# Sustainable Tourism Practices and Critical Regionalism: A Case Study of Recreation and Resort Projects in Nigeria

**Abdulwahab Engworo Etudaiye[1], Abdullahi Nura Sani [2], Muhammad Idris Bala[3], Mohammed Baba Sada[4], Amos Mbaya Hyelkuzuku[5]**
[1]Department of Architectural Technology, School of Environmental Studies
[2]Federal Polytechnic Damaturu, Yobe State
EMAIL: arcwahhab4real@yahoo.com
Phone no: 07031582794

*Abstract: This study explores how critical regionalism supports sustainable tourism in Nigeria's recreation and resort projects. As sustainability becomes essential in tourism, understanding how local contexts shape its implementation is crucial. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research investigates projects across different regions, analyzing how cultural, social, economic, and environmental factors interact with global sustainability practices. Data from interviews, documents, and site visits reveal both challenges and opportunities in adopting sustainable methods. The study highlights the roles of stakeholders—government, private sector, communities, and tourists—in advancing sustainable tourism. It offers practical and theoretical insights, recommending national policy guidelines that integrate local materials, culturally responsive designs, architectural education, and cross-sector collaboration for more sustainable tourism development.*

*Keywords: Sustainable tourism, Critical regionalism, Nigeria, Recreation and resort projects, Tourism development, Sustainability practices, Local communities*

## 1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism is increasingly recognized as a crucial component of global tourism development, aiming to minimize environmental impacts, conserve cultural heritage, and enhance local communities' socio-economic well-being (UNWTO, 2022). Critical regionalism offers a framework for achieving these goals by incorporating local cultural, environmental, and social contexts into architectural practices (Frampton, 1983; Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003). Nigeria, with its rich cultural diversity and natural landscapes, thus presents unique opportunities for sustainable tourism development and has witnessed a surge in tourism-related activities in recent years. The government has recognized the potential of the tourism sector for economic development and has initiated various policies to promote sustainable tourism practices (Akpabio & Okafor, 2018).

However, many of its recreational and resort projects lack contextually appropriate designs that reflect local cultures and environments (Adewuyi, 2023) and the implementation of sustainable practices in the development of recreation and resort projects remains an understudied area. This paper explores how critical regionalism can guide sustainable tourism practices in Nigeria by fostering a sense of place and promoting environmentally responsible designs. Despite Nigeria's potential for sustainable tourism, there is limited research on the integration of critical regionalism in recreational and resort projects. This study addresses this gap by examining the alignment of critical regionalism with sustainable tourism practices in Nigeria. This study aims to analyze the principles of critical regionalism and assess their relevance to sustainable tourism, particularly within the Nigerian context. It seeks to examine how the application of critical regionalist ideals—such as sensitivity to local culture, climate, materials, and traditions—can enhance sustainable tourism practices in the design and development of recreational and resort projects. Furthermore, the research provides empirical evidence through detailed case studies of selected tourism projects across Nigeria, offering insights into how these principles are implemented in practice and their impact on sustainability outcomes.

This study is guided by key research questions aimed at deepening the understanding of critical regionalism within the context of sustainable tourism development in Nigeria. It seeks to explore how the principles of critical regionalism contribute to advancing sustainability in tourism, particularly through the integration of local culture, materials, and environmental responsiveness. Additionally, the research investigates the role of critical regionalism in enhancing the sense of place within Nigerian recreational and resort projects, emphasising how architectural and design strategies rooted in local identity can enrich tourist experiences. The study also examines the practical challenges and potential benefits associated with implementing critical regionalist approaches in Nigeria's tourism sector, offering insights into both constraints and opportunities for sustainable development.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Sustainable Tourism & Critical Regionalism: Concepts and Practices

Sustainable tourism is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) as tourism that fully considers its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts while addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities (UNWTO, 2022). Sustainable tourism aims to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities while maximising economic and cultural benefits. It involves careful planning and management to ensure that tourism development is environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially responsible (Mowforth & Munt, 2016). Key practices include reducing resource consumption, protecting natural and cultural heritage, and fostering community participation (Buckley, 2021; UNWTO, 2019).

