

## Cultural and Artisanal Clustering as a Catalyst for Urban Tourism: The RICATs Initiative in Redefining Dakar's Tourism Identity and Revitalization

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**ABSTRACT:** Dakar's tourism sector remains largely dependent on coastal and seasonal tourism, limiting diversification and underutilizing the city's cultural and artisanal assets. Fragmented governance, weak cross-sector coordination, and infrastructural constraints further hinder the development of a competitive urban tourism model. This study examines the RICATs (*Rencontres Internationales de la Culture, de l'Artisanat et du Tourisme*) initiative as a cluster-based approach integrating tourism, culture, and crafts within Dakar's urban tourism ecosystem. Using a qualitative case study methodology, the research draws on 32 semi-structured interviews, participant observation conducted between 2020 and 2023, and analysis of policy and sectoral data. Findings indicate that the cluster approach enhances cross-sector collaboration, diversifies tourism experiences, and increases visitor engagement with cultural and artisanal products. However, governance fragmentation, infrastructural limitations, and uneven stakeholder participation remain significant barriers. The study argues that cultural density and intangible heritage can strengthen urban tourism competitiveness in Global South cities when supported by coherent institutional frameworks.

**Keywords:** *Urban tourism development, Cultural and creative industries, Tourism clusters, Intangible cultural heritage, Artisanal economy, Destination governance, Dakar, Senegal.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Urban tourism in African capital cities has long been shaped by narrow development models that privilege coastal leisure, international arrivals, and seasonal consumption patterns. In Senegal, and particularly in Dakar, tourism development has historically relied on seaside attractions and conference-related travel, resulting in a spatially and thematically concentrated offer. While this model has contributed to national economic growth, it has also generated structural vulnerabilities, including seasonality, limited diversification, and weak integration of local cultural and artisanal resources into the tourism value chain.

Dakar possesses a dense concentration of cultural, artistic, religious, and artisanal assets that extend far beyond its coastal identity. Artisan markets, creative industries, religious heritage, everyday cultural practices, and emerging healthcare services collectively form a rich but underutilized urban tourism ecosystem. However, the fragmentation between tourism, culture, and crafts (reinforced by centralized governance structures and sectoral silos) has constrained the city's ability to translate these assets into coherent tourism products. As a result, Dakar continues to struggle to position itself as a diversified and competitive urban destination, despite strong symbolic capital and growing demand for experiential and cultural tourism.

In response to these challenges, the RICATs - International Gathering for Culture, Crafts, and Tourism (*Rencontres Internationales de la Culture, de l'Artisanat et du Tourisme*) - initiative emerged as an experimental framework aimed at operationalizing a cluster-based approach to urban tourism development. Drawing on cluster theory, RICATs sought to integrate tourism, culture, and crafts through networking platforms, business-to-business meetings, immersive cultural experiences, educational tours, and scientific forums. The initiative was designed to foster cross-sectoral collaboration, enhance the visibility of cultural and artisanal actors, and reposition Dakar's tourism identity around cultural density and intangible heritage.

Despite its conceptual relevance and initial stakeholder engagement, the RICATs initiative experienced institutional discontinuity after only two editions. This interruption raises critical questions regarding the political prioritization of cultural tourism, the absence of formal institutional anchoring, and the limits of experimental initiatives in highly centralized tourism governance systems. Rather than reflecting a lack of relevance or demand, the stalled trajectory of RICATs points to deeper structural constraints related to political will, governance fragmentation, and the challenge of transforming innovative pilot initiatives into sustained public policy instruments.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the RICATs initiative as a case study to explore the potential and limits of cluster-based urban tourism development in Dakar. The research addresses the following questions: How can cultural and artisanal clustering contribute to the diversification of Dakar's urban tourism offer? What structural, institutional, and political factors condition the success or failure of such initiatives? And to what extent can cluster theory be adapted to Global South urban contexts characterized by strong cultural capital but limited decentralization?

