Economic Interests and Community Participation in Cultural Heritage Management: Evidence from Kilwa Kisiwani World Heritage Site, Tanzania

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Abstract
This study investigates how economic interests, specifically employment and income, influence community participation in cultural heritage management at Kilwa Kisiwani, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Tanzania. Guided by Social Exchange Theory, the research employed a mixed-methods design comprising a household survey of 124 respondents (analyzed using PLS-SEM), complemented by 24 semi-structured interviews and four focus group discussions. Findings show that employment (β = 0.426) and income (β = 0.613) significantly strengthen economic interests, which in turn strongly predict community participation (β = 0.582) and explain 61% of its variance. Qualitative data, however, expose critical inequities: favoritism, nepotism, gendered exclusion, and elite capture undermine trust and weaken collective action despite the presence of economic incentives. Qualitative findings also indicated that unequal access to employment and income opportunities may limit how far economic benefits translate into broader community participation. The study therefore highlights benefit distribution as an important contextual dimension for understanding how economic incentives are experienced within the community. Recommendations include transparent recruitment, rotational employment systems, targeted support for women and youth, formal benefit-sharing frameworks, and integration of economic planning into heritage policy. This research contributes empirical evidence from East Africa to global debates on community-based heritage management, highlighting the importance of considering both economic opportunities and how access to those opportunities is experienced within local communities.

Keywords: *Community participation; Cultural heritage management; Economic interests; Social Exchange Theory; World Heritage Site; Kilwa Kisiwani; Tanzania.*

INTRODUCTION

Community participation has become a defining principle of contemporary heritage management practice, widely recognized as essential for ensuring the sustainability and legitimacy of conservation efforts. Scholars and international frameworks alike emphasize that heritage cannot be safeguarded solely through expert-driven or technocratic approaches; rather, its sustainability requires the active involvement of communities who live with, use, and attribute meaning to heritage sites (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2010; Waterton & Watson, 2013). In particular, the World Heritage Convention and subsequent UNESCO guidelines stress the need to recognize communities as "primary stakeholders" rather than peripheral beneficiaries (Cleere, 2006; Munjeri, 2004).

Despite this consensus, the drivers of community participation remain contested. In much of the literature, economic incentives are foregrounded as the most critical motivators of participation. Participation in heritage activities is often framed through a utilitarian lens, where communities weigh costs and benefits before engaging in conservation or tourism initiatives (Blau, 1964; Andereck et al., 2005). Empirical evidence from both developed and developing contexts supports this perspective. In Europe and Asia, for example, employment opportunities, heritage cooperatives, and income from tourism consistently increase local support for conservation (Galluccio, 2024; Candeloro, 2025; Cerisola, et al. 2024). In sub-Saharan Africa, where poverty and livelihood insecurity remain pressing realities, heritage-related economic opportunities are often perceived as essential for motivating engagement (Banda et al., 2024; Mpofu & Van der Merwe, 2025).

However, while economic incentives are widely acknowledged, their distribution and accessibility have emerged as critical challenges. Evidence from Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Tanzania indicates that heritage-related benefits are often monopolized by elites, skewed towards men over women, or concentrated in families with political connections (Mbaiwa, 2017; Platteau, 2004; Lwoga, 2018). Such inequities undermine trust, exacerbate tensions, and erode collective willingness to participate. Consequently, economic incentives, though necessary, are not sufficient in themselves to sustain participation. In this study, fairness refers specifically to community members' perceptions regarding whether access to heritage-related employment and income opportunities is inclusive and whether economic benefits are distributed

without favoritism, exclusion, or undue concentration among particular groups. Importantly, fairness was not specified as a separate latent construct in the quantitative PLS-SEM model; rather, perceptions of fairness emerged from the qualitative component and are used to contextualize and explain the quantitative relationships.

At Kilwa Kisiwani, a UNESCO World Heritage Site on Tanzania's southern coast, these dynamics are particularly evident (Ichumbaki & Lwoga, 2021). The site offers various income-generating opportunities, including guiding, vending, casual conservation labor, and artisanal production. Yet local accounts reveal frustrations over exclusion, favoritism, and the seasonal or temporary nature of employment (Lwoga, 2018). Women report limited access to guiding and formal jobs, youth describe being overlooked in favor of older men, and many residents express a sense that only those with personal connections benefit from heritage-related opportunities (Ichumbaki & Lwoga, 2021). Such grievances highlight the complex interplay between economic incentives, equity, and participation. These qualitative accounts are important because they indicate that the presence of economic opportunities and the perceived fairness of access to those opportunities may represent different dimensions of community experience.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of economic incentives in heritage management, important knowledge gaps remain. Existing studies have largely focused on the general relationship between tourism benefits and community support for conservation, with limited attention to the specific roles of employment and income as distinct dimensions of economic interests. Furthermore, although concerns regarding unequal benefit distribution, elite capture, and exclusion have been documented in several African heritage and tourism contexts, few studies have systematically examined how these economic interests translate into community participation in cultural heritage management. In Tanzania, empirical evidence remains particularly limited, and studies at Kilwa Kisiwani have primarily described community perceptions and governance challenges without quantitatively testing the relationships between employment, income, economic interests, and participation. Consequently, there is insufficient understanding of the mechanisms through which economic benefits influence participation and how perceived inequities shape these relationships. This study addresses this gap by employing a mixed-methods approach to examine the influence of employment and income on economic interests and their subsequent

