



Cultural Institutions as Spaces to Promote Human Rights, Social Justice and Social Cohesion in Limpopo, South Africa

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Abstract

This study examines the role of cultural institutions in promoting human rights, advancing social justice, and fostering social cohesion, with a particular focus on practices in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Through a qualitative document analysis methodology, this research investigates how museums, libraries, heritage sites, and cultural centres serve as transformative spaces for social change. The study employs purposive sampling of institutional documents, policy frameworks, exhibition catalogues, and digital archives from cultural institutions in the Venda region and the broader Limpopo Province, spanning the period from 2015 to 2025. Findings reveal that cultural institutions function as informal educators on human rights, provide platforms for marginalised voices, and create shared spaces that bridge social divisions. The analysis identifies key strategies, including decolonisation of collections, community-led curation, multilingual accessibility initiatives, and truth-telling about historical injustices. However, challenges persist, including resource constraints, the tension between neutrality and advocacy, and the gap between tokenistic representation and genuine institutional transformation. Drawing on examples from the Vhembe District and other Limpopo institutions, this study demonstrates that effective cultural work requires sustained community engagement, power-sharing, and recognition of indigenous knowledge systems. The research contributes to scholarship on cultural institutions in post-apartheid South Africa and offers practical recommendations for museum professionals, librarians, and cultural workers seeking to advance social transformation through their institutions.

Introduction

Cultural institutions occupy a distinctive position in contemporary society, functioning at the intersection of education, heritage preservation, and social transformation (Sandell, 2016). In South Africa, a nation still grappling with the legacy of apartheid and ongoing struggles for social justice, these institutions carry particular significance. Museums, libraries, heritage sites, and cultural centres are not merely repositories of artefacts or information; they are active participants in the construction of national identity, the negotiation of historical memory, and the advancement of democratic values (Coombes, 2003; Marschall, 2010).

Limpopo Province, located in the northernmost region of South Africa, presents a compelling context for examining the social role of cultural institutions. Home to diverse communities, including the Vhavenda, VaTsonga, Bapedi, and others, the province embodies both the cultural richness and the socioeconomic challenges characteristic of post-apartheid South Africa. The Venda region, in



particular, possesses a distinctive cultural heritage expressed through sacred sites such as Lake Fundudzi and Phiphidi Falls, traditional leadership structures, artistic traditions including pottery and woodcarving, and indigenous knowledge systems that have survived colonial and apartheid-era suppression (Maumela, 2019).

Despite their potential, cultural institutions in Limpopo face significant challenges. Historical underfunding, the legacy of apartheid-era cultural policies that privileged certain narratives whilst marginalising others, and ongoing resource constraints limit their capacity to fulfil their social missions. Furthermore, questions remain about how effectively these institutions promote human rights, advance social justice, and build social cohesion in practice rather than merely in policy statements (Rassool, 2022).

Whilst cultural institutions are increasingly positioned as agents of social change, there is a lack of empirical evidence examining how institutions in under-resourced, historically marginalised regions operationalise this mission. Specifically, scholarship on cultural institutions in South Africa has primarily concentrated on major metropolitan museums in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, leaving provincial institutions understudied (Corsane, 2004; Minkley & Rassool, 2018).

The primary research objectives are: To examine how cultural institutions in Limpopo Province, particularly in the Venda region, promote human rights through their programmes, exhibitions, and policies, to analyse strategies employed by these institutions to advance social justice, including efforts to address historical injustices and amplify marginalised voices, investigate the role of cultural institutions in building social cohesion across diverse communities in a context of ongoing social and economic inequality, identify challenges and constraints that limit the effectiveness of cultural institutions as agents of social transformation and develop evidence-based recommendations for strengthening the social impact of cultural institutions in similar contexts.

This research makes significant contributions to the scholarship in several ways. First, it extends geographical coverage of cultural institution studies beyond metropolitan centres to provincial contexts where resources are scarcer but social needs are often more acute. Second, it provides empirical documentation of indigenous cultural institutions and practices in the Venda region, contributing to the decolonisation of museum and heritage studies. Third, it provides practical insights for cultural workers, policymakers, and community organisations seeking to harness the power of cultural institutions for social transformation. Finally, it contributes to global conversations about the social role of cultural institutions, demonstrating both universal principles and context-specific adaptations.

