# Decolonizing Architectural Memory: Archival Storytelling and Open Knowledge for Post-Colonial Nigeria's Built Heritage

Asuru Lutherking Petercan
River State University

## Abstract

This study suggests a multi-pronged examination of the underappreciated architectural achievements of Nigeria's post-colonial avant-garde using documentary and archival research. Its goal is to convert these results into easily available content for Wikimedia projects, thus bridging the gap between academic architectural histories and the open knowledge movement. To reconstruct architectural narratives influenced by climate, cultural identity, and socio-political changes, the project will examine visual archives, public policy documents, and documentary films focused on individuals who emerged after colonialism and Tropical Modernism. With a special emphasis on African architecture, oral history, and heritage conservation, the initiative will provide Wikimedia Commons uploads, Wikidata entries, and enriched Wikipedia articles. Additionally, it will involve communities of practice in advocacy, training, and knowledge production, including archivists, editors, academics, and GLAM partners. This study supports Wikimedia's dedication to knowledge equity and cultural representation by democratising access to underrepresented architectural haistories and contributing to scholarly discourse.

## Introduction

The contributions of post-colonial architects who operated at the nexus of modernism, cultural identity, and decolonisation have historically been overlooked in international archives and public discourse on architecture in Africa, notably in Nigeria. Because of this disparity, it has been difficult to learn how these individuals impacted regional interpretations of Tropical Modernism, national development narratives, and urban patterns. Their heritage is dispersed over oral histories, local knowledge systems, and inaccessible physical archives; many of these are in danger of going extinct because of neglect or a lack of infrastructure for preservation.

By examining the work of Nigeria's post-colonial architectural vanguard and converting these findings into publicly available formats through Wikimedia platforms, this study fills that gap. It focuses on archival and documentary sources, such as architectural drawings, government documents, and visual media, and emphasises the underutilised value of oral histories in architectural historiography. By bringing these

multi-layered narratives to light, the project reveals the origin of architectural knowledge that has been suppressed or ignored in the past, guaranteeing source transparency and reinforcing local custodianship in knowledge production.

By contesting epistemic hierarchies that have historically privileged Western voices and archives, the study helps decolonise architectural knowledge in addition to rediscovering lost histories. By democratizing access to Africa's architectural legacy and encouraging the decentralisation of power over what is remembered, archived, and shared, it supports Wikimedia's aim of knowledge equity.

As evidenced by the work of individuals like Jane Drew, the project focuses especially on architects who were impacted by or responded to colonial modernist concepts like Tropical Modernism. It investigates how, in the years following independence, Nigerian architects either embraced or rejected these principles, creating a hybrid modernism that is not yet publicly recorded.

**Research Questions:**

1. How did post-colonial Nigerian architects reinterpret or respond to Tropical Modernism within their designs and philosophies?

2. What narratives and insights can be recovered from archival materials, films, and oral histories documenting these figures?

3. How can these insights be effectively translated into open knowledge formats (e.g., Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons, Wikidata) to increase public awareness and scholarly engagement?

4. How can provenance-centred documentation contribute to more ethical, transparent, and locally accountable forms of knowledge decolonisation on Wikimedia platforms?

**Date:** 1st July 2025 - 30th June 2026

## Related work

This study expands on previous research and initiatives about the preservation of architectural history, knowledge decolonisation, and the incorporation of archival information into open knowledge platforms. The preservation of architectural history has been studied in the past, with a focus on collaborative archival approaches, digital tools, and oral histories.

1. **Heritage Archive Preservation through EDMS Automation**

My study on the function of EDMS (Electronic Document Management Systems) automation in heritage archive preservation is a significant example of related work. The management, sustainability, and accessibility of architectural heritage archives can all be enhanced by digital automation, according to this study. The study highlighted the need to develop sustainable and scalable archival systems that guarantee the long-term preservation of both digital and physical assets by utilising technology. Since it guides the procedures for cataloguing and digitising Nigerian architectural history for online platforms such as Wikimedia, this approach directly relates to the project.