effect on community participation in cultural heritage management at Kilwa Kisiwani World Heritage Site. The quantitative component assesses the hypothesized relationships among employment, income, economic interests, and participation, while the qualitative component provides contextual evidence on how residents experience access to and distribution of economic benefits. This distinction allows the study to discuss fairness as an explanatory qualitative theme without implying that its independent statistical effect on participation was directly tested.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964) was used to guide this study. The theory provides a widely used framework for explaining why individuals and communities choose to participate in collective endeavors such as tourism and heritage conservation. SET posits that participation occurs when perceived benefits outweigh the costs, whether those costs are measured in time, labor, or opportunity. Applied to heritage contexts, SET suggests that communities are more likely to support conservation efforts when they perceive tangible rewards such as employment, income, or access to resources (Andereck et al. 2005). Conversely, when benefits are absent, minimal, or perceived as unfairly distributed, participation declines.

In heritage studies, SET has been applied across diverse contexts. For example, in European rural areas, economic cooperatives tied to heritage tourism foster strong community participation (Candeloro, 2025). Similarly, Galluccio (2024) shows how museum-based employment in Italy enhanced household incomes and motivated support for preservation initiatives. In the global South, SET has been used to explain why residents engage in heritage-based tourism when it provides supplementary income or livelihood diversification (Cerisola, et al. 2024).

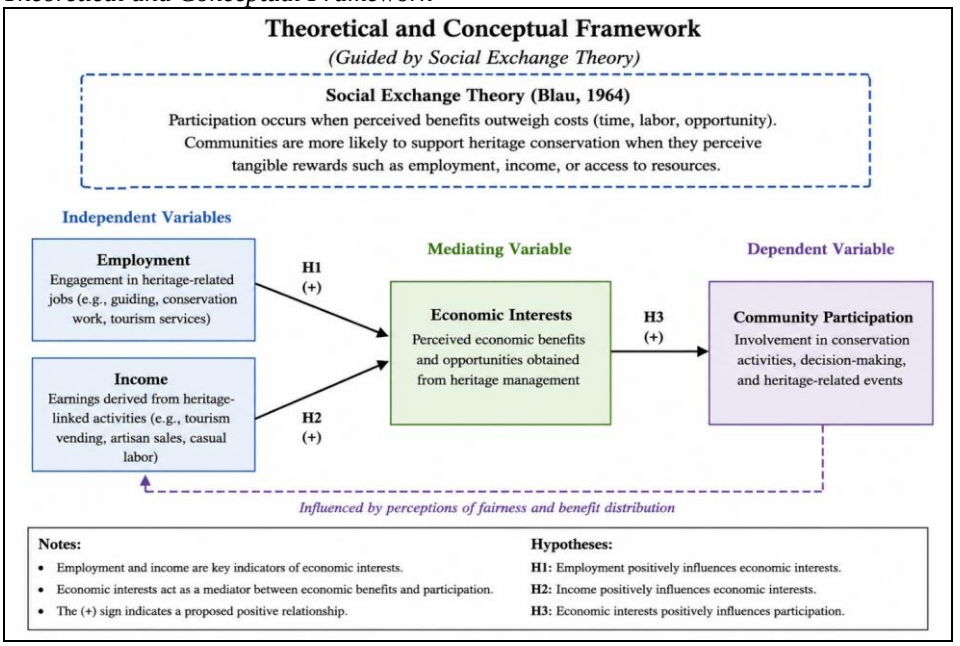
Critics of SET argue that it overemphasizes rational, utilitarian decision-making while neglecting cultural and symbolic motivations (Deacon & Smeets, 2013). However, its explanatory power remains strong in contexts where poverty and livelihood insecurity are prevalent, making material incentives a crucial determinant of behavior. For this reason, SET provides a useful lens for examining economic interests at Kilwa Kisiwani.

Based on social exchange theory and previous empirical studies, this study proposes that employment and income represent key dimensions of economic interests, which subsequently influence community

participation in cultural heritage management. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationships among the study constructs.

Although the conceptual framework focuses on the hypothesized quantitative relationships, the qualitative component also examined residents' perceptions of how economic benefits were distributed. Thus, fairness is treated in this study as a qualitative explanatory theme rather than as a separately tested construct in the PLS-SEM model. This distinction is important because the study provides evidence on the perceived fairness of benefit distribution but does not estimate a separate statistical path from fairness to participation.

Figure 1:
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework



Source: Adapted from Odege (2012) with modifications

Hypotheses Development

Drawing on the principles of Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the reviewed literature, this study proposes that community members who derive employment and income from heritage-related activities are more likely to develop stronger economic interests in cultural heritage management. These economic interests, in turn, are expected to encourage active participation in heritage conservation and management. Based on

this theoretical and empirical foundation, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Employment positively influences economic interests in cultural heritage management at Kilwa Kisiwani World Heritage Site.

H2: Income positively influences economic interests in cultural heritage management at Kilwa Kisiwani World Heritage Site.

H3: Economic interests positively influence community participation in cultural heritage management at Kilwa Kisiwani World Heritage Site.

