

# Cultural Economy: Is Culture at the Center of a City's Economy?

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**Abstract** Every part of a city's economy is determined by culture. The only challenge is that conceptualization of culture differs between its users and this is making it difficult for the concept to be assigned an economic value. This study was guided by Planning, Functional and Normative theories adopted from Kevin Lynch work. The study was conducted within Kisumu County (Kenya). Observation and desk review were used as methods for data collection. Being that culture is abroad concept, in this study, the authors try to show case if culture is truly at the center of city economy with special referencing to characteristics of culture. This gives an indication on the role that culture plays in building Kisumu city economy such as creating unique markets and space designs, affecting distribution of goods and services, and expressing power and authority over goods and services. This is show cased through combining characteristics of culture (Culture is organic, Super-Organic; Overt, Covert; Explicit, Implicit; Ideal, Manifest; Stable yet changing; shared, learned; Symbolic) to physical localities (Dunga Beach, Jomo Kenyatta Sports Ground, and Ranalo Foods-Kosewe) within Kisumu City. With the connection between characteristics of culture and physical localities in Kisumu city, it is therefore evident that truly, culture is at the center of Kisumu city's economy and if it is not embraced, it create a collapse to the city's economy. Future studies needs to interrogate the various forms of culture, and their effect to the city economy.

**Keywords** Center, City, Culture, Cultural Economy

## 1. Introduction

What do you think of when you hear the word culture? You may have a chain of ideas that comes to your mind and in reflection to this; it is likely that defining culture is not an easy task. The difficulty of understanding the concept of culture stems from the different usages. More than 50 years ago, Kroeber and Kluckhohn [1] collected 164 definitions of culture, which they organized into several categories Broad definitions that focused on content. Definitions that focused on social heritage or tradition. Normative definitions that focused on rules or ways of doing things. Psychological definitions that focused on adjustment or problem solving. Structural definitions that focused on patterns and organisations. Genetic definitions that focused on culture as a product or artefact as well as incomplete or metaphorical definitions that Kroeber and Kluckhohn called

'on-the-side stabs in passing' at definitions.

The complications of defining culture also come from the existence of multiple constituents of culture, such as material culture [methods by which people share goods, services, technology], subjective culture [ideas and knowledge shared in a group], and social culture [shared rules of social behaviour, institutions], [2]. Despite the complications in conceptualising culture, there is some emerging consensus on the properties of culture as Triandis [3] explained, 'There are many definitions of culture . . . but almost all researchers see certain aspects as characteristics of culture. First, culture emerges in adaptive interactions between humans and environments. Second, culture consists of shared elements. Third, culture is transmitted across time periods and generations.' In this study we adopt the British anthropologist Edward Tylor's definition of culture: 'complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'[4].

Different agents can define an economy as an area of the production, distribution, or trade, and consumption of goods and services [5]. It can also be defined as a social domain that emphasises the practices, discourses, and material expressions associated with the production, use, and

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management of resources [6]. In order to describe a given economy whether of a household or a city, we conceptualise it as the result of a set of processes that involves its culture, values, education, technological evolution, history, social organisation, political structure and legal systems, as well as its geography, natural resource endowment, and ecology, as main factors. These factors give context, content, and set the conditions and parameters in which an economy functions.

The term center in this study is defined as the point from which an activity or process is directed or on which it is focused. Cultural economy refers to the cultural dimensions of economic activity (the design or marketing of any product or service; or, simply, the social dimensions of the organisation of production), [7]. The term cultural economy is indicative of a particular subsection of economic activity, which is concerned with cultural products, and activities (such as music, film, and fine art) [7]. Adam Smith [8] was the first to analyse how norms, beliefs, morality and culture affect economic development, an upsurge of interest in the role culture, though Max Weber [9] has been identified to have prominent contribution to the field.