By combining qualitative field data with policy analysis and theoretical insights, this paper contributes to debates on urban tourism diversification, cultural economy, and cluster theory in emerging economies. It argues that while cultural density and social capital offer strong foundations for innovative tourism development, their translation into sustainable urban tourism strategies ultimately depends on political commitment, institutional coordination, and long-term governance continuity.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Cluster Theory and Cultural Tourism in Urban Contexts**

Tourism development has increasingly been analyzed through the lens of clustering, particularly in contexts where spatial concentration, intersectoral linkages, and collective competitiveness shape destination performance. Cluster theory provides a useful framework for understanding how tourism, culture, and crafts can be articulated into integrated urban systems rather than operating as fragmented sectors.

In urban destinations, clusters offer a way to connect tangible infrastructure with intangible assets such as heritage, creativity, and social capital.

## **2.1 From Agglomeration Economies to Tourism Clusters**

The conceptual roots of cluster theory lie in Alfred Marshall's analysis of agglomeration economies, which emphasized the advantages derived from geographic proximity among firms and producers. Marshall (1920) argued that spatial concentration generates positive externalities through shared labor pools, localized supply chains, and knowledge spillovers. Although originally developed to explain industrial districts, this framework has been widely adapted to service sectors, including tourism, where co-location facilitates coordination, specialization, and innovation.

In tourism contexts, agglomeration effects manifest through the clustering of accommodations, attractions, cultural venues, transport services, and ancillary activities. Such proximity enhances visitor accessibility and experience while reducing transaction costs for producers. However, agglomeration alone does not guarantee competitiveness. In many developing urban contexts, clusters emerge informally and remain weakly structured, limiting their capacity to scale or innovate sustainably.

## **2.2 Competitive Clusters and Cross-Sectoral Integration**

Building on agglomeration theory, Porter's competitive cluster framework emphasizes the strategic dimension of clustering. According to Porter (1998), clusters derive their strength not only from spatial proximity but from dynamic interactions among interconnected firms, institutions, and support services that simultaneously compete and cooperate. Competitive clusters stimulate innovation, improve productivity, and enhance destination differentiation by aligning demand conditions, factor endowments, and institutional support.

In tourism, this approach highlights the importance of cross-sectoral integration between tourism services, cultural industries, crafts, creative economies, and knowledge institutions. Rather than treating culture and crafts as peripheral attractions, cluster-based tourism models position them as core components of

destination value creation. Empirical studies have shown that destinations that successfully integrate cultural production, creative industries, and tourism governance are better equipped to diversify their offerings and mitigate seasonality (Álvarez González & González Morales, 2006; Kim & Wicks, 2010).

### **2.3 Cultural Density, Intangible Heritage, and Urban Tourism**

Recent scholarship has extended cluster theory by emphasizing the role of intangible assets in tourism development. Cultural practices, everyday lifestyles, social interactions, and artisanal knowledge contribute to what can be described as cultural density—an accumulation of symbolic and experiential resources embedded in urban spaces. In cultural tourism, visitors increasingly seek immersive experiences rooted in authenticity, social interaction, and local identity rather than standardized attractions.

In this perspective, crafts and creative practices play a dual role. Economically, they support livelihoods and local value chains; symbolically, they shape destination narratives and visitor perception. When embedded within tourism clusters, crafts and cultural expressions can enhance experiential value and lengthen visitor stays. However, the integration of intangible heritage into tourism clusters requires institutional mediation to avoid commodification, exclusion of local actors, or cultural dilution.

### **2.4 Limits of Cluster Theory in Centralized Governance Contexts**

While cluster theory provides a powerful analytical framework, its application in Global South urban contexts reveals important limitations. Many tourism cluster models implicitly assume decentralized governance, stable institutional environments, and long-term policy continuity. In highly centralized systems, where tourism remains a nationally controlled competency, local initiatives often lack the authority and resources needed to institutionalize innovation.