Literature Review

Contemporary scholarship positions cultural institutions not as neutral preservers of heritage, but as institutions that actively participate in social transformation (Sandel, 2016; Janes & Sandell, 2019). This "new museology" paradigm rejects the notion that museums and similar institutions can remain detached from social issues (Vergo, 1989; Marstine, 2011). Vergo's foundational work established that traditional museology's focus on methods and procedures obscured deeper questions about purpose and social responsibility. Marstine extended this critique to argue that museums must actively engage with contested narratives and marginalised voices, rather than presenting authoritative, singular histories. Three theoretical approaches inform this study: critical heritage studies, which examine how heritage is contested and deployed (Smith, 2006); human rights education theory, exploring informal learning spaces (Flowers, 2000; Tibbitts, 2017); and social capital theory, which explains how institutions build community networks (Putnam, 2000). Tibbitts' pedagogy of human rights education distinguishes between values-and-awareness models, accountability models, and transformational



models, each offering different pathways for cultural institutions to engage visitors with rights-based content.

In South Africa, institutions such as the Apartheid Museum have pioneered the memorialisation of human rights (Coombes, 2003; Marschall, 2010), although Rassool (2022) notes that resource concentration in Gauteng marginalises provincial institutions. Coombes' analysis demonstrates how the Apartheid Museum negotiates tensions between international human rights discourse and local memory practices, whilst Marschall explores how memorial landscapes shape collective memory and national identity in the post-apartheid context. Rassool's critique highlights how geographic and economic inequalities in cultural infrastructure perpetuate the marginalisation of rural and provincial communities, limiting their capacity to participate in national heritage dialogues and creating hierarchies of remembrance that mirror apartheid-era spatial segregation. The decolonisation movement encompasses repatriation, interpretive revision, staff diversification, and power redistribution (Onciul, 2015; Lynch & Alberti, 2010). Onciul's collaborative museology framework emphasises shared authority and co-creation between institutions and source communities, challenging traditional curatorial control, whilst Lynch and Alberti document practical strategies for institutional transformation that extend beyond symbolic gestures to substantive shifts in decision-making power. Maumela (2019) demonstrates that indigenous knowledge systems in Venda offer alternative heritage frameworks that challenge Western paradigms, revealing how oral traditions, spiritual practices, and community-based custodianship present fundamentally different epistemologies of heritage preservation, which resist incorporation into conventional institutional structures.

Research on social cohesion in South Africa yields mixed results. Some institutions create bridging capital across divisions, whilst others reproduce hierarchies (Meskell & Scheermeyer, 2008). Meskell and Scheermeyer's examination of World Heritage sites in South Africa reveals how international recognition can paradoxically reinforce exclusionary practices by privileging expert knowledge over community participation, and how tourism development around heritage sites often benefits economic elites whilst displacing local populations, thereby deepening rather than bridging social divisions. Their work suggests that institutional intentions towards social cohesion may be undermined by structural inequalities embedded in funding models, governance structures, and professional norms that favour particular forms of cultural capital. Libraries function as democratic spaces, providing universal access and opportunities for civic engagement (Kranich, 2001; Hart & Nassimbeni, 2013). Kranich's conceptualisation of libraries as cornerstones of democracy emphasises their role in ensuring information equity, fostering public discourse, and supporting civic literacy functions, particularly critical in societies with histories of information control and censorship. Hart and Nassimbeni's research in South African public libraries document how these institutions serve as crucial community hubs in under-resourced areas, offering not only information access but also social infrastructure for education, employment assistance, and community organising, though they note persistent challenges, including uneven resource distribution, infrastructure deficits, and the digital divide that limit libraries' transformative potential.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative document analysis grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, systematically examining 127 institutional documents from Limpopo cultural institutions spanning the period from 2015 to 2025. Using thematic coding informed by grounded theory, the research analyses institutional reports, exhibition catalogues, policy frameworks, and digital archives to understand how museums, libraries, heritage sites, and cultural centres approach human rights education and social cohesion.



Research Design and Rationale

This study employs qualitative document analysis, a systematic examination of written and visual materials to generate empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009; Altheide et al., 2008). Bowen characterises document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents that requires data to be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. In contrast, Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider (2008) emphasise the method's capacity to reveal institutional logics and organisational culture through the artefacts that institutions produce. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, the research treats documents not as neutral records but as socially constructed texts shaped by the institutional contexts in which they emerge (Prior, 2003). Prior's approach to documents-in-action recognises that institutional texts simultaneously reflect and constitute organisational realities, serving as traces of decision-making processes, manifestations of power relations, and instruments through which institutions project identity and legitimacy to various stakeholders.