Weber used religiosity to express culture and argued that Protestantism played a crucial role in the development of capitalism, which is a concept of the economy. The longest running debate about the cultural economy can be tracked more precisely to its status as a mode of analysis and to debates about the role of economic sociology as a sub-discipline and its position vis a vis economics. Increasingly culture is being used in instrumental ways to promote cities for example, by creating distinctive modern art galleries. The argument here is that cultural differentiation is a way of marking place-rooted uniqueness [inherent or created], [7].

Culture has different roles on how a city economy will be or is already is. In this study, the authors would like to take a different approach and investigate if actually culture is at the center of city economy by focusing on characteristics of culture (which are developed from the different definitions of culture) and their influence on city economy with special reference to Kisumu City. This is because few documentations has been made on the relation between cultural characteristics and how they do influence a city's economy especially when refereeing to Kisumu City.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Material and methods captures the study area, theories guiding the study, sources of data for the study and data collection methods.

### 2.1. The Study Area

This paper focuses on Kisumu City in Kisumu County, which is one of the 47 Counties in Kenya. Figure 1 shows the

position of the study area Kisumu city. Kisumu is located right at the shores of Lake Victoria Basin, which occupies an area of about 251 000 square kilometers, of which 69 000 square kilometers is the lake itself. Lake Victoria is the largest freshwater lake in Africa and the second largest in the world. The lake borders three different countries: Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, and the basin stretches over five countries [10].

Kisumu is today just over 100 years old. When the Uganda Railway construction reached the eastern shores of Lake Victoria in 1901, a little settlement, named Port Florence by the colonial administration, begun and this marked the birth of Kisumu as a town. The town thus begun as a railway depot and first accommodated the railway team which consisted of surveyors, administrators, engineers and Asian labourers [11].

After the establishment of the Kisumu city, it developed in line with its name into a commercial, industrial and transportation hub for the Lake Victoria Basin. Connections by rail and waterways was established to Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, and furthermore within the country to Nairobi and the harbor city Mombasa [12]. From the 70's the city has grown from around 100,000 inhabitants to currently around 400,000 where around 39% are living in informal settlements. The city is growing at a rate of 4% per year. It is projected to reach half a million inhabitants by 2018 and before 2050 as much as a million inhabitants [13].

### 2.2. Theories Guiding the Study

This study was guided by the three kinds of theories that explain spatial patterns in the city as adopted from Kevin Lynch, who devoted a considerable part of his career in trying to offer guidance on good urban form [14]. The three theories are planning theory which examines how decisions about the city are made; Functional theory which explores the ways in which form works; and the Normative theory which connects form to values answering the question of what makes the city economy to be good. Culture is seen to be part of these theories because it assists in the decision-making, determining which forms are working, and what is of value to the city residents making it to be at the center of city economy.

### 2.3. Sources of Data and Data collection Methods

The research was mainly qualitative and consisted of both primary and secondary data. The secondary data consisted of existing documentaries (books, journals, articles, newspapers, and images) about city, culture and cultural economy. On the other hand, the primary data consisted of data from observation of purposively selected areas (Ranalo Foods-Kosewe Restaurant at railways, Kisumu Sports Ground, Dunga Beach, and Yawa Dance Company) within Kisumu city. Observation of the areas was done with the help on those in the areas.