Several studies note that cluster-based tourism initiatives in emerging economies frequently depend on individual leadership, donor support, or temporary events, making them vulnerable to political shifts and institutional discontinuity. Without formal policy anchoring, legal recognition, and sustained public investment,

experimental clusters struggle to transition from pilot initiatives to durable development instruments.

## **2.5 Conceptual Positioning of the Study**

This study mobilizes cluster theory as an interpretative framework rather than a prescriptive model. It does not assume that clustering automatically leads to competitiveness or sustainability. Instead, it examines how cultural and artisanal clustering interacts with governance structures, political will, and institutional coordination in shaping urban tourism outcomes.

By analyzing the RICATs initiative in Dakar, the paper contributes to the literature by highlighting the conditions under which cultural density and intangible heritage can support urban tourism diversification—and the circumstances under which such initiatives stagnate. The study thus extends cluster theory by foregrounding the political economy of tourism innovation, particularly in contexts where cultural resources are abundant but institutional continuity remains fragile.

## **3. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine the RICATs (International Gathering for Culture, Crafts, and Tourism) initiative as an experimental cluster-based model for urban tourism development in Dakar. The case study design is particularly suited to exploring complex, context-dependent phenomena where institutional arrangements, stakeholder interactions, and political conditions shape outcomes. The research follows Yin's (2014) case study framework, emphasizing contextual depth, multiple data sources, and analytical triangulation.

RICATs was selected as a critical case because it explicitly sought to integrate tourism, culture, and crafts through a cluster logic in a highly centralized governance environment. The initiative's limited continuity (having been implemented for only two editions) also provides an opportunity to examine not only outcomes but structural constraints affecting sustainability and scalability.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

Data collection combined primary and secondary sources to capture both operational dynamics and broader policy contexts.

#### **Primary Data**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 stakeholders between June 2022 and February 2023. Participants included policymakers, representatives of tourism institutions, artisans, cultural actors, tourism operators, and event organizers involved directly or indirectly in the RICATs initiative. Interview durations ranged from 45 to 90 minutes and focused on perceptions of cluster integration, governance coordination, economic impacts, and institutional challenges.

In addition, participant observation was carried out during RICATs-related activities, including forums, exhibitions, and educational tours. This enabled real-time observation of stakeholder interactions, coordination mechanisms, and operational constraints, complementing interview data with experiential insights.

#### **Secondary Data**

Secondary sources included national and sectoral policy documents (notably the Plan Sénégal Émergent and the Stratégie Nationale de l'Artisanat), institutional reports from international organizations, tourism performance statistics (2019–2023), and academic literature on tourism clusters and cultural economies. These materials provided contextual grounding and allowed for cross-verification of stakeholder claims.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed using thematic coding with NVivo 12. An initial coding framework was developed deductively based on cluster theory and urban tourism literature, focusing on collaboration, governance, infrastructure, cultural value creation, and institutional support. This framework was then refined inductively to capture emergent themes, particularly those related to political prioritization, institutional discontinuity, and the limits of experimental initiatives.

Secondary data were analyzed through comparative content analysis, allowing qualitative findings to be triangulated with quantitative trends in tourism performance, artisan revenues, and visitor behavior. This triangulation strengthened analytical validity by linking stakeholder perceptions to observable sectoral patterns.

### **3.4 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity**

The researcher's proximity to the RICATs initiative facilitated privileged access to key stakeholders and internal processes, enhancing the depth and richness of the data. At the same time, this positionality required careful reflexive engagement to mitigate potential bias. Analytical distancing was maintained through systematic triangulation across data sources, the use of verbatim interview excerpts during coding, and the prioritization of critical perspectives, including those highlighting institutional failures and political constraints.

Rather than presenting RICATs as a success narrative, the study deliberately interrogates its limitations, discontinuity, and structural vulnerabilities. This reflexive approach strengthens the credibility of the findings and aligns the analysis with critical traditions in tourism and urban studies.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations and Limitations**

All interview participants provided informed consent, and anonymity was preserved throughout the analysis. Data collected during public forums and events were treated as non-sensitive.