Critical regionalism, as articulated by Frampton (1983), advocates for an architecture that mediates between global modernism and local specificities. It emphasizes the use of local materials, responsiveness to climate, and the integration of cultural and historical contexts (Frampton, 1983; Lefaivre & Tzonis, 2003). In tourism architecture, critical regionalism can enhance a sense of place and authenticity, vital for sustainable tourism development (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Recent case studies have explored sustainable tourism practices in various global contexts (Buckley, 2012; Gössling et al., 2018), with some highlighting the growing importance of sustainability in tourism development, particularly in emerging economies like Nigeria, where tourism can significantly impact local communities and ecosystems (Spenceley, 2018). Case studies from around the world have demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach. For example, in Bali, Indonesia, the integration of traditional Balinese architectural principles into modern resort design has helped preserve local culture while promoting sustainable tourism (Picard, 1996). Similarly, studies conducted by Etudaiye & Baba (2020), revealed that prominent public recreation parks in Nigeria have been designed to have a semblance of place; an architecture which relates in its base forms and materials both in the place and to the international. The sense of place has been employed in resort land-use decisions and construction through a myriad of environmental and cultural expressions. Contextually, the peculiarities of the region have been carefully factored into design decisions and the quality of the environment has also enhanced the attraction, recreation perception, and experience, and has resulted in a highly intelligent, appropriate, and sustainable tourism and recreation park development However, a focused examination of recreation and resort projects in Nigeria from the perspective of both sustainable tourism practices and critical regionalism is notably lacking. Consequently, the integration of sustainability into tourism projects is essential for long-term success and for ensuring that tourism contributes positively to local development.

### 2.2 Intersection of Sustainable Tourism & Critical Regionalism and its Application in Nigerian Context

The intersection of sustainable tourism and critical regionalism provides a framework for developing tourism infrastructure that is both environmentally sustainable and culturally appropriate. By incorporating the principles of critical regionalism into sustainable tourism practices, developers can create tourism projects that are in harmony with their surroundings, support local economies, and preserve cultural heritage. Studies on sustainable tourism in Nigeria point to the significance of the tourism sector for economic development (Etudaiye & Baba, 2020; Akpabio & Okafor, 2018, Etudaiye, 2013). However, there is a dearth of research specifically addressing the integration of sustainable practices into recreation and resort projects. The literature on critical regionalism in the context of tourism development highlights the role of architecture and design in preserving and enhancing the local identity of destinations (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

Critical regionalism, as proposed by Kenneth Frampton, argues for an architecture that responds to local cultural and environmental conditions while avoiding mere imitation or global homogenisation (Frampton, 1983; Etudaiye, 2013). This framework is particularly relevant in the context of tourism development, where authenticity and connection to the local context are crucial for the visitor experience (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). In Nigeria, applying critical regionalism to tourism projects has the potential to create unique and authentic experiences for visitors. The integration of sustainable tourism practices with critical regionalism in the development of recreation and resort projects is an emerging area of research. Scholars argue that combining these two approaches can lead to more environmentally sensitive and culturally authentic tourism development (Xie et al., 2020) as their alignment lies in their shared goals: minimising environmental impacts, fostering cultural continuity, and promoting local identity (Edwards, 2014: Etudaiye, 2013).

Critical regionalism offers practical strategies for achieving sustainable tourism objectives by encouraging environmentally sensitive designs that reflect local contexts and cultures (Uduku, 2021). However, the application of critical regionalism in Nigeria is often challenged by economic constraints, limited technical expertise, and a preference for foreign architectural styles (Olowu, 2022). Consequently, there are notable examples where critical regionalism has been effectively employed in resort projects, creating culturally resonant and ecologically sensitive environments ((Etudaiye & Baba, 2020; Adewuyi, 2023). Examples are Obudu Mountain Resort, Cross River State, Yankari Game Reserve, Bauchi State, Ikogosi Warm Spring Resort, Ekiti State, Fifth Chukker Polo and Resorts, Kaduna –State, Wonderland Amusement Park & Resort, Abuja, Pleasure Park, Port Harcourt –Rivers State. The literature review provides a nuanced understanding of how sustainable tourism practices and critical regionalism can be effectively

integrated into the development of recreation and resort projects in Nigeria. The findings offer insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers seeking to foster a balance between tourism development and the preservation of local cultural and environmental assets.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, combining a literature review and case study analysis to explore the application of critical regionalism in specific recreation and resort projects in Nigeria. This study is descriptive and employs a qualitative method based on a case study approach. The methodology of case studies has been widely employed in tourism research (Yin, 2018) as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the complexities and nuances involved in the intersection of sustainable tourism practices and critical regionalism. Researchers have emphasized the importance of in-depth analysis to understand the complexities and nuances of specific tourism projects (Wang et al., 2019). Consequently, the selected projects were selected as denoting critical regionalism elements as well as regional considerations and analysed based on their design, indigenous construction techniques, environmental impact, community engagement, and overall contribution to sustainable tourism.