2. **Cross-Border Collaboration in Archival Heritage Research**

Cross-Border Collaboration in Archival Heritage Research: A Case Study of Find and Tell

Elsewhere is another important endeavour. Nigeria investigated cross-border cooperative archiving techniques to conserve and disseminate African heritage. To facilitate resource sharing and the development of synergies for wider accessibility, this initiative entailed the exchange of ideas between Nigerian and foreign archive organisations. From the perspective of decolonising knowledge, this initiative sets a significant precedent for the current study by emphasising the necessity of international collaborations in the digital preservation of Nigerian architecture.

### 3. "Architect Onafowokan Michael Olutusen" Article on the CCA Website

Along with my technical study, my piece "Architect Onafowokan Michael Olutusen" explores the life and work of one of Nigeria's first modernist architects and was posted on the website of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA). The essay explores Olutusen's influence on post-colonial Nigerian architecture and emphasises the importance of conserving and recording the works of architects who shaped the nation's architectural identity. Since it illustrates how identifying individual architects can improve our comprehension of post-colonial architectural growth and aid in the decolonisation of architectural history, the insights from this article will serve as the cornerstone of the proposed project.

### 4. Indigenous Knowledge and Tropical Modernism

Previous studies have also looked at how West African modernist architectural methods and indigenous knowledge interact, especially in the context of Tropical Modernism. African architectural design has been impacted by academics such as Jane Drew, who have concentrated on culturally appropriate and climate-responsive design techniques. By recognising and expanding upon these theoretical foundations, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how post-colonial Nigerian architects managed the conflicts between colonial influences, modernity, and cultural legacy.

### 5. Wikimedia Projects and Digital Archiving in Heritage Preservation

One important body of work that is pertinent to the project at hand is the use of Wikimedia platforms for heritage preservation. GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums) network initiatives, especially those about Africa, have underscored the significance of digitising and facilitating access to local history via Wikimedia Commons and Wikidata. In this study, the potential of storytelling as a research tool within the framework of open knowledge platforms will be examined, with a particular focus on Nigerian architectural legacy.

### 6. Storytelling in Architectural Historiography

Lastly, the use of storytelling in architectural historiography is becoming more and more popular as a means of enhancing the accessibility and interest of architectural history. This method places a strong emphasis on the human experiences incorporated into architectural spaces, the cultural significance of particular buildings, and the use of narrative to contextualise architectural design. By combining oral histories with conventional archive research, the proposed project will build on this methodology and produce a more complex and human-centred account of Nigerian architectural history.

# Methods

A multi-method, community-engaged research framework that emphasises storytelling as a methodology and an output will be used for this project. To document, personalise, and publicly share the accomplishments of Nigeria's post-colonial architectural vanguard, the project will combine archival research, oral history, narrative interpretation, and Wikimedia-based dissemination.

### 1.  Archival Research and Documentation

The first step entails locating and examining archive resources, including policy documents, design publications, pictures, and blueprints, that are kept in repositories at regional universities, the British Library, and the National Archives of Nigeria. Materials that show how Nigerian architects interacted with or responded to colonial design paradigms and Tropical Modernism will be highlighted. Provenance shall be meticulously recorded to uphold decolonial knowledge practices, ethical citation, and transparency.

### 2.  Oral Histories and Storytelling

One of the main methods used in this study is storytelling, especially when gathering oral histories. A semi-structured interview method that emphasises lived experience, memory, and personal narrative will be used to collect testimonies from architects, collaborators, apprentices, and impacted communities. By bringing to light information not found in official archives, these oral histories will shed light on the social, cultural, and emotional aspects of architectural practice.