The study's limitations include its temporal scope (2020–2023) and its focus on a single initiative, which constrains generalizability. Additionally, reliance on stakeholder networks may introduce selection bias, although methodological triangulation and reflexive analysis help mitigate this risk. These limitations are acknowledged as intrinsic to in-depth qualitative case study research and do not detract from the analytical objectives of the study.

## **4. RESULTS**

This section presents the empirical findings derived from interviews, participant observation, and secondary data related to the RICATs initiative (2020–2023). The

results are organized around three analytical pillars: (1) cultural and artisanal clustering effects, (2) sectoral linkages and market structuring, and (3) institutional and political constraints affecting sustainability.

#### **4.1 Cultural and Artisanal Clustering Effects**

Findings indicate that RICATs contributed to strengthening interactions between cultural actors, artisans, and tourism stakeholders during its implementation period. A large majority of interviewees (approximately 87%) reported improved visibility of artisanal and cultural activities within tourism circuits, particularly through immersive initiatives such as the “Dakar Life Style” experiences. These activities enabled visitors to engage directly with local households, artisans, and performers, reinforcing perceptions of authenticity and cultural immersion.

At the community level, participating households reported modest but tangible economic benefits. Interview data suggest that involvement in immersive tourism activities generated supplementary monthly income, while also fostering a sense of recognition and inclusion in the tourism economy. Visitor feedback collected during RICATs-related activities highlighted cultural immersion as a central element of satisfaction, surpassing conventional leisure or seaside experiences.

However, these positive effects remained spatially and temporally concentrated. Artisans emphasized persistent challenges related to market access, transport logistics, and promotion beyond event periods. Several respondents noted that while RICATs temporarily intensified demand and visibility, the absence of continuity limited long-term income stabilization and skill upgrading. These findings suggest that cultural density alone, without sustained institutional support, is insufficient to anchor durable clustering effects.

#### **4.2 Sectoral Linkages and Market Structuring**

RICATs facilitated new forms of interaction between tourism operators, artisans, cultural institutions, and emerging sectors such as healthcare tourism. Business-to-business meetings and networking platforms resulted in the signing of partnership agreements, particularly between small tourism enterprises and artisanal producers.

Some of these agreements translated into hybrid tourism products combining accommodation, cultural visits, crafts, and medical services.

Healthcare tourism emerged as a significant but unevenly integrated component of the cluster. Dakar's position as a regional medical hub attracted visitors primarily from neighboring West African countries, driven by cost differentials and service availability. RICATs created opportunities for dialogue between clinics, hotels, and tour operators, leading to the design of integrated medical travel packages. Nevertheless, empirical evidence shows that only a minority of healthcare providers formalized long-term partnerships with tourism actors, reflecting limited institutional coordination and regulatory clarity.

Digital integration efforts yielded mixed results. While digital platforms and training initiatives were introduced to enhance artisans' market access, adoption rates remained low. Interviewees cited technical constraints, limited digital literacy, and infrastructural deficiencies as major barriers. Although some artisans reported increased online sales following capacity-building programs, these gains were not sufficiently widespread to transform market structures.

Overall, the findings reveal that RICATs contributed to experimentation in sectoral integration but fell short of establishing stable and scalable market linkages. Informal collaboration predominated, and the absence of binding institutional mechanisms limited the consolidation of cluster dynamics.

### **4.3 Institutional and Political Constraints**

A central empirical finding concerns the institutional discontinuity of the RICATs initiative itself. Despite initial momentum and stakeholder engagement, RICATs was implemented for only two editions. Interview data consistently point to governance fragmentation, limited political prioritization, and the absence of formal institutional anchoring as primary explanations for this interruption.

Stakeholders emphasized that RICATs operated largely as an event-driven initiative rather than as a policy-embedded program. Responsibility for tourism development remains highly centralized, and municipal actors involved in RICATs lacked the

authority and financial autonomy to ensure continuity. Several interviewees noted that cultural and artisanal tourism is frequently acknowledged in strategic discourse but rarely translated into binding policy instruments or dedicated budget lines.