### 3.1.1 Theoretical Framework: Synthesising Sustainable Tourism and Critical Regionalism

Sustainable tourism, as a multidimensional concept, has been interpreted through various theoretical lenses, notably the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework proposed by Elkington (1997), which emphasizes the balance between environmental integrity, social equity, and economic viability. Similarly, Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model offers insights into the stages of tourism development and their implications for long-term sustainability. While these frameworks are instrumental in understanding the general dynamics of sustainable tourism, they often fall short in addressing the contextual and cultural dimensions that are vital in shaping tourism experiences, especially in regions characterized by rich and diverse cultural identities such as Nigeria. To address this gap, this research integrates the concept of critical regionalism, a theory rooted in architectural discourse, notably advanced by Kenneth Frampton (1983), which advocates for design responses that are sensitive to local culture, climate, and topography while maintaining a critical stance toward global homogenisation. Critical regionalism resists placeless, standardized architecture by emphasising the use of indigenous materials, vernacular techniques, and contextual responsiveness, thereby fostering a strong sense of place and cultural continuity.

The integration of critical regionalism with sustainable tourism theory provides a holistic analytical framework for evaluating recreational and resort projects in Nigeria. This synthesis enables the research to move beyond conventional sustainability metrics and engage deeply with the cultural, environmental, and architectural dimensions of tourism development. It allows for an assessment of how local identity and tradition are preserved or transformed within tourism infrastructures and how such practices contribute to or detract from sustainable outcomes. By employing this dual-theoretical lens, the study aims to critically assess the extent to which Nigerian recreational and resort projects embody principles of sustainability while maintaining cultural and contextual relevance. This approach is particularly pertinent in a country where tourism has the potential to serve as a vehicle for both economic development and cultural preservation, but where uncritical adoption of foreign models may undermine local values and ecological balance. Furthermore, this framework facilitates the exploration of stakeholder involvement, especially the role of architects, planners, local communities, and government agencies in shaping tourism spaces that are not only economically viable and environmentally responsible but also culturally meaningful and socially inclusive. The framework thus serves as a robust tool for interrogating the intersection of design, development, and sustainability in Nigeria's tourism sector, ultimately informing policy recommendations and best practices for future projects.

## 4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected from multiple sources, including scholarly articles, architectural project documents, site visits, and interviews with architects and planners, and local stakeholders involved in relevant projects and resort managers. Visual surveys and observations were used as instruments for data collection. A thematic analysis is conducted to identify recurring patterns, principles, and strategies of critical regionalism in the selected case studies. Comparative analysis is also used to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in achieving sustainable tourism objectives.

**1. Case Studies of Recreation and Resort Projects in Nigeria**

*Case Study 1: Obudu Mountain Resort, Cross River State*

Obudu Mountain Resort, situated in the highlands of Cross River State, stands as one of Nigeria's most significant examples of environmentally responsive and culturally grounded tourism architecture. The resort is strategically designed to harmonize with its mountainous terrain, drawing from both indigenous building traditions and sustainable design principles. Its architecture demonstrates a deliberate use of locally sourced materials—primarily timber and stone—which not only minimizes environmental impact but also fosters a strong connection to the region's natural and cultural context (Olowu, 2022). The architectural design of the resort adopts climate-responsive strategies, including passive heating and cooling techniques that reduce reliance on mechanical systems, thereby enhancing energy efficiency. This responsiveness to

the highland climate reflects a broader commitment to environmental sustainability. The resort's formal language is derived from the vernacular mountain architecture of the region, further enriched by elements of Cross River's indigenous cultural heritage. Key features such as sloped roofs, extensive use of timber cladding, and stone masonry are not only aesthetically appropriate but also functionally suited to the local climatic conditions, as depicted in Plates 1 and 2.

Obudu Mountain Resort exemplifies the principles of critical regionalism by resisting the homogenising tendencies of global architectural styles and instead privileging localized forms, materials, and construction techniques. The architectural expression achieves a balance between modern functionality and traditional identity, reinforcing a sense of place while meeting the demands of contemporary tourism. According to Adewuyi (2023), the resort's use of indigenous materials and low-impact construction techniques aligns closely with the core tenets of sustainable tourism. The buildings are proportioned under the site's natural terracing contour, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of topography and landscape integration. Ornamentation is minimal and reserved, limited to the interior detailing of essential architectural elements, which reinforces the authenticity and simplicity characteristic of regional architecture. The overall design strategy reflects a deep sensitivity, most especially the ventilated floor level, to the site's ecological features, climatic variations, cultural narratives, and the irregularities of the physical landscape.