The narratives will influence how historical items are interpreted and placed in context, acting as both data and interpretative lenses. Certain recordings and transcripts will be posted to Wikimedia Commons and summarised or excerpted in Wikipedia articles with participant approval, enabling these stories to spread in easily accessible and community-driven knowledge spaces.

### 3.  Content Analysis and Narrative Interpretation

Archival records and oral interviews will be thematically classified using qualitative analysis to find recurrent themes, such as colonial-era planning influences, Tropical Modernist design adaptations, indigenous material usage, or identity changes following independence. Here, storytelling will serve as a crucial instrument for meaning-making as well as for narration, linking personal and group experiences to more general architectural patterns and sociopolitical changes.

### 4.  Wikimedia Integration and Open Access Outputs

The final phase focuses on translating insights into the Wikimedia ecosystem. This includes:

- creating Wikipedia entries that prioritise contextual depth, biographical detail, and narrative coherence.

- submitting audio and video content to Wikimedia Commons together with provenance information and descriptive metadata.

- constructing organised Wikidata entries that connect individuals, initiatives, organisations, and design components.

By framing the content as a dynamic tale rather than a static fact, the storytelling technique will allow readers, editors, and researchers to interact more deeply.

# Expected output

This project will generate a variety of narrative-rich, open-access research outputs aimed at bridging the gap between public knowledge and scholarly understanding. Wikimedia users, heritage experts, educators, and larger communities interested in architectural history, decolonisation, and digital preservation are the target audience for these products.

**1. Enhanced Wikimedia Content**

- **Wikipedia articles**: 15–20 brand-new or greatly enhanced articles about notable structures, post-colonial Nigerian architects, architectural trends such as Tropical Modernism, and organisations that impacted architectural practice and education.

- **Wikimedia Commons uploads**: a carefully chosen selection of digitally preserved documents, images, audio recordings, and annotated media that are freely licensed and enhanced with provenance and context.

- **Wikidata entries**: organised information about important people, initiatives, resources, schedules, and themes—connected to already-existing objects in many language communities.

Incorporating narrative context into these outputs will guarantee that they are not only educational but also captivating and culturally aware.

**2. Research Publications and Storytelling Essays**

- At least one book chapter or peer-reviewed journal paper discussing the use of storytelling in architectural historiography, with an emphasis on Nigerian design legacies and Tropical Modernism.

- Archival stories and oral histories are brought to life for a general audience through a longform storytelling essay series or digital exhibition, which might be housed on Diff, CCA, or another open cultural platform.

**3. Public Engagement & Open Knowledge Tools**

- A reusable framework for telling tales about architectural heritage in Wikimedia projects that includes templates for interview consent, metadata guidelines, and procedures for incorporating oral histories into Wikidata and Commons.

- In partnership with GLAM partners and Wikimedia affiliates, at least two open webinars or workshops will be held to disseminate findings and instruct others in community-centred documentation.

**4. Network Expansion and Sustainable Practice**

Improved connections with the open culture and Wikimedia GLAM communities, including collaborations with Global GLAM projects and the Heritage Conservation Integration group.

A replicable methodology for documenting disadvantaged architectural history through open-access platforms and narrative.

The initiative will have an impact on the academic, archival, and Wikimedia landscapes because these outputs will not only close significant content shortages but also serve as models for moral, community-based methods of knowledge production.

# Risks

Even if the initiative aims to fill a sizable vacuum in open knowledge and architectural research, there are several hazards and difficulties to take into account. These consist of:

### 1. Limited Access to Archival Materials

Physical or digital limitations may make it difficult to access historical resources from Nigerian institutions or foreign collections, particularly if such items are not digitised or are few because of preservation issues.

Mitigation Strategy: The researcher will make use of existing connections with archives (such as the National Archives of Nigeria and the British Library) and investigate alternative sources, like private collections or digital archives, where resources might be easier to locate. Oral histories will also be used to fill in the gaps in the actual archival record.

