modern artists. This consists of straw hats, seats, stools, drums, masks, wood sculptures of people and animals, clay pots, and household utensils (Lita, Personal Communication, December 10, 2024). According to the former museum attendant, most of the carved objects, such as masks, stools, and statues, originate from Cameroon's Northwest (see Figure 2). This is because the region is well-known for producing paintings and sculptures of geological and zoological animals (Ekwoke, Personal Communication, March 24, 2025). A former museum curator explains the value of the Visitors' Book. This book conveys the vestiges of the visitors, which are useful for the development management. According to Lange Nga Joseph, one of the museum visitors, he quotes, the exhibit was "beautiful, but more artefacts should be added, and the room enlarged." Hans Njoh (Synod Office Buea) says, "It is really exciting to have an idea of what our hands can produce locally." Crafts should be promoted even in elementary schools to preserve our talents. The thoughtful and inciting comments of visitors serve as a recollection for scholars, students, museum staff, and government to enhance the museum's growth (Ngole, Personal Communication, December 20, 2024). He goes on to say that the government's continued efforts to protect Cameroon's cultural values boost the country's heritage. For instance, on April 21, 2004, Decree No. 2004/003 was adopted to continue promoting Cameroon's cultural values through study. The Buea Public Museum is portrayed in this edict as a crucial hub for advancing education and research.



Figure 2: Permanent Exhibition

Source: Source: Photographed by Researcher, 2025.

Economic Impact of the Buea Public Museum

The main goal of establishing the Buea Public Museum, like other museums in Cameroon, was to preserve the grassroots local culture and the country's heritage. Since then, museums have positively impacted the area and the local economy. As a result, the museum has made a notable contribution to the economic well-being of the community and the entire Southwest region of Cameroon. Thus, museums develop human resources and enhance livelihood in a postcolonial Cameroon. This includes nation-building, generating revenue, serving as a tourist destination, creating employment, and raising government revenue.

Museums and Nation-Building

Museum development in Cameroon, such as the Buea Public Museum, enhances nation-building. According to Gorham (2020), in Tanzania and Kenya, museums have been used to systematise and disseminate divergent nationalist pedagogies, highlighting how collections and exhibition content reflect differing state strategies in forging national unity. This can be correlated with the fact that museums are a space for economic development in the country, as tourists become acquainted with the appealing and exhilarating fashion objects of diverse communities. The Buea Public Museum displays the Southwest's culture and artistic heritage from other regions in Cameroon to visitors.

When tourists visit this museum, they come into contact with other ethnic groups in Cameroon, thereby promoting national unity and development. Therefore, this museum is an avenue for economic benefit, because its main goals are not only preservation but also the promotion of culture, and objects serve as didactic materials for teaching (Koni, Personal Communication, December 28, 2025). According to Ndambi (2004, pp. 279), museums are involved in nation-building because they collect didactic materials for instruction. He adds that school teachers might use museum collections to offer illustrative materials, which can influence pupils' or students' imaginations. Also, the creation of this museum has boosted the tourism industry in the Southwest region,

generating economic development. In Africa, especially Cameroon, museum vision has shifted from object preservation to economic development, and is playing a vital role in promoting national identity and nation-building in the postcolonial context. According to the former museum curator, the establishment of museums in Cameroon has led to the creation of handicraft centers that support economic development, especially through the sales of their products to tourists (Ngole, Personal Communication, December 20, 2025). For example, museums have brought new fulfillment, leading to the creation of modern craft technology workshops or handicraft centers in regions. In the Southwest region of Cameroon, handicraft centers are located in Limbe. This includes the Regional Handicraft Village and PRESCRAFT.