In sum, the Obudu Mountain Resort offers a compelling case of architectural response rooted in critical regionalism. It represents a model of how tourism development can be grounded in local tradition, material culture, and environmental stewardship, offering an architectural language that is both contextually appropriate and sustainable. The resort's design stands as a testament to the potential of architecture to mediate between global tourism demands and the preservation of local identity and ecological integrity.



**Plate 1:** Siting around area of mountainous area with beautiful flora – a manifestation of critical regionalism
(Source: Field Survey)



**Plates 2 a and b:** Use of timber with Indigenous House form – a manifestation of critical regionalism
(Source: Field Survey)

### Case Study 2: Yankari Game Reserve, Bauchi State

Yankari National Park, located in Alkaleri Local Government Area of Bauchi State, Northeastern Nigeria, spans approximately 2,244 square kilometres, encompassing the Duguri, Pali, and Gwana districts. As one of the most prominent eco-tourism destinations in the region, the park plays a critical role in both wildlife

conservation and the promotion of sustainable tourism practices in Nigeria. The architectural design of the park's facilities exemplifies a thoughtful integration of indigenous Hausa building traditions and local materials. Structures within the reserve prominently feature earthen construction techniques using sun-dried mud bricks—commonly referred to as "brown architecture"—alongside indigenous timber, as illustrated in Plates 3 and 4. This architectural vocabulary not only reflects the cultural heritage of the region but also reinforces the use of contextually appropriate, climate-responsive materials that contribute to reduced environmental impact.

According to Adewuyi (2023), the design strategy of the Yankari Game Reserve demonstrates ecological sensitivity through the preservation of natural habitats and the application of low-impact construction methodologies. These strategies minimize disruption to the surrounding ecosystem, aligning with global sustainable tourism principles while being grounded in local knowledge and materials. The project's alignment with the tenets of critical regionalism is evident in its rejection of generic architectural models in favour of context-specific solutions that respond to the socio-cultural and environmental characteristics of the site. Furthermore, the resort area within Yankari National Park exemplifies how architecture can serve as a mediator between cultural identity and sustainability. By embedding local spatial arrangements, material culture, and building techniques into the design, the project fosters a strong sense of place. As Carmona (2019) emphasizes, such approaches enhance the experiential quality of tourism environments by creating spaces that are both environmentally responsible and culturally meaningful.

In conclusion, Yankari National Park stands as a compelling example of how critical regionalism can inform sustainable tourism development. The architectural language employed within the park not only conserves cultural heritage but also supports ecological stewardship, offering valuable insights for future eco-tourism initiatives in Nigeria and beyond.



**Plates 3a, b and c:** Hausa Indigenous architectural elements such as the pinnacles (*Zonkwa*), round huts and courtyard system in a modern form (Source: Field Survey)



**Plates 4 a and b:** VIP and luxury suits and accommodation displaying Indigenous Hausa elements (Source: Field Survey)

**Case Study 3:** Ikogosi Warm Spring Resort, Ekiti State
The Ikogosi Warm Springs Resort in Ekiti State, Nigeria, serves as a notable example of critical regionalism in architectural design, integrating exceptional facilities with natural aesthetics and culturally resonant accommodations. Located near the renowned Ikogosi Warm Spring—where a warm spring and cold spring flow side by side in a unique natural phenomenon—the resort is situated within a landscape of lush greenery and hills, creating a retreat that embodies a "home away from home" atmosphere. The 116-hectare resort is widely recognized as one of Nigeria's natural wonders, celebrated for its landscape and ecological harmony. Its architecture reflects critical regionalism by grounding the resort in local cultural and environmental contexts, an approach that resonates with the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). As Polat (2016)

highlights, regional architecture embodies two essential qualities: being human-made and the product of time, values evident in the thoughtful integration of the resort's structures within the natural landscape.