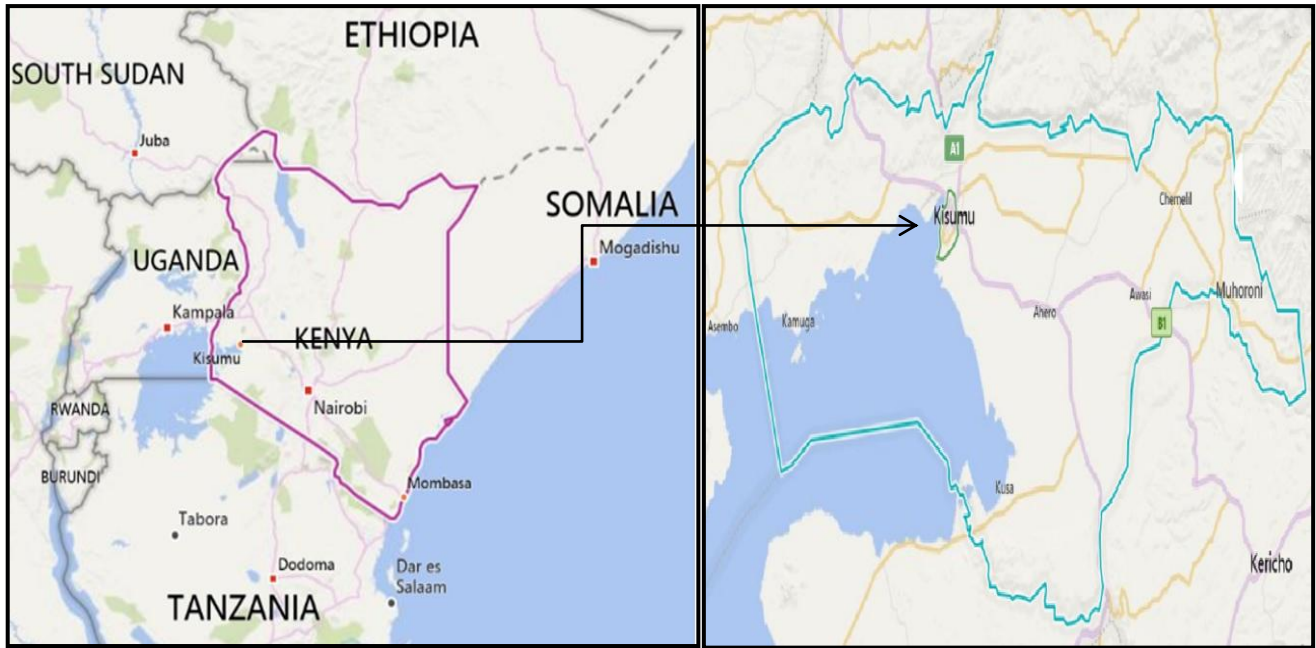


Figure 1. Map of Kisumu City. Source: (Authors, 2019)

### 3. Results and Discussions

There are various characteristics of culture, which emerged as the results of different definitions from different authors. The authors investigate the following characteristics of culture: culture is organic and super organic; culture is overt and covert; culture is explicit and implicit; culture is ideal and manifest (actual); culture is table yet changing; culture is shared and learned; and culture is symbolic.

#### 3.1. Culture is Organic and Super Organic

Culture is organic when we consider the fact that there is no culture without human society. It is super organic, because it is far beyond any individual lifetime. Individuals come and go, but culture remains and persists. The word super-organic is useful when it implies that what may be quite a different phenomenon from a cultural point of view. For example, a tree means different things to the botanist who studies it, the old woman who uses it for shade in the late summer afternoon, the farmer who picks its fruit, the motorist who collides with it and the young lovers who carve their initials in its trunk.

The same physical objects and physical characteristics, in other words, may constitute a variety of quite different cultural objects and cultural characteristics though still beneficial to the city economy with human society at the center of transactions. In Figure 2 for example, we think of Dunga Wetland Gallery-Papyrus Board Walk at Dunga Beach. It is a place where conservation of the wetland is taking place and it is supportive in providing revenue to the city economy as those who go they pay some amount of money about hundred Kenyan Shillings to see what happens there. It act as employment to the local community

members and a place of recreational and knowledge sharing. This is in line with what Barker [15] gives as a role of culture to the city's economy, which is contributing to flexible responsible and cost effective part of community development.



Figure 2. Papyrus Board Walk at Dunga Beach. Source: (Authors, 2019)

#### 3.2. Culture is Overt and Covert

Culture is generally divided into material (overt) and non-material (covert) cultures. Material culture consists of any tangible human made objects such as tools, automobiles, buildings, etc. Non- material culture consists of any non-physical aspects like language, belief, ideas, knowledge, attitude, values, etc.