Data Sources and Sampling

Purposive sampling selected documents illuminating institutional practices related to human rights, social justice, and social cohesion (Patton, 2015). Patton's logic of purposive sampling emphasises selecting information-rich cases that offer insights central to the research purpose, rather than pursuing empirical generalisations. This approach is particularly well-suited for understanding how specific cultural institutions negotiate complex social mandates within a particular provincial context. Data sources include institutional documents, policy frameworks, exhibition catalogues, annual reports, website content, educational materials, and digitised archives from Limpopo cultural institutions, spanning the period from 2015 to 2025. This temporal range encompasses the decade following the Rhodes Must Fall movement and broader decolonisation debates, allowing for an analysis of institutional responses to pressures for transformation, whilst also capturing the pre-COVID pandemic and post-pandemic periods that shaped institutional operations and priorities.

Primary institutions examined include:

1. Mapungubwe Museum and Interpretation Centre
2. University of Venda Art Gallery and Cultural Centre (Thohoyandou)
3. Dzata Ruins Heritage Site (Vhembe District)
4. Provincial heritage sites (Lake Fundudzi, sacred forests)
5. Municipal libraries (Polokwane, Thohoyandou, Makhado)
6. Limpopo Provincial Archives
7. Community cultural centres in rural villages
8. Digital heritage documentation projects

These institutions represent diverse typologies of museums, heritage sites, libraries, archives, and community centres operating at different scales from provincial flagship institutions to village-level facilities, encompassing both formalised state institutions and community-based initiatives. This diversity enables analysis of how institutional type, governance structure, resource availability, and community relationships shape approaches to social cohesion and human rights education.

Total dataset: 127 documents comprising 43 institutional reports, 31 exhibition catalogues, 28 academic publications, 17 media articles, and 8 digital heritage collections. Documents were selected based on relevance to research questions, accessibility, and capacity to illuminate institutional practices, policies, and public presentations. Inclusion criteria prioritised materials produced by or about the focal institutions that addressed themes of heritage interpretation, community engagement, social justice, human rights, or social cohesion. Exclusion criteria eliminated purely administrative or



financial documents that lacked substantive content related to the institutional mission and programming.

Data Analysis

Analysis was conducted using thematic coding informed by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory approach recognises the researcher's role in constructing rather than discovering themes, acknowledging that analytical categories emerge from the interaction between data and the researcher's interpretive framework. In contrast, Corbin and Strauss provide systematic procedures for moving from raw data to conceptual abstraction. Initial open coding identified recurring patterns, followed by axial coding that explored relationships between categories, and selective coding that synthesised overarching narratives (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding involved a line-by-line examination to identify concepts and assign preliminary labels to text segments. Axial coding then reassembled the data by establishing connections between categories, identifying conditions, contexts, and consequences. Selective coding ultimately integrated categories around core themes that explain institutional approaches to social cohesion. Analysis used NVivo software supplemented by manual close reading, attending to both manifest and latent content (Berg, 2001).

Results

How do cultural institutions in a resource-constrained province navigate the complex terrain of human rights education? The evidence from Limpopo reveals institutions not as passive repositories but as active interpreters of contested histories, each developing distinct approaches shaped by their unique mandates, community relationships, and historical contexts.

Human Rights Education Through Cultural Institutions

Analysis reveals Limpopo cultural institutions engage with human rights education through historical documentation, consciousness-raising exhibitions, dialogue spaces, and universal access initiatives. The University of Venda maintains an oral history archive documenting the 1986 Venda uprising against homeland authorities. The Dzata Ruins have been reinterpreted to highlight indigenous governance systems, challenging colonial narratives and emphasising precolonial legal systems and women's councils (Maumela, 2019).

Reinterpreting Stone and Memory: Dzata Ruins as Decolonial Pedagogy

Dzata Ruins, situated in the Nzhelele Valley of the Vhembe District, presents a compelling case study of how heritage sites can challenge colonial narratives through reinterpretation. The site comprises the stone-walled capital of the Venda kingdom, which flourished from approximately 1700 to 1898 before it was conquered by colonial powers. For decades, colonial and early apartheid-era interpretations diminished Dzata's significance, attributing the sophisticated stone architecture to external influences and portraying precolonial African governance as primitive and chaotic—narratives that conveniently justified European domination.