Museum as a Source of Revenue

The present museum attendant highlights how the museum generates revenue for its management and permanence. The Museum's Guide implementation specifies museum fees based on visitors' ages. These fees support the management of the museum's growth and development (Lamynuy, Personal Communication, December 10, 2024). Accordingly, the museum serves as a hub for tourist-generated income because visitors must pay to enter. The curator explains that the museum needs to charge for maintenance, including staff training, conservation, preservation, and exhibition. Additionally, the admission price may be changed based on the museum's development and condition. The curator also attests that different Cameroonian state museums may charge different admission fees. The entry fees foster the economic development of the Southwest region. Museums can generate revenue through direct income streams, such as entrance fees, rentals, and merchandise sales, contributing to financial sustainability and reducing dependence on government funding (National Museum Annual Report, 2022–2023). Although the museum earns revenue, it also collaborates with other institutions to boost the region's economic influence.

As already mentioned, the establishment of regional handicraft hubs in Limbe's Southwest area contributes to the region's economic growth. The purpose of the handicraft centers is to serve tourists and other visitors who wish to buy artistic objects. Aside from these hubs, hawkers in other areas also profit from the selling of their goods to visitors. This contains mementos such as traditional masks, books, bags, bangles, headgear, and traditional clothing. The prices offered by the hawkers and the stores differ. The prices of those items are usually influenced by demand and the preferences of consumers, sellers, intermediaries, and even the retail locations. According to this hawk art dealer (Ngule, Personal Communication, August 27, 2025), hawking around Limbe and Buea towns gave room to established contacts with tourists who are fans of artistic works. Therefore, when tourists buy from hawkers, it is a source of income. In some circumstances, tourists visit market centres to experience the vibrancy of the "authenticity" of the objects (Steiner, 2001, pp. 20). Museums also stimulate economic development, attracting domestic and international tourists, elevating business sites, creating jobs, and promoting cultural pride. This, in turn, stimulates funding for cultural

infrastructure (Wonderful Museums, 2025). According to Abam (2019, pp. 12), museums generate revenue for the host community, as seen by the Buea Public Museum in the Southwest region of Cameroon.

Museums as a Hub for Touristic Attractions

Museums are cultural institutions that collect and display tangible objects, attracting both locals and visitors. Since these objects represent the culture of the people, they have become a key focus for tourism activities in this area. Museums such as the National Museum of Ghana attract cultural tourists seeking authentic historical engagement, making museums essential to heritage tourism (Adu-Agyem et al., 2013). The Buea Public Museum attracts tourists for several reasons, according to Bie, the Southwest Region's Regional Delegate of Arts and Culture. First, it showcases the people's past civilization. Second, it boosts community pride and documents indigenous histories. Third, it preserves, transmits, and stores historical traditions of societies. Fourth, it offers an avenue for relaxation and leisure (Bie, Personal Communication, December 10, 2024). In line with the delegate's views, museums such as the Buea Public Museum promote cultural interaction and animation in the Southwest Region of Cameroon. In my opinion, this museum remains a major tourist attraction because visitors learn about the Southwest's culture and other regions of Cameroon by exploring the tangible heritage found in the chiefdoms.

In this context, tourists discover local products and their traditional uses, which introduces them to the customs and values of the people. According to an intern at the Buea Public Museum, some tourists always feel satisfied after viewing the displayed objects. This is because the objects are embedded with traditional African philosophies and associated with significant values and narratives of history, socio-cultural, mystical, economic, and identity (Agbor, Personal Communication, August 27, 2025). Similarly, in South Africa, museums contribute to the cultural tourism market by attracting visitors interested in complex historical narratives, including colonial and apartheid histories (Strydom, 2017). It is important to acknowledge that tourists' spending in the area promotes economic growth. Thus, the region's living standards are raised by foreign exchange revenues from tourists. For instance, their lodging in hotels, motels, and inns, as well as the goods they purchase from local stores and the streets, promote the region's economic development. According to Ibunku et al. (2024, pp. 452), museums indirectly contribute to local economies by attracting domestic and international tourists whose expenditures benefit surrounding businesses.