**Figure 3.** Belt, Rack and Baskets made from Papyrus Reed and water hyacinth as displayed by Dunga Women in Tour Guide CBO. Source: (Authors, 2019)



**Figure 4.** Jomo Kenyatta Sports Ground Kisumu. Source: [hr.wikipedia.org](http://hr.wikipedia.org) (2019)

In Figure 3, Women within Dunga found it important to engage in the tour guard CBO by making belt, rack and baskets made from papyrus reeds and water hyacinth and selling them to tourist. The overt part of the culture are the items bought but the covert part is how they feel about the item bought as some do go to an extra mile of knowing why the item has a particular shape or design. Because most of these designs and shapes are cultural determine, the tourist end up having a feeling of attachment to the local people's tradition and the cultural land.

The creative pursuits of a city economy are ultimately not determined by patterns of supply and demand alone; they are

also driven by individuals own social interests [16,17]. For many, participation in cultural activities is initially driven not by career development motivations, but by a personal desire to engage with the affective, emotive, cathartic dimensions of creative pursuits such as music, writing and painting, which supports the city economy through an individual, who pay tax to the city economy.

Each person learns in his culture what is good, true, and beautiful. Attitudes, values and goals are defined by the culture. While the individual normally learns them as unconsciously as he learns the language. Attitude are tendencies to feel and act in certain ways. Values are



measures of goodness or desirability, for example, we value private property, (representative) government and many other things and experience. Culture determines the success of a business and even that of the city economy this is because it focuses on goal attainment which individual values define as worthy for example becoming the president of the firm and by providing certain goals and ridiculing others, culture channels individual ambitions hence determining the goals of life.

### 3.3. Culture is Explicit and Implicit

According to Kluckhohn and Kelly [18], culture mean all those historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behaviour of men. Explicit culture refers to similarities in word and action, which can be directly observed. For example, the adolescent cultural behaviour can be generalized from regularities in dress, mannerism and conversation that means that anyone in the dress trading within the city would have to capture the adolescent cultural behaviour. Figure 4, shows the Jomo Kenyatta Sports ground a place that has the incorporation of traditional designs of building into the city designs where the traditional round hut of the Luo community have been used to build a house.

When there is economic crisis, different people will have different opinions on the causes and effects it will have on different sector of the economy but this they only explain based on their cultural values and understanding. It is implicit when we consider those things we do, but are unable to explain them, yet we believe them to be so. This helps in

explaining why some customers will go for a particular brand of item or service irrespective of factors such as cost, quantity and quality.

### 3.4. Culture is Ideal and Manifest (Actual)

Ideal culture involves the way people ought to behave or what they ought to do. Manifest culture involves what people actually do. The cultural content of current cities is primarily visual (good design), which in turn facilitates the development of new retail cultures, business or organisational cultures around new urban spatial formations [19]. Creative cities are the engine of city economy [20]. Growth in the creative city concept is therefore put into an economic context, a context that sees the well-being of a city or society in solely economic terms [21].

Creativity in the city must be innovative and directly connected to its citizens, important is the ability to think flexibly and approach problems openly [22] an idea that seems ideal and may not be manifested as expected with the city. The ideal and manifest may affect the economy when assumptions are made based on the quality of goods and services or even on decision making about the policies governing city economy. When the actual differs from the ideal then there are chances of the economy collapsing. Figure 5 shows the availability of different artefacts at Dunga beach, which is an indication that handwork is a source of economy as it provides the actual available goods at the market for consumers, which may not be from one particular region. This shows that truly creativity and culture runs hand in hand for the betterment of the economy especially that of a city like Kisumu.



**Figure 5.** Artefacts made from locally available Materials sold at Dunga Beach. Source: (Authors, 2019)



Figure 6. Advertisement image of 7<sup>th</sup> Edition of Kisumu Fashion Week of 2018. Source, (Authors, 2019)

### 3.5. Culture is Stable yet Changing

Culture is stable when we consider what people hold valuable and are handing over to the next generation in order to maintain their norms and values. However, when culture encounters other cultures, it can change. Culture changes not only because of direct or indirect contact between cultures, but also through innovation and adaptation to new circumstances. This helps the economy to grow as with innovation and adaptation to new circumstances the marketing, goods production and services delivery qualities and quantities increases, which is a plus to the city economy.