[Diagram from the free Cyclopaedia pictures]

Recent reinterpretation work, documented in exhibition materials and guided tour scripts, tells a profoundly different story. The stone enclosures are now understood as architectural expressions of a complex political system that featured checks on chiefly power through councils of elders, specialised advisors, and, importantly, women's councils, which wielded significant authority in matters affecting families and social welfare. Tour guides, many drawn from the local Ramabulana clan, which traces its lineage to Dzata's rulers, explain how the *khoro* (central court) functioned as a democratic space where commoners could petition rulers directly, and how the spatial organisation of the settlement reflected sophisticated principles of governance, security, and social organisation.

This reinterpretation serves multiple pedagogical purposes. It directly challenges colonial-era dismissals of African political sophistication, presenting concrete architectural and organisational evidence of indigenous governance systems. It highlights women's political participation in precolonial contexts, implicitly questioning contemporary gender inequalities. Perhaps most significantly, it provides community members, particularly youth, with historical anchors for pride and identity that counter persistent narratives of African inferiority. As Maumela (2019) demonstrates, these indigenous governance frameworks offer not merely historical interest but alternative political philosophies relevant to contemporary debates about democracy, leadership accountability, and community participation.

Table 1: Human Rights Themes in Limpopo Cultural Institutions (2015-2025)

Theme	Frequency	Primary Institutions	Key Approaches
Apartheid history	18 documents	Provincial archives, UNIVEN	Oral histories, photo exhibitions
Indigenous rights	15 documents	Heritage sites, cultural centres	Sacred site protection
Women's rights	12 documents	Libraries, art galleries	Feminist art exhibitions
Land rights	11 documents	Mapungubwe, community museums	Restitution narratives
Children's rights	9 documents	Public libraries	Literacy programmes
LGBTQ+ inclusion	4 documents	Urban libraries	Pride programming

Table 1 presents human rights themes in Limpopo cultural institutions between 2015 and 2025. Universal access initiatives show uneven progress. Urban libraries have implemented accommodations for people with disabilities, but rural branches often lack these facilities due to



infrastructure constraints. Economic accessibility improved through free admission at most public sites, though Mapungubwe charges fees, excluding impoverished communities. Libraries offer free internet access, which is particularly crucial in areas where household connectivity is limited (Hart & Nassimbeni, 2013).

Social Justice and Decolonisation Strategies

Analysis identifies four primary social justice strategies: confronting historical injustices, amplifying marginalised voices, redistributing institutional power, and challenging systemic inequality. Mapungubwe Museum has undertaken significant decolonisation work, reinterpreting collections to challenge colonial narratives about African civilisation. Exhibition materials now emphasise the sophisticated trade networks, metallurgy, and social stratification of the ancient Mapungubwe kingdom (Huffman, 2005; Matenga, 2011).

Beyond Label Changes: Mapungubwe's Epistemological Shift

Mapungubwe Museum's decolonisation work extends far beyond the superficial relabelling that characterises many institutional "transformation" initiatives. The institution has undertaken what might be termed an epistemological restructuring, a fundamental rethinking of how knowledge is produced, whose voices carry authority, and what narratives receive institutional endorsement. Exhibition materials now centre African agency and sophistication in ways that earlier displays actively obscured. The famous Mapungubwe gold rhinoceros, previously presented primarily as an archaeological curiosity demonstrating technical skill, is now contextualised within sophisticated discussions of the kingdom's international trade networks that connected interior southern Africa to Swahili coast merchants, Indian Ocean maritime routes, and ultimately Chinese and Persian markets between the 10th and 13th centuries. Display panels explain metallurgical techniques using terminology from African material science rather than exclusively European frameworks. Social stratification is discussed not as "primitive inequality" but as a complex class formation comparable to those found in medieval European or Asian societies of the same period.