The construction of Ikogosi Warm Springs Resort exemplifies local craftsmanship, employing materials in harmony with the climate and environment. This design approach responds to the natural features that enhance the recreational appeal of the site, including mountains, rocky outcrops, and the confluence of the warm and cold springs, which support activities such as hiking and sightseeing. This context-sensitive architectural strategy reinforces a sense of place by integrating elements of Yoruba cultural heritage and providing a sustainable tourism experience. The deliberate use of locally sourced materials and renewable energy not only aligns with the tenets of critical regionalism but also with sustainable tourism principles, fostering both environmental and cultural sustainability (Uduku, 2021). The resort's design approach acknowledges and respects the natural and cultural landscape of Ekiti State, promoting a sense of place through architecture that is simultaneously reflective of Yoruba heritage and responsive to the ecological character of the region as evident in the plates 5 & 6.



**Plates 5 a and b:** Situated on a rocky outcrop and luscious natural vegetation – an expression of environmental preservation (Source: Field Survey)



**Plates 6 a, b and c:** Ikogosi Warm Spring Resort; Situated on a rocky outcrop and uses stone embodied construction, an expression of Critical regionalism (Source: Field Survey)

**Case Study 4:** Fifth Chukker Polo and Resorts, Jos Road, Igabi LGA, Kaduna The Fifth Chukker Resort & Polo Club in Kaduna, Nigeria, exemplifies critical regionalism by harmonising modern luxury with elements unique to its geographic and cultural setting. Situated within the expansive Kangimi Resorts on the Kaduna-Jos road, this 3,000-hectare site dedicated to equestrian pursuits and refined leisure reflects a deliberate design strategy that honours local topography, materiality, and environmental identity, aligning with the principles of critical regionalism. In the context of critical regionalism, which seeks to bridge the global and the local by emphasising place-specific design over universal or homogenising approaches, the Fifth Chukker Resort's design is especially noteworthy. By utilising abundant local materials—primarily stone—for both structure and landscaping, the resort connects visually and materially with the mountainous, rocky outcrops on which it stands as shown in plates 7, 8, & 9. This approach, echoing Kenneth Frampton's critical regionalism, prioritizes the use of local materials that enhance the natural surroundings rather than overshadowing them. The use of stone also fosters a sense of permanence and durability, reflecting the geological character of the region while minimising the environmental impact associated with transporting non-local building materials.

Significantly, the resort's spatial layout respects the terraced contours of the land, creating a naturally integrated ambience that celebrates the unique mountain vistas. This terracing not only provides structural stability on a rugged landscape but also aligns

with critical regionalism's emphasis on adapting to and accentuating natural landforms instead of levelling or modifying them excessively. According to Frampton's philosophy, architecture should be rooted in the physical landscape, allowing buildings to respond to the climatic, topographic, and cultural conditions of the site, thus creating a built environment that feels organically connected to its locale rather than imposed upon it. Additionally, Fifth Chukker's attention to "sophisticated elegance" in its dining and lodging facilities achieves a sense of modern comfort while still grounding the experience in Nigerian cultural heritage. This respect for the cultural context in both form and function aligns with critical regionalism's emphasis on creating spaces that are meaningful within their specific cultural and geographic environment, resisting a "placeless" global modernism in favour of something more personally and locally resonant.

Thus, the Fifth Chukker Resort & Polo Club serves as an exemplary case of critical regionalism by weaving the cultural and natural specificities of Kaduna's landscape into a design that honours Nigeria's heritage while embracing contemporary luxury and functionality. By thoughtfully integrating indigenous materials, respecting topographical features, and providing a localized sense of refinement, this resort illustrates a harmonious and sustainable approach to architectural design in line with critical regionalist principles.



**Plate 7:** Aerial view of the fifth Chukker Resort sited on a rocky outcrop: an example of critical regionalism approach (Source: Field Survey)



**Plates 8 a and b:** 3Dimensional view of the stone masonry resort castle: an organic blend with the natural environment (Source: Field Survey)

**Plates 9 a and b:** Stone Masonry round hut for lodging accommodation (Source: Field Survey)

### Case Study 5: Wonderland Amusement Park & Resort, Abuja

Wonderland Amusement Park & Resort in Abuja is an illustrative example of critical regionalism, blending global recreational trends with Nigerian cultural and environmental identity. Situated on a 330,000-square-meter site in the Federal Capital Territory and surrounded by notable landmarks, the park capitalizes on its strategic location while respecting the natural contours of its rocky outcrop, an approach that aligns with Kenneth Frampton's critical regionalism principles. Frampton emphasizes that architecture should respond sensitively to its geographical and cultural context, creating an experience rooted in local specificity while avoiding a purely international style. One of the primary ways Wonderland embodies critical regionalism is through its extensive use of stonemasonry in its signature castle structure and other architectural features. The stonemasonry, which resonates with the local material culture, is both structurally durable and symbolically connected to the natural landscape, reflecting a connection to the rocky terrain. Utilising indigenous materials that relate to the immediate environment, Wonderland's structures are not only visually cohesive with their setting but also environmentally adaptive, reducing the need for imported building materials and thus lowering the environmental footprint. This use of stonemasonry mirrors the principles of critical regionalism, which advocates for building forms that harmonize with the landscape rather than impose upon it.