The reliance on individual leadership and informal coalitions further increased vulnerability to political shifts. Without integration into national tourism strategies or legal frameworks, RICATs lacked mechanisms for long-term planning, monitoring, and evaluation. This institutional fragility limited its capacity to scale beyond pilot activities and contributed directly to its suspension.

These findings highlight a structural contradiction: while Dakar possesses strong cultural and social capital conducive to clustering, the political and institutional environment constrains the transformation of experimental initiatives into sustained urban tourism strategies. The interruption of RICATs thus emerges not as an anomaly but as an outcome of deeper governance and policy dynamics.

The following table (Table 1) situates the empirical findings of the RICATs initiative within established cluster theory, highlighting both areas of convergence and critical points of divergence. While agglomeration and cultural density generated short-term clustering effects, the absence of institutional anchoring and political continuity limited the sustainability of the cluster dynamics.

**Table 1.** Alignment Between Cluster Theory and Empirical Findings from the RICATs Initiative

<b>Theoretical Dimension</b>	<b>Cluster Theory Expectations</b>	<b>Empirical Evidence from RICATs (Dakar)</b>	<b>Observed Gaps and Contextual Limits</b>
<b>Agglomeration effects (Marshall)</b>	Geographic proximity generates efficiency, knowledge spillovers, and shared resources	Artisan markets and cultural actors exhibited strong spatial concentration and informal knowledge exchange	Benefits remained episodic and event-dependent; no mechanisms to stabilize gains beyond RICATs editions

<b>Theoretical Dimension</b>	<b>Cluster Theory Expectations</b>	<b>Empirical Evidence from RICATs (Dakar)</b>	<b>Observed Gaps and Contextual Limits</b>
<b>Knowledge spillovers and learning</b>	Continuous interaction fosters innovation and skill upgrading	Temporary learning occurred through forums, exhibitions, and B2B meetings	Lack of permanent training institutions and follow-up programs limited cumulative learning
<b>Cross-sectoral integration (Porter)</b>	Interconnected sectors cooperate and compete to enhance competitiveness	Initial collaboration between tourism operators, artisans, cultural actors, and healthcare providers	Collaboration remained largely informal; weak contractualization and institutional mediation
<b>Demand sophistication</b>	Local and international demand drives innovation and differentiation	Strong visitor interest in immersive cultural and experiential tourism	Demand not structurally captured due to absence of certified products and market intelligence systems
<b>Institutional support and governance</b>	Public institutions support clusters through policy, regulation, and financing	RICATs benefited from symbolic endorsement and stakeholder goodwill	No legal status, dedicated budget, or integration into national tourism policy frameworks
<b>Cluster sustainability</b>	Long-term competitiveness through institutionalization and continuity	RICATs implemented for only two editions	Discontinuity linked to political prioritization and centralized governance structures
<b>Role of intangible assets</b>	Cultural identity enhances differentiation	Cultural density and social capital strongly enhanced	Intangible assets insufficient without political and institutional

<b>Theoretical Dimension</b>	<b>Cluster Theory Expectations</b>	<b>Empirical Evidence from RICATs (Dakar)</b>	<b>Observed Gaps and Contextual Limits</b>
		visitor experience	anchoring

From author: Papa Elimane FAYE, January 2026

## 5. DISCUSSION

The RICATs initiative provides a valuable lens through which to examine both the potential and the structural limits of cluster-based urban tourism development in Dakar. While empirical findings demonstrate localized successes in cultural integration, experiential tourism, and stakeholder engagement, the initiative’s interruption after two editions reveals deeper governance and political-economy constraints that shape tourism innovation in centralized systems. This discussion interprets the results along three interrelated dimensions: partial effectiveness of cultural clustering, limits of sectoral integration, and the role of political commitment and institutional anchoring.