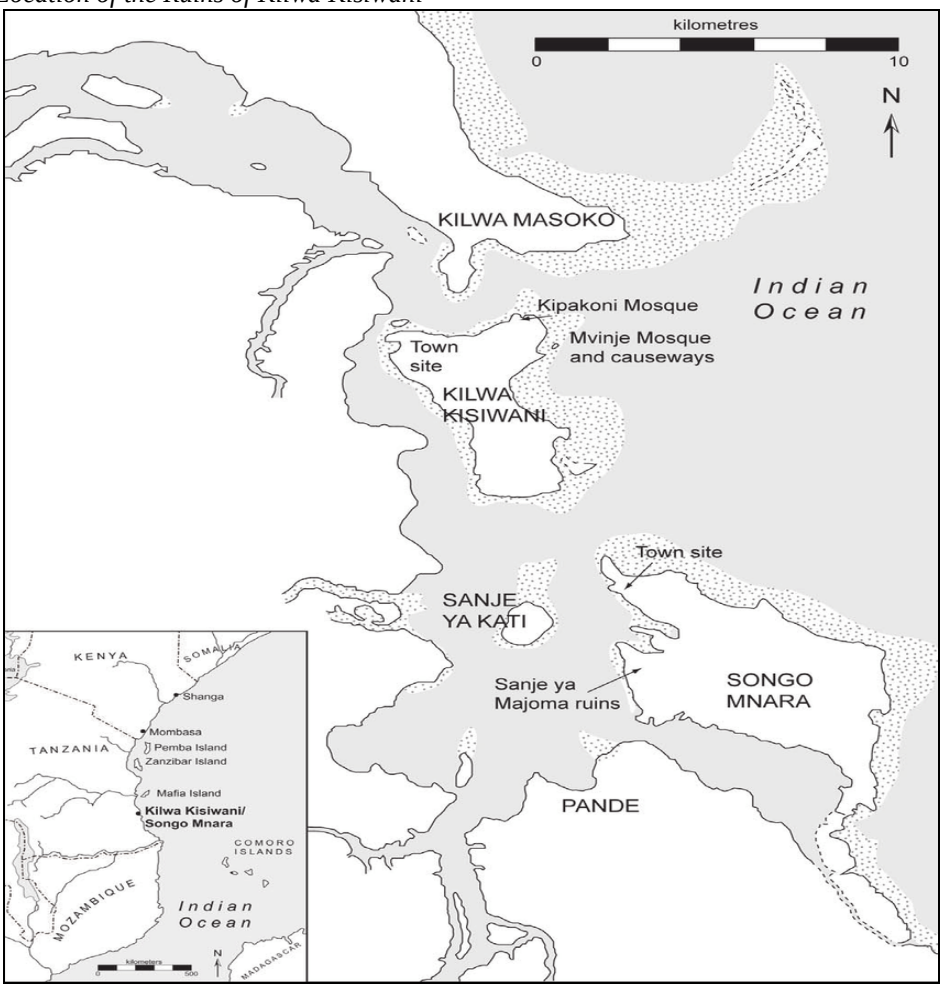
Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework underpinning the study. In the conceptual framework, employment and income are treated as economic factors that influence economic interests, which subsequently influence community participation. Accordingly, the model examines whether employment and income contribute to residents' economic interests and whether these economic interests are associated with participation in cultural heritage management.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

Kilwa Kisiwani is an island in Kilwa District, Lindi Region, along Tanzania's southern coast. Geographically, it lies between 8°55′S and 9°00′S latitude and 39°28′E and 39°32′E longitude**.** Administratively, Kilwa District is divided into 6 divisions, 21 wards, and 93 villages. Kilwa Kisiwani falls within the Kilwa Masoko Division and Kilwa Masoko Ward, making it one of the district's central localities. Today, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site recognized for its archaeological and architectural remains, including the Great Mosque and Husuni Kubwa palace. The community of Kilwa Kisiwani comprises small-scale fishers, farmers, artisans, and vendors who are directly or indirectly connected to the heritage economy. Despite international recognition, the site continues to face challenges of underfunding, limited local involvement in decision-making, and unequal access to benefits from conservation and tourism initiatives (Lwoga, 2018).

Figure 2:
Location of the Ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani



Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide both measurable and interpretive insights into how economic interests shape participation. The quantitative component tested hypotheses derived from Social Exchange Theory using survey data analyzed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). This approach was chosen because PLS-SEM is well suited for predictive modelling of complex relationships among latent constructs, particularly with relatively small sample sizes and non-normal data distributions (Hair et al. 2017).

The qualitative component, comprising in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), captured lived experiences, narratives, and perceptions of exclusion or inclusion in economic opportunities. This design ensured triangulation, where statistical findings were contextualized and enriched by community voices.

Population, Sampling Procedure, and Sample Size

The study population comprised adult residents (18 years and above) living in communities surrounding Kilwa Kisiwani World Heritage Site who had resided in the area for at least one year. The qualitative component included key stakeholders, including officials from the Antiquities Department, village ruins committee members, and local government leaders, because of their direct involvement in heritage management.

For the quantitative component, stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation across gender, age groups, and primary occupation. Households were selected using simple random sampling from the village register. The population size of approximately 1,300 residents was based on the 2012 Population and Housing Census, which was the most recent official population information available at the time of data collection in 2021. Rather than relying solely on a large population-based sample-size estimate, the adequacy of the final survey sample was assessed in relation to the requirements of the PLS-SEM analysis.