Wonderland's site planning further exemplifies critical regionalist principles through the thoughtful arrangement of spaces that reflect the site's topography. The park's design incorporates a gradual incline from the entrance toward a mountain, with pathways that wind organically around natural features, inviting visitors to explore the park while connecting with its landscape. This strategy aligns with critical regionalism's focus on topographic sensitivity, as it ensures that the park is experienced as a series of interconnected spaces that follow the land's natural contours. The meandering pathways are carefully engineered, allowing visitors to enjoy scenic views of both the park's amenities and the larger Abuja cityscape. Frampton underscores the importance of "place-form" in architecture—designing forms that reveal and elevate the local terrain, as seen in the path design at Wonderland.

Additionally, Wonderland's Fulani Ranch restaurant on the hilltop integrates regional influence by providing a platform for both culinary and cultural immersion. The restaurant's menu, which offers African, Mediterranean, and continental dishes, serves as a cultural nod to Nigeria's diverse culinary heritage while inviting an international experience, balancing local and global tastes. In doing so, it fulfils another core tenet of critical regionalism: fostering a sense of place that respects and celebrates local culture in a way that is accessible to both regional and international audiences. Frampton's approach to critical regionalism emphasizes this "revealing of the landscape" and the avoidance of design choices that dominate the natural environment. Wonderland achieves this by positioning each feature to enhance the natural terrain rather than compete with it.

In essence, Wonderland Amusement Park & Resort epitomizes critical regionalism by marrying modern recreational facilities with design choices that embrace the cultural and environmental uniqueness of Abuja. Through its use of stonemasonry, topographically sensitive site planning, and a culturally inclusive approach to dining, Wonderland maintains a harmonious relationship with its surroundings as shown in plates 10 & 11. The resort exemplifies how critical regionalism can create a distinctive, culturally resonant, and environmentally attuned architectural experience, one that is deeply embedded in its geographical and cultural context.

**Plate 10:** Stone Masonry Entrance castle into the Wonderland Park & Resort
(Source: Field Survey)



**Plates 11 a and b:** Rock Outcrop that helps the enhancement of nature-based tourism and resort
(Source: Field Survey)

### Case Study 6: Pleasure Park, Port Harcourt –Rivers State

Port Harcourt Pleasure Park exemplifies critical regionalism by blending contemporary architecture with site-specific environmental and cultural elements, making it a sustainable and economically beneficial landmark within Nigeria's urban fabric. Critical regionalism, as posited by theorists like Kenneth Frampton, advocates for architectural design that respects and integrates local geography, climate, culture, and social context, providing a distinct counterpoint to globalized, placeless architecture. The Pleasure Park's design reflects the duality of "richness and contemporary" identity, aligning with the tastes of an upscale, educated demographic while still incorporating aspects that resonate with the broader community as reflected in plates 12 & 13. Its emphasis on luxury and modernity in design targets a specific market segment, catering to the Niger Delta's affluent residents and tourists. However, it achieves a critical regionalist approach by also embodying environmental and social sustainability. The park's design takes advantage of its strategic location on expansive land along Aba Road, integrating seamlessly into the cityscape between the Army Barracks and Air Force base junction, which ties it to Port Harcourt's identity as the "garden city" and reflects the socio-economic status of the area.

This context-sensitive positioning allows the park to serve as an urban green space and as a recreational escape in an industrialized region, fulfilling Faizi's (2006) notion that urban parks are integral to a sustainable city by providing spaces for ecological conservation, recreation, and aesthetic enjoyment. Port Harcourt Pleasure Park incorporates local environmental sustainability principles by emphasising landscape conservation and the careful selection of facilities that are both recreational and ecologically considerate. The park's expansive green spaces, tree-lined paths, and a reclaimed stream are manifestations of critical regionalism as they use natural features to create a sense of place. According to Frampton's critical regionalism, such design elements provide a direct, tactile connection to the environment, rooting the architecture in its natural context. By incorporating ecological features like the stream and local plants, the park promotes biodiversity, counteracting the urban heat and pollution of an industrialized city like Port Harcourt.