### 5.1 Cultural Density as a Catalyst for Urban Tourism Diversification

The findings confirm that Dakar’s cultural density (expressed through crafts, everyday cultural practices, and immersive social experiences) constitutes a powerful foundation for urban tourism diversification. Initiatives such as the “Dakar Life Style” experiences illustrate how intangible heritage can generate meaningful visitor engagement and economic benefits at the community level. This supports recent extensions of cluster theory that emphasize symbolic value, authenticity, and experiential depth rather than infrastructure alone.

From a Marshallian perspective, the spatial concentration of artisans and cultural actors facilitated knowledge exchange, visibility, and short-term economic gains. However, unlike classic industrial districts, these effects remained episodic and event-dependent. Cultural density proved effective as a catalyst but insufficient as a stabilizing force. Without institutional mechanisms to sustain demand and support

skills development, clustering effects dissipated once the initiative paused. This finding nuances cluster theory by showing that cultural agglomeration, while necessary, is not sufficient to ensure continuity in urban tourism systems.

## **5.2 Sectoral Integration Without Institutionalization**

RICATs' efforts to link tourism, crafts, culture, and healthcare tourism align closely with Porter's conception of competitive clusters built on cross-sectoral complementarities. The emergence of hybrid tourism products and business-to-business agreements demonstrates that functional linkages can be initiated through targeted platforms and events. However, the limited formalization of these partnerships highlights a structural weakness: sectoral integration remained largely informal and reversible.

The healthcare tourism component is particularly illustrative. Despite Dakar's growing regional role as a medical hub, only a small proportion of clinics established durable partnerships with tourism operators. This suggests that proximity and opportunity alone do not generate stable clusters; rather, institutional mediation, regulatory clarity, and shared governance frameworks are required. The same pattern is observed in digital integration efforts, where capacity-building initiatives yielded uneven results due to infrastructural constraints and limited policy support.

These findings echo critiques of cluster theory in Global South contexts, where experimental initiatives often lack the institutional depth required for consolidation. RICATs functioned more as a coordination space than as a structuring mechanism, revealing the gap between collaborative intent and institutional capacity.

## **5.3 Political Will, Governance Fragmentation, and Institutional Discontinuity**

The most critical insight emerging from the analysis concerns the political and institutional conditions underlying RICATs' interruption. The discontinuation of the initiative after two editions cannot be attributed to lack of relevance, stakeholder interest, or experiential value. Instead, it reflects the structural vulnerability of tourism innovation in contexts characterized by centralized decision-making and fragmented sectoral governance.

Tourism development in Senegal remains largely a national competency, limiting the autonomy of municipal actors to institutionalize locally driven initiatives. While cultural and artisanal tourism is frequently valorized in strategic discourse, it occupies a marginal position in operational policy priorities and budgetary allocations. As a result, initiatives like RICATs depend heavily on individual leadership, informal coalitions, and temporary political alignment.

This reliance on personal or event-based momentum exposes cluster initiatives to political shifts and institutional inertia. Without legal recognition, dedicated funding mechanisms, or integration into national tourism strategies, RICATs lacked the structural conditions necessary for continuity. From a political-economy perspective, this highlights a disconnect between symbolic endorsement of cultural tourism and the willingness to embed it within binding governance frameworks.

Rather than representing a failure of the cluster approach itself, the RICATs case illustrates the limits of experimentation in the absence of political continuity. Innovation was tolerated, even encouraged, but not institutionalized. This finding contributes to a growing body of literature arguing that the sustainability of tourism clusters depends less on conceptual soundness than on governance alignment and political commitment.

#### **5.4 Implications for Cluster Theory and Urban Tourism Policy**

The Dakar case invites a critical re-reading of cluster theory when applied to postcolonial and highly centralized urban contexts. While Porterian models emphasize competition, innovation, and institutional support, they often understate the role of political prioritization and state capacity in shaping outcomes. The RICATs experience demonstrates that clusters based on cultural and social capital can generate value even in infrastructure-constrained environments, but only temporarily unless supported by durable governance arrangements.