### 2. Ethical Challenges with Oral Histories

Ethical considerations must be carefully considered when gathering oral histories, especially regarding consent, privacy, and accurately representing participants' voices. Making sure oral histories are accurately recorded and interpreted is another difficulty.

Mitigation Strategy: The researcher will gather oral histories in accordance with ethical best practices, which include getting written informed consent and giving participants a chance to check and approve their work. There will be explicit policies in place regarding data protection and anonymisation.

### 3. Integration of Diverse Knowledge Forms

It can be difficult to create a coherent and authoritative narrative when combining oral histories, archival research, and digital knowledge sites like Wikipedia. The same events or numbers may occasionally be interpreted differently or conflictingly by various sources.

Mitigation Strategy: The researcher will use an open, inclusive approach that considers a range of viewpoints. To ensure that different points of view are represented while upholding academic rigour, any conflicts will be portrayed as a necessary component of the story.

### 4. Digital Literacy and Accessibility Barriers

Different levels of digital literacy may make it difficult to engage a wide audience with the project's deliverables, particularly in areas with restricted access to technology. Furthermore, the local context of Nigerian architecture might not be familiar to the worldwide audience of the Wikimedia platform.

Method of Mitigation: The researcher will provide training workshops and public webinars to address digital literacy to increase local capacity and encourage broader engagement. To ensure that both broad audiences and professionals can interact with the content, it will be written in an understandable and approachable manner. For a wider worldwide audience, linguistic assistance will also be investigated.

### 5. Sustainability of Open Knowledge Contributions

Given the difficulties in sustaining community support and involvement over the long term, it may be risky to make sure that contributions to

Wikimedia platforms continue to be available and active.

Mitigation Strategy: Throughout the project, the researcher will work with local contributors and Wikimedia volunteers, promoting the development of community-based content management systems. To maintain the impact of the research, project documentation and training materials will also be made available.

# Community impact plan

This project is not simply about increasing scholarly knowledge—it is equally focused on promoting a richer, more inclusive understanding of Nigeria's architectural history and its place in the global narrative of post-colonial architecture. By integrating underrepresented knowledge to the open knowledge ecosystem, the initiative will have far-reaching implications across multiple populations, including architecture professionals, educators, policy makers, students, local communities, and worldwide open knowledge networks.

## 1. Engaging Local Communities and Practitioners

Preservation and knowledge of architectural heritage, especially the legacy of post-colonial modernism, are of great interest in Nigeria. Through workshops, webinars, and local knowledge-sharing events, this project will actively engage local architects, students, and heritage professionals. Along with offering instruction in digital tools for Wikimedia platform contributions, these initiatives will increase awareness of the value of recording and conserving local architectural history. The project will guarantee that the outcomes are durable and culturally relevant by incorporating local practitioners and experts in the content production and evaluation process.

## 2. Impact on Educational Institutions and Policy

Academic institutions in Nigeria and throughout West Africa would benefit from the rise in prominence of significant architects and architectural trends. The dissemination of study results would provide educators with current resources to improve instruction and learning about Nigerian architectural history. The project will also encourage ongoing discussions about the need for legislative changes related to sustainable architecture, cultural preservation, and public access to historical documents. The project will fight for stronger frameworks to protect architectural heritage by interacting with lawmakers.

## 3. Wikimedia and Open Knowledge Communities

This project will help expand African architectural information on Wikimedia platforms worldwide, making sure that Nigeria's influence on post-colonial architectural traditions is accurately reflected. The initiative will contribute to decolonizing the portrayal of African architecture by contributing in-depth essays, photographs, and oral histories to Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons, making it more widely available. In order to keep the project's outputs current and incorporated into a wider network of free knowledge, wikimedia volunteers—especially those in the African and architectural communities—will be urged to accept and expand upon this work.