A post-hoc statistical power analysis using G*Power was conducted using a medium effect size of 0.15, a significance level of 0.05, and three predictors. The analysis indicated a minimum required sample of 119 respondents at a statistical power of 0.95. The study obtained 124 valid questionnaires, which exceeded the minimum sample required by the power analysis. The final sample was therefore considered adequate for the PLS-SEM analysis.

The achieved sample was 124 respondents. The number of valid responses was affected by field-access and response challenges, including difficulties accessing some households, residents' unwillingness to participate, incomplete questionnaires, and logistical and time constraints during data collection. The final sample therefore reflects the valid responses obtained during the fieldwork period.

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to recruit 24 key informants representing community leaders, women vendors, youth, tour guides, Antiquities Department officials, village ruins committee members, and local government representatives. In addition, four focus group discussions were conducted with adult men, adult women, youth, and community elders to capture diverse perspectives on employment opportunities, income generation, and participation in heritage management. No participant took part in more than one qualitative method or in both the qualitative and quantitative phases, thereby enhancing the independence of the data sources used for triangulation.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire measured employment, income, economic interests, and community participation. Data were collected in 2021.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Interview and discussion guides contained open-ended questions focusing on employment opportunities, income generation, perceptions of benefit distribution, barriers to participation, and experiences with heritage management. All interviews and discussions were conducted in Kiswahili, recorded with participants' consent, and later transcribed for analysis. The qualitative findings were used to provide contextual explanations for the quantitative relationships, particularly participants' experiences of access to economic opportunities and the distribution of benefits.

Measurement of Constructs

The measurement items were adapted from previous studies on community participation and heritage management (e.g., Odege, 2012; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023) and modified to suit the Kilwa Kisiwani context. Employment was measured using items assessing respondents' engagement in heritage-related employment opportunities, while income captured the financial benefits obtained from heritage-based activities such as tour guiding, handicraft production, vending, boat transportation, and casual labor. Economic interests were conceptualized as a distinct construct representing residents' economic motivations and perceived economic benefits associated with cultural heritage management. In the structural model, employment and income were specified as antecedent

constructs influencing economic interests, while economic interests were specified as a predictor of community participation. Community participation was measured using indicators assessing involvement in conservation activities, participation in decision-making, attendance at community meetings, and engagement in heritage-related events. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Thus, employment and income represent economic dimensions through which residents experience economic interests, while community participation refers to residents' involvement in heritage management activities. Perceptions of fairness or unequal benefit distribution were examined qualitatively rather than as a separate latent construct in the PLS-SEM model.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SmartPLS software. The analysis followed a two-stage procedure involving assessment of the measurement model and structural model. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, while convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Collinearity was assessed using variance inflation factor (VIF) values.

The structural model was evaluated through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples to determine the significance of hypothesised relationships. Path coefficients (β), t-values, p-values, and coefficients of determination (R^2) were used to assess model performance and explanatory power. The adequacy of the quantitative sample was also considered using the PLS-SEM sample-size requirements and a post-hoc G*Power analysis. The latter indicated that a minimum sample of 119 was required for an effect size of 0.15, $\alpha = 0.05$, three predictors, and statistical power of 0.95; the final sample of 124 therefore exceeded this requirement.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview and focus group transcripts were coded and organized into themes reflecting economic motivations, perceived benefits, barriers to participation, and experiences of inclusion and exclusion in heritage-related opportunities. The qualitative findings were used to contextualize and explain the quantitative results. This integration enabled qualitative evidence on benefit distribution, inclusion, and exclusion to be used to interpret the statistical relationships without treating fairness as a quantitatively tested predictor**.**

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, formal research clearance and permission were obtained from relevant authorities, including the Open University of Tanzania, the Department of Antiquities, the Lindi Regional Administrative Office, the Kilwa District authorities, and the Kilwa Kisiwani local government. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose, objectives, and procedures of the study, including their right to decline or withdraw at any stage without penalty. Informed consent was obtained before interviews, focus group discussions, and questionnaire administration. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and the data were handled securely and used solely for academic purposes. The study also respected the dignity, values, norms, and socio-cultural practices of the local community, as well as the authenticity and integrity of the cultural heritage resources examined.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study involved 124 respondents from communities surrounding Kilwa Kisiwani World Heritage Site. Respondents included men, women, youth, elders, tourism workers, traders, artisans, and local leaders. Most respondents depended on fishing, farming, petty trade, and tourism-related activities for their livelihoods. Several respondents reported involvement in heritage-related economic activities such as tour guiding, vending, handicraft production, boat transportation, and casual labor connected to tourism and conservation activities.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were male (66.1%), while female respondents constituted 33.9% of the sample. The largest age group was 25–34 years (41.9%), followed by 18–24 years (23.4%) and 35–44 years (19.4%). Respondents aged 45–59 years (7.3%) and those aged 60 years and above (8.1%) were less represented. In terms of primary occupation, fishing was the most common livelihood activity (22.6%), followed by farming (19.4%) and petty trade or vending (17.7%). Tourism-related activities, including guiding and boat transport, accounted for 14.5% of respondents' primary occupations, while artisan or handicraft production (11.3%) and casual conservation labor (8.1%) were also reported. Other occupations made up 6.5% of the sample.