An example from Kisumu city is that of the Yawa Dance Company, where youths from Kisumu and its environs come together to practice and perform traditional dances and other creative arts that can make them earn income in a descent way. Their determination and talent was shown when they organized the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of Kisumu fashion Week 2018 that was held on 15th December 2018 at Acacia Premier Hotel Kisumu.

Figure 6 shows the image of the advertisement and from this image, it is evident that the aim of the fashion week was to promote African culture where designers are encouraged to use locally available materials and local designs and show case the same. The designs are later sold both locally and internationally in order to earn income and contribute to the

city's revenue. Fashion has become part of every culture and is contributing greatly to the city economy by creating employment to the city occupants with majority being the youths. This is because it contributes to expression and promotes ideas, innovation and creativity and as the youths are energetic and are willing to explore new ideas and talents they then become majority in the sectors promotion with an intention to earn income and meet their daily needs and that of dependants.

This was evident during the Kisumu Fashion Week 2018 where some of the most talented youths showed their most creative, uniquely expressive creations and designs from around East Africa. Cultures undergo a gradual change. With passing time, some beliefs change, certain traditions or rituals are eliminated, language and mannerisms of people change, and thus their culture [23].

Due to the exposure to various cultures across the globe, people adopt some aspects of other cultures. This affects what they teach their children, thus influencing the culture of their future generations and in a small way, leading to a cultural change and Kisumu City is not an exception. Social thinking undergoes a transition and so does culture making gender roles to change. For instance, traditionally, the males were meant to work and earn for their family, while women stayed at home and looked after the children. Today, these roles have changed. In many families, both men and women



work away from home and take care of their children without exact gender specification, as their main concern is to make ends meet.

### 3.6. Culture is Shared and Learned

Culture is the public property of a social group of people (shared). Individuals get cultural knowledge of the group through socialisation. However, we should note that not all things shared among people might be cultural, as there are many biological attributes, which people share among themselves [23]. A group of people, usually inhabiting the same part of the world, shares every culture. The region they live in, the geographical conditions around them, their country's past, the belief system and values of its people, and the heritage they are proud of, constitute their culture. Being common to a group, these aspects develop a sense of unity and belonging among the people of that group.

People of the same community share the same values,

beliefs, and traditions. People with shared values, beliefs and traditions have an easier way of innovating new ideas and using it as a strength to build up their economy. This is because of the availability of common language, which makes communication and understanding easier while trading. Having shared culture means that both the producers, distributors and customers have a common ground of understanding for their businesses, which indirectly is a plus to the economy as they have common identity. Culture is not biologically passed from older generations to the newer ones. It is learned through experience. The members of a culture share certain ideals, which shape their lives. The future generations learn to follow the same ideals. Culture propagates through generations, which adopt their old customs and traditions as a part of their culture. The ideals they base their lives on, is a part of their culture. Cultural values are imparted from one generation to another, which is the reason why they continue.



Figure 7. Ranalo Foods-Kosewe Kisumu Branch. Source: (Authors, 2019)



**Figure 8.** A building in the Jomo Kenyatta Sports Ground in Kisumu named 'Od Mikayi', which means the first Wife's House. Source: (Authors, 2019)

The language, the literature, and the art forms pass down from generation to generation. Culture is learnt, understood, and adopted from what is taught by society and assimilated from the environment. No individual is born with a sense of culture. In the course of life, he/she learns it. Culture has been used to educate and make it easy for the locals of a city to identify and learn new skills that are advantageous to city economy.

This happens when indigenous knowledge of culture is incorporated or used as a base in understanding the various means of production, marketing strategies and customers' preferences. The idea of culture being shared and learned within Kisumu is visible from various sector of the city. Figure 7 shows Ranalo Food Restaurant which is next to Kisumu Railway Institute that was opened towards the end of the year 2018. It made it possible for people from different parts of Kisumu and its environs including visitors to have a taste of the traditional African foods especially the Luo community delicacies (brown Ugali- *kuon bel*, fried fish- *rech Mowang*', ghee- *Mor alenya*, among others) and African Music (Benga and Rhumba) which in most cases are live bands. On looking at the history of Ranalo foods owned by a popular businessperson William Osewe, it is evident that culture is shared and learned. Why do we say so? A tale is told of a man; whose roots draw from the Lake-dwelling communities of Kenya.