The park's wide array of recreational facilities—such as climbing towers, pedal boats, playgrounds, jogging areas, and a mini golf course—also demonstrates critical regionalism in its function as a community space, offering both active and passive recreation for all age groups. This variety enables the park to be a community-centric space that reflects and responds to the leisure needs of diverse users. In critical regionalist theory, public spaces should foster a sense of communal identity and interaction, bridging socio-economic gaps within the local population by providing inclusive and accessible amenities. This approach embodies Frampton's call for architecture that mediates

9

between local and international forces without losing its distinct cultural identity. By generating revenue through tourism, the park also contributes to the state's economic growth, showcasing how critical regionalism can foster economic development alongside cultural and environmental preservation.

In addition to its physical design, Port Harcourt Pleasure Park's incorporation of modern amenities like a 5-star cinema, virtual reality games centre, and international restaurant reflects the principle of critical regionalism by merging global entertainment standards with a space that celebrates and sustains local culture. These attractions, while international in style, are thoughtfully curated within a distinctly Nigerian setting, showcasing how critical regionalism can adapt global influences to local needs and tastes. Thus, Port Harcourt Pleasure Park's architecture serves as an exemplar of critical regionalism, marrying modern recreational design with a focus on environmental sustainability, community enrichment, and cultural representation. By doing so, it demonstrates that urban parks in Nigeria can meet global standards of luxury and modernity while remaining deeply rooted in their geographical and cultural environment.



**Plates 12 a and b:** Pleasure Park, Port Harcourt – an example of contemporary architecture
(Source: Field Survey)



**Plates 13 a and b:** Pleasure Park, Port Harcourt – an example of contemporary architecture that respects the environmental conservation
(Source: Field Survey)

## 5. Discussion

**Integrating Sustainable Tourism and Critical Regionalism in Nigeria: Insights from Case Studies**
The case studies examined in this research underscore the significant potential for integrating sustainable tourism practices with the principles of critical regionalism within the Nigerian context. However, they also reveal notable limitations in the practical application of this integration. Although awareness of sustainability in tourism is growing, the consistent implementation of sustainable practices remains a challenge. Moreover, the application of critical regionalism in architectural and planning interventions is often superficial or merely symbolic, lacking depth in contextual responsiveness. To address these shortcomings, there is a need for a holistic and systemic approach to tourism planning—one that explicitly prioritizes both environmental sustainability and cultural authenticity. This entails the development of national guidelines and context-specific standards for incorporating critical regionalism in tourism architecture, sustained investments in eco-sensitive infrastructure, and enhanced collaboration among architects, developers, policymakers, and host communities.

i. **Critical Regionalism as a Strategy for Sustainable Tourism:** The case studies affirm that critical regionalism can serve as an effective framework for advancing sustainable tourism goals. As Edwards (2014) asserts, critical regionalism encourages the use

10 *AGM December 2024*

of local building materials, supports energy-efficient design strategies, and reinforces cultural continuity—three elements central to sustainable tourism development. These attributes position critical regionalism as a viable strategy for reducing tourism's ecological footprint while enhancing cultural resilience and identity.

ii. **Enhancing Sense of Place through Architecture:** Another key contribution of critical regionalism is its capacity to enhance the *genius loci*, or sense of place, through architectural expression. Drawing on Norberg-Schulz's (1980) notion of place-making, the case studies demonstrate how integrating local materials, vernacular forms, and climate-responsive design can create emotionally resonant environments. Such environments not only enrich the tourist experience but also foster responsible visitor behaviour by deepening appreciation for local culture and ecology—thereby reinforcing the principles of sustainable tourism.

iii. **Challenges and Opportunities in Implementation:** Despite its potential, the implementation of critical regionalism in Nigerian tourism development is fraught with challenges. These include the high cost and limited availability of local materials, a shortage of skilled professionals trained in vernacular and sustainable design techniques, and resistance from stakeholders accustomed to conventional or globalized architectural models. Nevertheless, as Uduku (2021) suggests, these constraints can be transformed into opportunities through innovation, capacity-building, and participatory design approaches. Strategic partnerships between architects, local artisans, educational institutions, and tourism authorities are essential to building the necessary ecosystem for culturally responsive and environmentally sound tourism infrastructure. Furthermore, policy incentives such as tax relief for developers employing sustainable practices, and mandates for locally sourced materials in public tourism projects, can stimulate broader adoption of critical regionalist principles in practice.