Respondents with direct involvement in heritage-related activities generally reported higher levels of participation in heritage management

compared to those without such involvement. As explained by a 42-year-old male boat operator:

> "*Tourism activities contribute significantly to household livelihoods here because people get jobs and customers for their businesses.*" (R12, Male, 42 years)

Another respondent noted:

> "*When* visitors *come, we benefit through selling crafts, food, and transport services.*" (R27, female vendor, 36 years old)

Table 1:
Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents (N = 124)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	82	66.1
	Female	42	33.9
Age	18–24 years	29	23.4
	25–34 years	52	41.9
	35–44 years	24	19.4
	45–59 years	9	7.3
	60+ years	10	8.1
Primary Occupatiin	Fishing	28	22.6
	Farming	24	19.4
	Petty Trade/Vending	22	17.7
	Tourism-Related (guiding, boat transport)	18	14.5
	Artisan/Handicraft Production	14	11.3
	Casual Conservation Labor	10	8.1
	Other	8	6.5

Source: Field Data (2021).

Note: Percentages may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding. N = total number of survey respondents

Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Model

Reliability and validity tests were conducted before structural analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability values for all constructs exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and all constructs recorded values above 0.50. Discriminant validity tests confirmed that employment, income, economic interests, and community participation were distinct constructs. The

measurement model results, presented in Table 2, confirm satisfactory reliability and validity.

Table 2:
Measurement Model Results

Construct	Loadings	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Employment	>0.70	0.81	0.86	0.62
Income	>0.75	0.89	0.92	0.68
Economic Interests	>0.70	0.87	0.91	0.66
Participation	>0.70	0.87	0.91	0.66

Source: Research Data (2021), SEM-PLS Output.

Discriminant Validity and Model Fit

Table 3 presents the results of the discriminant validity assessment using the HTMT criterion. All HTMT ratios were below the threshold of 0.85, with values ranging from 0.68 to 0.74, supporting discriminant validity among the study constructs (Hair et al., 2022). Multicollinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The reported VIF values for the inner and outer models ranged from 1.24 to 2.87, indicating no evidence of problematic collinearity. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) for the estimated model was 0.068, which was below the commonly used 0.08 reference value and therefore indicated an acceptable level of residual discrepancy. Together, these diagnostics provide evidence supporting the adequacy of the measurement and structural model for the reported PLS-SEM analysis.

Table 3:
Discriminant Validity and Model Fit Indices

Criterion	Value	Threshold	Conclusion
Highest HTMT	0.74	< 0.85	Achieved
Maximum VIF	2.87	< 5.0	Achieved
SRMR	0.068	< 0.08	Achieved

Source: Research Data (2021), SEM-PLS Output.

Influence of Employment on Economic Interests

The first hypothesis (H1) examined whether employment positively influences economic interests in heritage management at Kilwa Kisiwani. The results showed a significant positive relationship between employment and economic interests ($\beta = 0.426$, $p < 0.001$), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4:
Structural Path Analysis of Employment and Economic Interests

Path	β (Original Sample)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-Statistic	p-Value
Employment → Economic Interests	0.426	0.426	0.012	34.463	0.000

Source: Research Data (2021), SEM-PLS Output

Respondents identified several heritage-related employment opportunities, including tour guiding, conservation work, security services, transportation, accommodation services, vending, and handicraft production. Interview participants reported that employment opportunities associated with tourism and heritage activities contributed to household welfare and daily income generation.

A 29-year-old male tour guide explained:

> "Many *young people depend on tourism jobs during the high season because employment opportunities are limited here*." (R41, male, 29 years old)

Another participant stated:

> "*The ruins create jobs for guides, boat operators, and vendors, so people see the importance of protecting the site.*" (R33, male conservation worker, 47 years old).

Some respondents also reported challenges related to limited employment opportunities and unequal access to jobs within the heritage and tourism sector. As explained by a 31-year-old female vendor:

> "*Most of the better jobs go to people with connections, while women remain in small vending activities.*" (R58, female, 31 years old)

Influence of Income on Economic Interests

The second hypothesis (H2) tested whether income positively influences economic interests in heritage management. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between income and economic interests ($\beta = 0.613$, $p < 0.001$) (Table 5). Income had the larger standardized path coefficient for economic interests among the two antecedent relationships examined.

Table 5:
Structural Path Analysis of Income and Economic Interests

Path	β (Original Sample)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-Statistic	p-Value
Income → Economic Interests	0.613	0.613	0.013	47.807	0.000

Source: Research Data (2021), SEM-PLS Output.

Respondents reported earning income through tourism-related activities such as handicraft sales, tour guiding, accommodation services, vending, and transportation. Several participants stated that tourism-related income supported household expenses, including school fees, food, and healthcare.

According to a 38-year-old male artisan:

> "*Tourists* are *our main customers. Without them, selling our products becomes very difficult*." (R19, male artisan, 38 years old)

Similarly, another respondent explained:

> "*When visitors increase, our income also increases because we transport tourists to the island.*" (R52, male boat operator, 44 years old)

Interview and focus group participants indicated that fluctuations in tourism activities directly affected household income levels. Some respondents also reported concerns regarding unequal distribution of tourism income and limited access to profitable tourism opportunities. One female trader noted:

> *"Only a few people benefit from tourism income while many others remain excluded."* (R67, female trader, 35 years old)

Influence of Economic Interests on Community Participation

The third hypothesis (H3) examined whether economic interests positively influence community participation in heritage management. As shown in Table 6, the results revealed a significant positive relationship between economic interests and community participation ($\beta = 0.582$, $t = 7.676$, $p < 0.001$). The path coefficient indicates a positive effect of economic interests on community participation. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the relationship is statistically significant, supporting H3.