Museums and Employment

Museums contribute to employment not only within cultural institutions but also through related economic activities that support broader labour markets. Their role in generating jobs spans direct, indirect, and induced employment. As demonstrated by the Buea Public Museum, one of the most important economic impacts of museums in Cameroon is the creation of jobs for the populace. Therefore, the Buea Public Museum provides unique

opportunities, especially for youths in the Southwest region, who have found both temporary and permanent employment. According to Strydom (2017), museums provide a range of formal employment opportunities, including curatorial and educational positions, as observed in South African museum systems. For example, the museum employs individuals who possess knowledge of cultural artefacts, marketing and outreach personnel, educators and programme coordinators, and administrative and support staff to assist the curator. For example, waitstaff working at the museum help guide visitors, educate them about the cultural significance of the objects, and explain their historical meanings (Dzelamonyuy, Personal Communication, December 28, 2025). Similarly, according to Adu-Agyem et al. (2013), during exhibitions and cultural festivals in Ghana, museum administrators often hire historians, designers, technicians, and cultural workers on temporary contracts to support museum events integrated with tourism promotions.

Additionally, the museum employs some youth as cleaners and security guards to support museum management, particularly in safeguarding the objects from looting and theft. According to a former museum attendant, other African Museums, such as the National Museum of Tanzania, offer practicum for intern students and training for early-career professionals with prospects working in the museum sector (Achimbi Personal Communication, March 24, 2025). Apart from the direct employment by the museum, other indirect employment opportunities are not technically based in the museum but are related to the cultural tourism sector in the Southwest region. For instance, handicraft centers, hotel sectors, tourism organizations, and restaurants employed youths as sellers, waiters, drivers, animators, and hotel staff (Itoe, Personal Communication, December 10, 2025). Olorunsola et al. (2015) attest that museums stimulate the tourism sector to create indirect jobs in hospitality services such as tour guides, hotel staff, restaurants, transportation, travel services, and local craft vendors. Additionally, some people have started their own galleries to showcase artistic products as self-employed individuals (Nsom, Personal Communication, August 27, 2025). It's important to understand that museum institutions, such as the Buea Public Museum, have helped reduce unemployment partly because many people's services are needed to meet tourists' needs. Furthermore, the museum provides employees with the opportunity to earn a living while also decreasing crime waves in the area, which are often caused by unemployment (Tambia, Personal Communication, August 27, 2025).

Museums and Government Revenues

Museums are vital institutions that contribute to government revenue and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Museums form part of the broader tourism sector, which in Cameroon contributes to national income through visitor spending, tourism services, and associated taxes. For example, one of Cameroon's museums that boosts the country's GDP is the Buea Public Museum. According to Lifafa Remigius, CEO of the Lifafa Museum in Buea, the tourism in Cameroon has been estimated to contribute around 4.1% of GDP, providing employment and diversifying income sources beyond agriculture and extractive industries (Lifafa, Personal Communication, August 27, 2025). This is related

to the speech made in the 2025 parliament by Bello Bouba Maïgari, the Minister of Tourism and Leisure for Cameroon, who states:

There are 930 officially recognized tourism destinations in the nation, which include both man-made and natural wonders. However, the industry directly and indirectly supports 15% of jobs and makes up 4.1% of GDP. (<https://www.businessincameroon.com/tourism>).

Although cultural tourism is not yet a great share of GDP, the sector overall supports economic activity and revenue generation for government and local communities. It is at this node that museums enrich cultural activities and encourage cultural consumption, which expands tourism expenditure beyond natural and wildlife attractions. As the government implements strategies to enhance tourism infrastructure and attract international visitors, museums are part of these efforts to increase tourism's GDP and stimulate economic growth (Fosoh, 2025). According to Njebusi (2025), the National Museum of Yaoundé is the flagship institution with rising visitor numbers that contribute to cultural tourism and revenue, similar to the Buea Public Museum in the Southwest Region, Cameroon. The Buea Public Museum activity is part of the wider tourism sector in the Southwest Region, contributing to government revenue and GDP through goods and services supplied to tourists, such as food, clothing, housing, and relaxation sites. These cultural heritage attractions in the Southwest region contribute to museum development, fostering the economic impact.