## 6. Conclusion

This study strategically positions itself at the intersection of sustainable tourism and critical regionalism, examining their integration within the design and development of recreational and resort projects in Nigeria. It demonstrates that critical regionalism serves as a viable architectural and planning framework for advancing sustainable tourism by fostering a strong sense of place, promoting cultural continuity, and minimising ecological disruption. The research illustrates how this approach can transform Nigeria's tourism sector by guiding the creation of facilities that are environmentally sustainable, contextually appropriate, and culturally reflective. Through a detailed case study methodology, the study contributes to the discourse on how the principles of sustainable tourism and critical regionalism can be harmonized to inform both design practice and policy development.

The findings underscore that while the synergy between these frameworks holds significant potential, its practical implementation is hindered by challenges such as insufficient policy support, lack of localized design standards, and gaps in professional and educational training. Accordingly, this research advocates for the formulation of region-specific planning policies that mandate context-responsive architectural solutions in tourism development. It also recommends the integration of critical regionalism into architectural and tourism curricula to cultivate future professionals capable of designing in ways that honour local identity while addressing global sustainability imperatives. By bridging theoretical insight with empirical evidence, this study lays the groundwork for more nuanced and actionable strategies in the promotion of culturally grounded, sustainable tourism across Nigeria's diverse regional contexts.

## 7. Recommendations

By addressing the following recommendations, Nigeria can develop a more sustainable and culturally relevant tourism sector that contributes to local development while preserving the environment and cultural heritage;

1. **Establishment of a National Framework for Sustainable Tourism Design** The Federal Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Environment and the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA) should develop a National Guideline on Sustainable Tourism Architecture. This framework should incorporate the principles of *critical regionalism*, emphasising the use of local materials, indigenous construction techniques, and context-sensitive design. Such guidelines would serve as a benchmark for developers, government agencies, and consultants involved in tourism projects.

2. **Incentivize Locally Responsive Design Practices:** Enact policies that provide fiscal incentives (e.g., tax rebates, grants, or subsidies) for tourism developments that demonstrate adherence to sustainable and culturally responsive design principles. This would encourage private developers to prioritize designs that reflect regional identity, utilize low-impact materials, and maintain ecological integrity.

3. **Mandate Environmental and Cultural Impact Assessments (ECIA):** Amend existing environmental legislation to require Environmental and Cultural Impact Assessments for all major tourism developments. This would ensure that both ecological sustainability and cultural authenticity are evaluated and protected during the design and planning phases of tourism-related projects.

4. **Curriculum Integration in Architectural and Planning Education:** Nigerian universities offering architecture, urban planning, and tourism-related programs should integrate **critical regionalism** and **sustainable tourism design** into their core curricula.

Coursework should include studies of indigenous architecture, ecological design strategies, and community-based development models to prepare students for practice in culturally and environmentally sensitive contexts.

5. **Capacity Building for Tourism and Planning Officials:** Organize continuing professional development (CPD) programs and workshops for tourism planners, local government officials, and community leaders to increase awareness of sustainable and culturally grounded tourism practices. This will strengthen the institutional capacity to implement, monitor, and enforce design guidelines rooted in the local context.

6. **Public Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Launch nationwide campaigns—through local media, community forums, and tourism centres—to educate the general public, including tourists and host communities, on the value of culturally rooted, environmentally sustainable tourism. Highlighting best-practice examples like Obudu Mountain Resort or Yankari National Park can reinforce learning and community pride.

7. **Interdisciplinary and Community-Centred Design Approaches:** Encourage **collaborative design models** that involve architects, environmentalists, cultural historians, artisans, and community members from the conceptual stages of tourism development. This ensures that projects are not only technically viable but also socially inclusive and culturally sensitive.

8. **Establishment of Regional Design Review Panels:** Form Regional Tourism Architecture Design Review Panels under the NIA or Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) to evaluate proposed tourism developments for their compliance with sustainability and cultural criteria. These panels can guide developers toward adopting critical regionalist strategies and minimising negative impacts on local communities and ecosystems.

9. **Research and Documentation of Indigenous Design Practices:** Promote research initiatives to document, archive, and analyse traditional architectural practices and their relevance to contemporary sustainable design. Such research should inform both academic discourse and professional design practice, ensuring that critical regionalism is grounded in authentic, local knowledge systems.

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