Table 6:
Path Coefficients for Economic Interests and Participation

Path	β (Original Sample)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-Statistic	p-Value
Economic Interests → Participation	0.582	0.581	0.076	7.676	0.000

Source: Research Data (2021), SEM-PLS Output.

Community participation was reflected in activities such as attending meetings, participating in conservation campaigns, engaging in tourism-related activities, supporting site protection initiatives, and involvement in local heritage events. Respondents who reported receiving economic benefits from heritage activities also reported higher levels of participation in heritage management activities.

As explained by a 63-year-old elder:

> "*The ruins* are *important because they attract visitors and help our children get opportunities in the future*." (R08, male elder, 63 years old)

Another participant commented:

> "People *are willing to support conservation when they see direct benefits from tourism."* (R71, female community member, 40 years old)

However, some participants expressed dissatisfaction regarding limited involvement in decision-making processes and concerns about transparency in benefit distribution. One fisherman explained:

> "*We* are *told to protect the site, but local people are rarely involved in important decisions*." (R84, male fisherman, 50 years old)

Similarly, a youth representative added:

> "*There is little transparency in how opportunities and benefits are distributed."* (R92, female youth representative, 33 years old)

Structural Model Explanatory Power

The structural model explained 61% of the variance in community participation ($R^2 = 0.61$), indicating that economic interests account for a considerable proportion of the variance in community participation. These findings demonstrate that economic factors play a substantial role in influencing community participation in cultural heritage management at Kilwa Kisiwani.

Table 7:
Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	B	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Employment → Economic Interests	0.426	34.463	0.000	Supported
H2	Income → Economic Interests	0.613	47.807	0.000	Supported
H3	Economic Interests → Participation	0.582	7.676	0.000	Supported

Source: Research Data (2021), SEM-PLS Output.

The results revealed that employment had a positive and significant effect on economic interests ($\beta = 0.426$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H1. Income also exerted a positive and significant influence on economic interests ($\beta = 0.613$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H2. Furthermore, economic interests significantly influenced community participation in cultural heritage management ($\beta = 0.582$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H3. The findings suggest that access to employment and income opportunities enhances community economic interests, which subsequently encourage participation in heritage management activities.

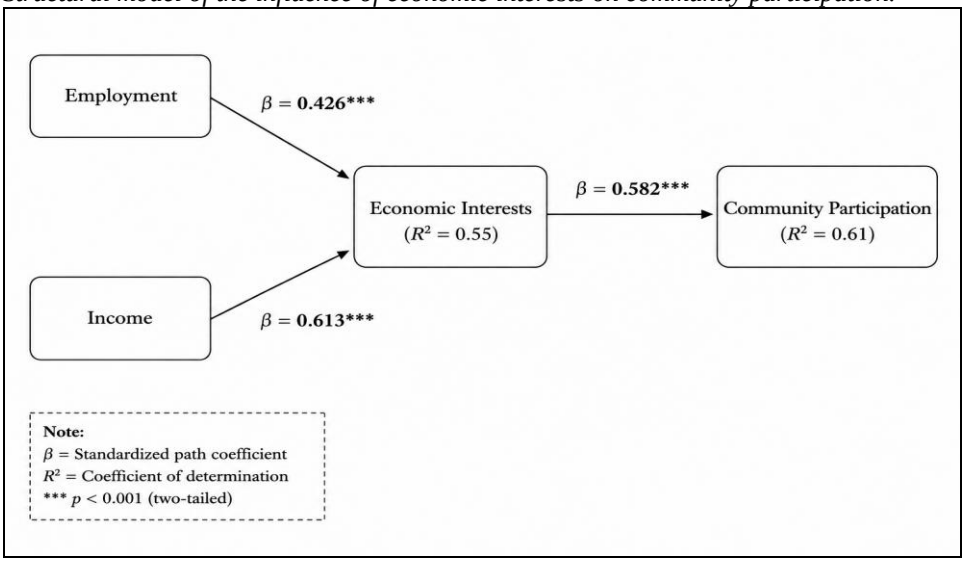
Table 8:
Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Quantitative relationship	**β**	**Statistical finding**	**Qualitative explanation**	**Integrated interpretation**
Employment → Economic Interests (H1)	0.426	Significant ($p < .05$)	Participants reported that employment opportunities associated with heritage activities contributed to their economic interests. However, access to some opportunities was perceived to be uneven, particularly among women and youth.	Employment contributes positively to economic interests, while qualitative evidence indicates that unequal access may affect how these opportunities are experienced across community groups.
Income → Economic Interests (H2)	0.613	Significant ($p < .05$)	Participants identified income from guiding, handicrafts, vending, boat transport, and other heritage-related activities as important sources of household livelihood. Some income opportunities were described as seasonal or temporary.	Income has a positive relationship with economic interests and represents an important economic incentive, although the availability and stability of income opportunities vary among residents.
Economic Interests → Community Participation (H3)	0.582	Significant ($p < .05$); $R^2 = 0.61$	Participants linked economic benefits with willingness to participate in conservation activities, community meetings, tourism activities, and protection of the heritage site. Qualitative accounts also raised concerns about unequal benefit distribution, consultation, transparency, and exclusion.	Economic interests are positively associated with community participation. The qualitative evidence provides contextual insight into how access to and distribution of economic benefits may shape residents' experiences of participation.