The man grew up with the joy of enjoying freshly made fish recipes; secrets passed down from mothers to their sons and daughters. He caught Nairobi by storm, initially setting up a dingy hotel in the Eastlands of Nairobi. News of the sweet taste of his delicious fish recipes and sauces quickly spread across Nairobi, and he faced up to the task of satisfying the huge Nairobi appetite. The K'Osewe brand has grown and is currently the go-to restaurant in Nairobi and now has finally spread its wings back to Kisumu. With ages

of precision perfection, generations of secret skill and ingredients, K'Osewe gives the best servings of organic whole foods south of the Sahara. The learning and cultural point of it, is when people without Luo origin are taught on how to eat the head of fish what the Luo's nicknamed 'the engine or the gear box' and anyone who cannot eat it is mocked or made fun of. The other fun part of it is a common joke boasted largely by the Luo community of Kenya where you gobble up a bony chunk of fish into your mouth, and only spit out the spines and bones from your lips.

### 3.7. Culture is Symbolic

Culture is based on the purposeful creation and usage of symbols; it is exclusive to humans. Symbolic thought is unique and crucial to humans and to culture. Symbolic thought is the human ability to give a thing or event an arbitrary meaning, grasp, and appreciate that meaning. Symbols are the central components of culture. Symbols refer to anything to which people attach meaning and which they use to communicate with others. More specifically, symbols are words, objects, gestures, sounds or images that represent something else rather than themselves. Symbolic thought is unique and crucial to humans and to culture.

It is the human ability to give a thing or event an arbitrary meaning, grasp, and appreciate that meaning. There is no obvious natural or necessary connection between a symbol and what it symbolises [24,25]. Culture thus works in the symbolic domain emphasising meaning, rather than the technical/practical rational side of human behaviour.

All actions have symbolic content as well as being action in and of themselves. Things, actions, behaviours, etc., always stand for something else than merely, the thing itself. For example, the name Kisumu originated from the Luo term 'Kisuma', which means a meeting, place for the purpose of exchange of goods, [11]. This is derived from the Luo word,



which is commonly used “sumo” meaning a place of barter trade. This clearly shows how symbols in language can be used in explaining economic understanding of a place. In return, the naming can help in the learning process for the next generation. Figure 8 shows a building at Jomo Kenyatta sports ground in Kisumu named ‘Od Mikayi’, which means the first wife’s house an indication that symbol and tradition is used in designing urban centers. This is because the traditional Luo hut is round in nature and this building is round in nature making the symbolism visible. It is also at the center of Jomo Kenyatta Sports ground just as the first wife’s hut is found at the center of the homestead.

## 4. Conclusions

It is true from the analysis of this study that culture is at the center of city economy. It also shows the role that culture plays towards the city economy such as making Kisumu city unique in terms of market and space designs, distribution of goods and services, and determining power and authority of goods and services. It is also true that culture influences the flow of money and revenue within Kisumu as it influences individual decisions on what to buy and where to buy it. By explaining the characteristics of culture (organic and super organic; overt and covert; explicit and implicit; ideal and manifest; stable yet changing; shared and learnt; and symbolic), we end up with their function in either supporting and promoting the city economy or causing the difficulties in its development and sustainability.

This paper is used as a revelation on the connection that culture has on economy especially that it is at the center of city economy. Future studies needs to interrogate the various forms of culture and whether they are promoting or hindering the development of Kisumu City economy. This is by considering the materialistic and the non- materialistic components of culture. The focus should be on individuals, households, communities, and Kisumu city at large in terms of means of production, service delivery, quality and quantity of goods, innovation and technological advancement, gender roles, sustainability of the city economy, and any other theme that may be of great importance to the city economy.

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