Discussion

The results are consistent with museological research examining the economic role of the Buea Public Museum within Cameroon's Southwest Region, connecting it with cultural economics and institutional theory. The findings acknowledge that the museum was established as a heritage preservation institution, but has gradually assumed economic functions. This transformation aligns with Throsby's (2001, 2010) argument that cultural institutions generate dual value, such as intrinsic cultural value and instrumental economic value. The findings reveal that the museum contributes to local economic stimulation through direct revenue streams, such as entrance fees and institutional collaborations for maintenance, staff remuneration, and conservation efforts on a modest scale. Significantly, the museum is incorporated into the Southwest Region's tourism economy. It is noted that museum visitors contribute to additional economic activities, such as making hotel reservations, buying handicrafts, using transportation, and consuming meals. Thus, the museum is a source of a multiplier effect on the local economy. This view is supported by cultural economic theory, which sees heritage organisations as the financial backbone of tourism networks. Also, the museum offers job opportunities directly and indirectly. This aligns with the fact that museums provide a range of formal employment opportunities (Strydom, 2017). This includes curatorial, security, cleaning, and educational outreach programs, which are examples of direct employment. Manufacturers of handicrafts, vendors, gallery owners, tour guides, and those employed in the hospitality industry are examples of indirect employment. The Buea Public Museum shows that even small-scale institutions contribute to labour absorption

in postcolonial urban environments. Such prospects are socially meaningful in a setting where youth unemployment is prevalent.

Furthermore, the museum indirectly promotes economic growth through nation-building and the formation of cultural identity. This links with the ideologies of Ndambi (2004) and Gorhom (2020). The museum promotes interethnic understanding and cultural pride by showcasing artefacts from Cameroon's Southwest Region and other regions. The museum's economic significance is reinforced by the increased tourism appeal brought forth by cultural confidence and heritage exposure. This supports institutional theory, which explains that how governance structures and policies are implemented affects the financial success of cultural institutions. Even though the museum is the only government museum in the region, the results also demonstrate structural limits despite the economic contributions. The museum's expansion and development are being hampered by the Ministry of Arts and Culture's policy execution, a lack of exhibition space, and inadequate funding. Despite the museum's economic contributions to the Southwest, its popularity is undermined by resource constraints and governance.

The limitations of this study should be carefully considered when interpreting the results. First, twenty informants were interviewed as part of a qualitative methodology using purposive sampling. Although this approach provided rich contextual insights, its generalizability is limited. The results do not statistically represent all museums in Cameroon but reflect views and experiences specific to the Buea Public Museum. Second, access to comprehensive financial records for the study was restricted. There was a lack of accurate figures on economic contributions, annual visitor counts, and detailed revenue data in past years. Consequently, instead of relying on museum-specific economic information, the analysis of GDP contribution remains mostly inferential and depends on broader tourism data. Third, the study did not include a quantitative economic impact assessment, such as multiplier analysis or input-output modeling. Utilizing such techniques could yield more precise estimates of direct, indirect, and induced economic effects. Fourth, the research focuses on the Southwest Region and does not compare other regional museums in Cameroon. A comparative multi-site study across the country would better illustrate the economic impact of museums nationwide. To obtain a more accurate empirical measure of their impact on GDP and employment, future research should include comparative regional studies, economic modeling, mixed-method approaches, and longitudinal analyses of visitor data.

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that the museum has transitioned from a preservation-focused institution to an impactful economic actor within Cameroon's Southwest Region. Though its main goal remains the conservation and transmission of cultural heritage, the museum also contributes to economic growth through generating revenue, boosting tourism, nation-building, creating jobs, promoting handicrafts, and enhancing cultural branding. Applying cultural economics and institutional theory, the study indicates that museums in

postcolonial settings play dual roles, serving as both protectors of identity and economic infrastructure. However, institutional neglect, limited funding, weak policy enforcement, and infrastructural shortcomings limit the museum's full economic potential. With strategic improvements in governance, infrastructure, marketing, digital technology, and stronger public-private partnerships, the Buea Public Museum could greatly increase its impact on local development and the national GDP. As a result, museums in Cameroon have moved beyond serving as repositories of artefacts to become institutions that actively promote long-term social and economic transformation. In this light, shifting the view of museums from mere cultural repositories to development catalysts reveals their full economic potential in Cameroon and across postcolonial Africa.

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