Source: Research Data (2021).
Note: β = standardized path coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination. Quantitative findings are based on PLS-SEM, while qualitative explanations are derived from interviews and focus-group discussions.

The quantitative relationships summarized in Table 8 are visually presented in the structural model shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3:
Structural model of the influence of economic interests on community participation.



Source: Research Data (2021), SEM-PLS Output.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the influence of economic interests on community participation in cultural heritage management at Kilwa Kisiwani World Heritage Site, Tanzania. The findings revealed that employment and income significantly enhanced community economic interests, while economic interests, in turn, positively influenced participation in heritage management activities. These results support the central proposition of Social Exchange Theory (SET), which argues that individuals are more likely to support collective initiatives when the perceived benefits outweigh the associated costs (Blau, 1964; Ap, 1992). The findings therefore reinforce the importance of economic benefits in shaping community engagement with heritage management.

The study found that employment opportunities generated through heritage tourism significantly influenced economic interests among residents. Heritage-related activities such as tour guiding, transportation services, handicraft production, conservation work, accommodation services, and vending provided important livelihood opportunities for

community members. In a context such as Kilwa Kisiwani, where formal employment opportunities remain limited, these activities represent valuable sources of income and economic security. Consequently, residents who benefited from heritage-related employment developed stronger economic interests in the preservation and management of heritage resources. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have identified tourism-related employment as an important driver of positive community attitudes toward conservation and tourism development (Andereck et al., 2005; Mbaiwa, 2011; Mensah et al., 2023). Similarly, Ashley and Roe (2002) and Musavengane and Kloppers (2020) observed that heritage tourism creates alternative livelihood opportunities that increase local dependence on and support for heritage resources.

Nevertheless, the qualitative findings revealed that access to employment opportunities was not always equitable. Several respondents reported that women and young people often faced barriers in accessing more rewarding tourism-related jobs, while opportunities were sometimes perceived to favour individuals with personal connections or social influence. These findings suggest that employment opportunities alone may not guarantee broad-based community participation if recruitment processes are perceived as unfair. Similar concerns regarding unequal access to tourism benefits have been reported in other tourism destinations in Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa (Lwoga, 2017; Mbaiwa, 2017). Thus, while employment contributes positively to economic interests, its ability to foster long-term participation may depend on transparent and inclusive access mechanisms.

Income emerged as the strongest predictor of economic interests in the study. This finding suggests that community members place considerable value on the direct financial benefits derived from heritage-related activities. Income earned through tourism-related enterprises supported household needs such as food security, healthcare, education expenses, and small-scale business investments. For many residents, heritage tourism functions as an important livelihood diversification strategy that reduces economic vulnerability. The strong influence of income observed in this study is consistent with findings from UNESCO World Heritage destinations and other heritage tourism contexts where tourism-generated revenues have been shown to strengthen local support for conservation initiatives (Biddulph, 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023; Cerisola et al., 2024; Galluccio, 2024).

The stronger influence of income compared to employment may reflect the fact that employment opportunities at Kilwa Kisiwani are often seasonal, temporary, or limited in number, whereas income directly affects household welfare and living standards. Residents may therefore evaluate heritage-related opportunities primarily in terms of their actual financial returns rather than simply the availability of jobs. This finding highlights the importance of considering not only employment creation but also the quality and economic value of employment opportunities when designing community-based heritage management strategies.

The present findings are also consistent with evidence from heritage destinations beyond Africa, where economic incentives have been shown to encourage community participation in heritage conservation. For example, studies in Italy and other European heritage sites found that employment opportunities generated through museums and cultural tourism strengthened residents' support for heritage conservation by improving household livelihoods (Galluccio, 2024). Similarly, research conducted in European rural heritage destinations demonstrated that income generated through heritage-based enterprises and cultural tourism enhanced local commitment to conservation initiatives by increasing the perceived economic value of heritage resources (Cerisola et al., 2024). Comparable findings have also been reported in Asian heritage destinations, where tourism-related employment and income positively influenced residents' willingness to participate in heritage protection and sustainable tourism development (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023). These international studies reinforce the argument that economic incentives constitute an important mechanism for fostering community participation across diverse heritage contexts.

Despite the positive contribution of tourism income, the qualitative findings revealed concerns regarding unequal benefit distribution. Some respondents perceived that tourism revenues were concentrated among a small group of individuals, while many community members remained excluded from profitable opportunities. Such perceptions are important because they indicate that economic benefits can encourage participation for some residents while generating dissatisfaction among others. Similar challenges of elite capture, unequal benefit-sharing, and exclusion have been documented in community-based tourism and heritage management initiatives across Africa (Platteau, 2004; Mbaiwa, 2017). This finding adds an important contextual dimension to the quantitative results by

showing that the economic benefits associated with heritage tourism are not experienced uniformly across the community.