Table 2: Decolonisation Initiatives in Limpopo Cultural Institutions

Initiative Type	Examples	Institutions	Implementation Status
Collection reinterpretation	Revised exhibition labels, African-centred narratives	Mapungubwe, UNIVEN Gallery	Ongoing
Language justice	Tshivenda/Sepedi labels and programmes	Regional museums, libraries	Partial implementation
Community curation	Elder-led heritage walks, village exhibitions	Community cultural centres	Pilot projects
Staff diversification	Hiring from local communities	Provincial institutions	Limited progress
Sacred site protocols	Traditional authority consultation, restricted access	Lake Fundudzi, Phiphidi Falls	Established

Table 2 shows decolonisation initiatives in Limpopo cultural institutions. Sacred site management demonstrates innovative approaches to integrating indigenous knowledge. Lake Fundudzi, sacred to Vhavenda people, operates under protocols developed collaboratively between provincial heritage authorities and traditional leadership. Access is restricted during sacred periods, and visitors must adhere to cultural protocols, including removing their shoes and refraining from photography in certain areas (Maumela, 2019). This represents genuine power-sharing rather than tokenistic consultation.



Social Cohesion Mechanisms

Cultural institutions build social cohesion through three primary mechanisms: creating shared spaces, fostering intercultural understanding, and strengthening social networks. Public libraries, particularly in townships and rural areas, function as democratic third spaces where diverse residents gather (Audunson et al., 2019). Observation of library programming reveals regular interaction across generational, linguistic, and socioeconomic lines through reading clubs, homework help sessions, and computer literacy classes. Table 3 reveals that programme frequency varies considerably, from weekly storytelling sessions to quarterly community dialogues. The programming detailed suggests a strategic approach to social cohesion that balances frequency with target audience’s needs

Table 3: Social Cohesion Programming in Limpopo Institutions

Programme Type	Target Audience	Frequency	Reported Outcomes
Multilingual storytelling	Children and families	Weekly	Language preservation, cross-cultural exposure
Heritage festivals	General public	Annual	Celebration of cultural diversity
Intergenerational programmes	Youth and elders	Monthly	Traditional knowledge transfer
Community dialogues	Adults	Quarterly	Discussion of local issues
Digital literacy training	Adults, unemployed youth	Ongoing	Skills development, job seeking

Discussion

This study reveals that cultural institutions in Limpopo Province serve as spaces of creative resilience, engaging meaningfully with human rights, social justice, and social cohesion, despite operating under severe resource constraints. These institutions have developed innovative strategies to extend their reach and impact, forging strategic partnerships across sectors, mobilising volunteer labour from invested communities, and harnessing digital technologies to transcend geographic boundaries. Yet their achievements unfold against a backdrop of persistent structural challenges, chronic underfunding, geographic isolation from metropolitan centres, and severely limited professional development opportunities that fundamentally constrain their transformative potential.

The Venda case offers particularly compelling evidence for contact zone theory (Pratt, 1991; Clifford, 1997). Sacred site management at Lake Fundudzi and Phiphidi Falls exemplifies genuine contact zones where indigenous and Western knowledge systems engage in productive dialogue rather than colonial imposition. Traditional authorities retain meaningful decision-making power over access protocols, ritual calendars, and interpretation narratives, a stark contrast to the extractive relationships that characterise most museum-community engagements. Yet this model remains exceptional rather than normative. Most institutions continue to operate within Western museological frameworks, despite rhetorical commitments to decolonisation (Maumela, 2019), revealing the profound difficulty of decolonising institutions whose very architecture embodies colonial power relations (Mbembe, 2015).

International comparisons illuminate both possibilities and constraints. Research on cultural institutions in indigenous communities in Canada and Australia suggests that genuine decolonisation requires not only the transfer of consultation rights but also the actual governance authority to be given to indigenous peoples (Phillips, 2011; Lonetree, 2012). The Venda examples align with these international best practices, but their exceptionality within South Africa suggests systemic barriers to replication. By contrast, studies of post-conflict museum work in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina reveal that institutions face similar neutrality paradoxes in addressing contentious histories (Sodaro,



2018), suggesting that this tension transcends the South African context and represents a fundamental challenge for heritage institutions operating in divided societies.

The social cohesion work undertaken by Limpopo libraries and community cultural centres demonstrates what Putnam (2000) terms "bridging social capital," connections across social divides that can foster trust and cooperation. Regular programming creates what Oldenburg (1989) calls "third places," neutral ground where diverse community members encounter one another outside the structured roles of work and home. However, the effectiveness of this bridging work is confronted with significant limitations. Structural drivers of division, entrenched economic inequality, persistent spatial segregation inherited from apartheid planning, and intensifying political polarisation operate at scales that exceed any single institution's capacity to address. This finding resonates with critiques of social cohesion discourse in South Africa, which argue that emphasising interpersonal contact without addressing material inequality risks obscuring rather than resolving fundamental injustices (Bénil-Gbaffou, 2008; Dawson, 2014). Effective cohesion work thus requires not institutional isolation but integration with broader social programmes addressing housing, employment, land reform, and educational inequality.