## 4. Public Outreach and Advocacy

The project's storytelling technique guarantees that the results will be understood by people outside of the academic community. Through the creation of multimedia storytelling exhibitions, accessible webinars, and open discussions on social media, the initiative will

promote a wider conversation about modern architecture and heritage protection. Furthermore, the project will broaden its scope and establish further collaborations for upcoming advocacy campaigns by working with groups such as the Global GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums) network.

### 5. Long-Term Impact on Digital Preservation Practices

Long-term effects of this research will also be felt in the fields of architecture and historical digital preservation. The project will establish a standard for future digital preservation initiatives by showcasing Wikimedia's potential as an archival platform for architectural history, especially in areas with restricted access to conventional archival infrastructures. Additionally, it will help create a model for community-driven, cooperative knowledge preservation and storytelling in the architectural sector.

## Evaluation

To ensure this project's efficacy, longevity, and addition to academic and public knowledge, evaluation of its effects is essential. The evaluation of the project will concentrate on gauging involvement, outputs, and how well the research achieves its goals of promoting open knowledge, conserving architectural heritage, and influencing practice and policy.

### 1. Output Evaluation

The project's main outputs—improved Wikipedia articles, Wikimedia Commons uploads, and oral history interviews—will be assessed for accuracy, completeness, and engagement. The following will be used to gauge success:

a. The quantity of updated or new Wikipedia entries about Tropical Modernism and Nigerian architecture.

b. The amount and calibre of multimedia (such as images, blueprints, and recordings of oral histories) that are added to Wikimedia Commons.

c. The establishment of Wikidata entries for significant architectural personalities, undertakings, and subjects.

d. The quantity of page views, downloads, and community interactions (e.g., revisions, conversations, citations) is are example of engagement metrics.

### 2. Community and Public Engagement

The following metrics will be used to assess the project's capacity to involve a wide range of stakeholders, from local communities to viewers throughout the world:

a. webinar and workshop participation, including the quantity of participants and the range of their regional or professional backgrounds.

b. Get input from attendees of training sessions and public events to gauge the importance and impact of the information imparted.

c. cooperation and alliances formed with regional heritage organizations, academic institutions, architectural associations, and legislators.

d. The extent to which the initiative stimulates current conversations regarding sustainable heritage preservation and its public visibility in the media or in scholarly discourse.

### 3. Policy and Institutional Impact

One of the major goals of this initiative is to impact public and policy advocacy about the preservation of architectural heritage. The accomplishment of this target will be measured through:

a. Policy changes or new activities connected to architectural conservation or historical protection that are directly informed by the project's findings and outreach.

b. Dissemination of project findings in relevant policy discussions, academic conferences, and professional networks (e.g., urban planning, heritage conservation, architecture).

c. forming long-term partnerships with Nigerian government agencies, institutions, or foreign groups that support architectural heritage protection.

### 4. Long-Term Sustainability and Knowledge Sharing

Long-term sustainability will be a crucial component of evaluation in addition to the project's immediate results:

Community members' ongoing contributions to Wikimedia platforms show that the knowledge created is still being developed and expanded upon.

Reusability of the narrative paradigm for additional heritage preservation initiatives, such as creating freely accessible materials for educators, heritage practitioners, and other academics.

The development of continuous knowledge-sharing procedures in the open culture and Wikimedia communities, guaranteeing that the project's spirit will continue to influence and guide subsequent initiatives.

### 5. Self-Reflection and Adaptation

Additionally, the study team will periodically reflect on itself, making any necessary adjustments to the strategy and techniques. This will involve holding frequent team meetings to discuss issues and evaluate progress.

monthly progress reports that monitor output quality and milestones.

Stakeholder feedback loops to learn more about the accessibility of resources and the effectiveness of community participation.

The degree to which the project improves access to underrepresented histories, fortifies the open knowledge infrastructure, and impacts sustainable preservation methods for architectural heritage will also be considered indicators of success in addition to the results generated.

## Budget

🟩 Research Fund Budget Template

## References

Unable to meet the deadline but willing to provide references if given an opportunity