The study further demonstrated that economic interests significantly influenced community participation in heritage management. Respondents who perceived direct economic benefits from heritage resources were more likely to engage in conservation activities, attend meetings, support site protection initiatives, and participate in tourism-related programs. This finding strongly supports the assumptions of Social Exchange Theory and aligns with previous studies showing that perceived benefits enhance local support for conservation and tourism development (Gursoy et al., 2002; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2023; Makoni & Musavengane, 2024). In the context of Kilwa Kisiwani, heritage resources are not viewed solely as cultural assets but also as important economic resources that contribute to household livelihoods. Consequently, residents who derive tangible benefits from heritage are more willing to invest their time and effort in its protection and management.

However, the qualitative findings indicate that economic incentives alone are insufficient to sustain participation. Respondents frequently expressed concerns regarding limited consultation, inadequate transparency, and exclusion from important decision-making processes. These concerns suggest that participation is influenced not only by economic considerations but also by governance-related factors such as trust, accountability, and procedural fairness. This observation is consistent with participatory heritage management literature, which emphasizes that sustainable conservation requires meaningful community involvement in decision-making processes rather than merely the distribution of benefits (Labadi et al., 2021; Waterton & Smith, 2020).

An important theoretical contribution of this study is its extension of Social Exchange Theory within the context of heritage management in developing countries. While SET traditionally emphasizes the exchange of costs and benefits, the qualitative evidence from Kilwa Kisiwani indicates that residents also consider how opportunities and benefits are accessed and distributed. Importantly, these perceptions were not tested as a separate fairness construct in the PLS-SEM model; rather, they emerged from the qualitative component and help explain differences in how economic opportunities are experienced. The study therefore points to

benefit distribution as a potentially important dimension for future extensions and quantitative testing of SET in heritage management.

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings is summarized in Table 8. The joint display distinguishes the statistically tested relationships from the qualitative explanations provided by participants, thereby showing how the two strands of evidence complement one another.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that economic empowerment remains a critical driver of community participation in cultural heritage management at Kilwa Kisiwani. However, the study also highlights that economic incentives operate within broader social and governance conditions. Sustainable heritage management therefore requires attention to economic opportunities alongside transparent governance, inclusive decision-making, and mechanisms that broaden access to heritage-related benefits. These findings are particularly relevant to Kilwa Kisiwani, while their applicability to other heritage destinations should be assessed through comparative research.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined how economic interests, specifically employment and income, affect community participation in cultural heritage management at Kilwa Kisiwani, Tanzania. Guided by social exchange theory and using a mixed-methods approach, the findings showed that employment and income significantly strengthened economic interests, which in turn positively influenced community participation. Income emerged as a stronger predictor than employment ($\beta = 0.613$ vs. $\beta = 0.426$), indicating that direct financial benefits are a key motivation for local communities to engage in heritage management activities.

Despite the positive influence of economic incentives, the study also revealed important challenges related to inequitable benefit distribution, including favouritism, elite capture, and gender exclusion. The qualitative findings further showed that some community members experienced limited access to employment opportunities, tourism income, and decision-making processes. These findings indicate that the presence of economic opportunities does not necessarily translate into broad-based participation when access to those opportunities is uneven.

The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on community-based cultural heritage management by providing empirical evidence

from the underrepresented East African context. It demonstrates that while economic incentives are essential for encouraging participation, they should be complemented by transparent governance, inclusive decision-making, and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms. The quantitative findings establish the positive relationships among employment, income, economic interests, and participation, while the qualitative evidence provides contextual insight into the conditions under which these relationships are experienced by different community groups. These findings have important implications for heritage policies that seek to operationalize community participation as promoted by UNESCO and other international heritage organizations.

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the quantitative analysis was based on 124 respondents from the Kilwa Kisiwani context; therefore, the findings should not be assumed to represent all communities living around heritage sites in Tanzania or elsewhere. Second, the qualitative findings were used to provide contextual explanations of the quantitative relationships, and perceptions concerning unequal access and benefit distribution were not modelled as a separate quantitative construct. Third, the study focused primarily on economic interests, employment, income, and participation; other factors such as governance, cultural values, institutional trust, and social identity may also influence community participation. These limitations provide opportunities for future research to test additional explanatory factors and examine the relationships across multiple heritage sites.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. Heritage authorities and tourism stakeholders should strengthen local employment opportunities through transparent and inclusive recruitment processes, with particular emphasis on women and youth, while investing in capacity-building programs in conservation, tour guiding, hospitality, and cultural entrepreneurship. Mechanisms for equitable distribution of tourism benefits should also be established through community benefit-sharing schemes, local development funds, and support for community-based enterprises to reduce perceptions of inequality.

Furthermore, heritage management institutions should strengthen community involvement in decision-making by creating formal consultation platforms, ensuring local representation in heritage

management committees, and promoting participatory planning processes that enhance trust and collective ownership. Heritage education and awareness programs should also be expanded to improve community understanding of the value of cultural heritage, encourage responsible tourism, and strengthen local stewardship.

These recommendations are primarily relevant to the Kilwa Kisiwani context, where the study identified specific concerns regarding access to employment, tourism income, and participation in decision-making. Their applicability to other heritage destinations should be assessed according to local institutional, economic, and social conditions. Finally, future studies should investigate additional factors influencing community participation, including governance systems, cultural values, social identity, institutional trust, and environmental perceptions, while undertaking comparative studies across different heritage sites in Tanzania and other African countries to improve the generalizability of the findings.

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