Challenges and Constraints

Four interconnected challenges emerged as particularly constraining: resource scarcity, neutrality tensions, measurement difficulties, and the persistent gap between decolonisation rhetoric and institutional practice. Chronic underfunding creates cascading effects throughout institutional operations, limiting not only programming and infrastructure development but also staffing levels to the point where many institutions operate with skeleton crews. This understaffing restricts capacity for sustained community engagement and specialised programming, precisely the activities most crucial for rights education and social cohesion work. Rural branch libraries face particularly acute challenges, often lacking basic amenities including reliable electricity, which fundamentally compromises their ability to provide digital services that might otherwise help overcome geographic isolation (Stilwell, 2016).

Limitations

The findings of this study must be interpreted within several important constraints. The research relied primarily on document analysis and institutional websites, which privileged official institutional narratives over community perspectives. Whilst this approach provided valuable insight into how institutions present themselves and their missions, it necessarily limited understanding of how communities actually experience and evaluate these institutions. Future research employing ethnographic methods, extended observation of programming, interviews with diverse community members, and participatory action research would provide crucial triangulation and potentially reveal gaps between institutional intentions and community impacts.

Geographic scope presents another limitation. Although the study examined institutions across Limpopo's five districts, resource constraints prevented exhaustive coverage of all heritage sites, museums, and libraries. Smaller, informal community-based initiatives operating outside formal institutional structures are likely to have gone undocumented, yet these grassroots efforts may represent particularly innovative approaches to heritage work and social cohesion. The study's focus on formally constituted institutions thus potentially underestimates the full scope of heritage activity in the province.

Conclusion

This study reveals cultural institutions in Limpopo Province as vital, if beleaguered, agents of transformation, spaces where human rights education, social justice advocacy, and social cohesion



converge despite persistent under-resourcing. These institutions have developed remarkably diverse strategies to fulfil their missions: they preserve contested histories through careful documentation, advance decolonisation through reimagined exhibitions and collection practices, amplify marginalised voices through community-led curation, and cultivate shared public spaces where diverse communities can encounter one another. The Venda region stands out as particularly instructive, offering compelling examples of how indigenous knowledge systems can be integrated into institutional practice and how sacred sites can be managed in ways that fundamentally challenge Western museological traditions, which have long dominated the field.

Yet beneath these achievements lie formidable obstacles that constrain institutional potential. Chronic resource scarcity fundamentally limits both the scope and quality of programming, forcing institutions to operate in a perpetual state of compromise between ambition and capacity. More insidiously, institutions find themselves caught in a neutrality paradox, an ideological bind that produces institutional paralysis precisely when urgent social issues demand timely, principled responses. The difficulty of measuring cultural impact compounds these challenges, obscuring institutional achievements and undermining efforts to advocate convincingly for increased funding. Perhaps most troubling is the persistent gap between decolonisation rhetoric and actual practice, a disconnect that exposes just how difficult it remains to transform institutions whose very foundations rest on colonial epistemologies and power structures.

Future research should employ mixed methods combining document analysis with ethnographic observation, community interviews, and participatory action research. Longitudinal studies tracking institutional change over five to ten years would illuminate transformation processes, identify successful strategies, and distinguish temporary projects from sustainable initiatives. Comparative research examining cultural institutions across multiple provinces would reveal how provincial contexts shape institutional capacity and community impact, whilst international comparisons with post-conflict societies and indigenous communities globally would situate South African experiences within broader debates about heritage, memory, and social transformation.

Cultural institutions in Limpopo Province, despite operating under constraints that would defeat less committed organisations, demonstrate that transformative social work remains possible in resource-scarce environments. Their experiences offer valuable lessons for similar contexts globally: meaningful change requires sustained community engagement over years and decades, not temporary projects; power-sharing demands genuine redistribution of decision-making authority, not merely consultative mechanisms; and effective heritage work must centre indigenous knowledge systems rather than treating them as supplements to Western paradigms.

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