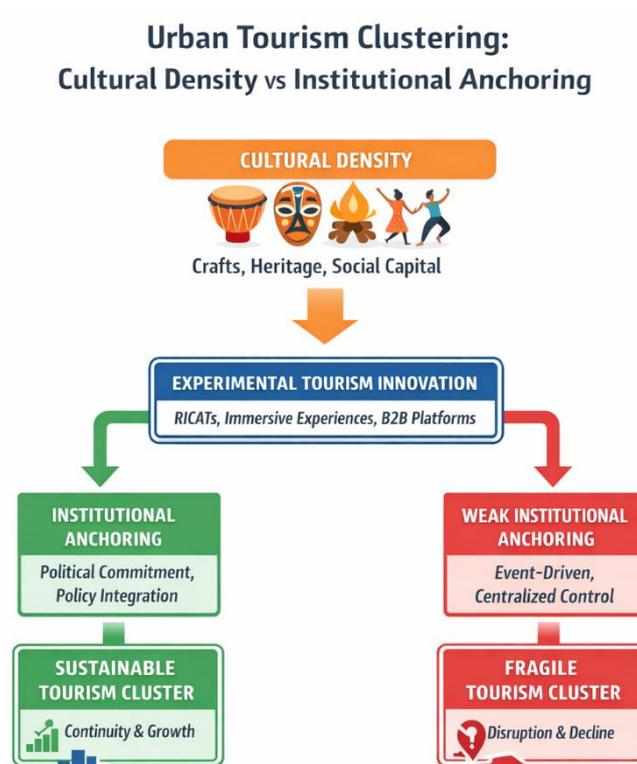
For urban tourism policy, the findings suggest that experimental initiatives must be accompanied by explicit strategies for institutional anchoring. These include decentralizing decision-making authority, formalizing multi-stakeholder coordination platforms, and embedding cultural tourism within national development frameworks.

Without such measures, cluster-based initiatives risk remaining symbolic showcases rather than engines of structural transformation.

The following figure (Figure 1) is a conceptual model illustrating the relationship between cultural density and institutional anchoring in urban tourism clustering.

The model shows how cultural and social capital can generate experimental tourism innovation, but long-term cluster sustainability depends on political commitment, governance coordination, and institutionalization.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of Urban Tourism Clustering: Cultural Density and Institutional Anchoring



From author: Papa Elimane FAYE, January 2026

### Analytical Explanation of the Model

- **Cultural density** acts as a **trigger**: Dakar’s rich cultural, artisanal, and social capital generates strong potential for tourism diversification.
- This density enables **experimental innovation**, such as RICATs, immersive tourism, and cross-sectoral collaboration.

- The **critical bifurcation point** is institutional anchoring:
  - When innovation is supported by political commitment, governance alignment, and formal policy tools, clusters become **durable and scalable**.
  - When institutional anchoring is weak or absent, innovations remain **event-based**, fragile, and reversible.

The interruption of RICATs after two editions is positioned as an **empirical outcome** of insufficient institutional anchoring, not as a failure of cultural potential.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the RICATs initiative as an experimental cluster-based approach to urban tourism development in Dakar, focusing on the integration of tourism, culture, and crafts within a centralized governance context. The findings demonstrate that Dakar possesses substantial cultural density and social capital capable of supporting innovative tourism experiences, particularly through immersive, community-based, and artisanal activities. During its implementation, RICATs contributed to enhanced visibility of cultural actors, diversification of tourism experiences, and localized economic benefits, confirming the relevance of clustering strategies grounded in intangible heritage.

However, the analysis also reveals that these positive effects remained fragile and temporally bounded. The interruption of RICATs after only two editions underscores a critical structural constraint: the absence of political continuity and institutional anchoring. Rather than reflecting conceptual weakness or lack of stakeholder interest, the discontinuity of the initiative highlights the limits of experimental tourism innovation in contexts where governance remains highly centralized and cultural tourism occupies a marginal position in operational policy priorities. In such environments, pilot initiatives are vulnerable to political shifts and institutional inertia, preventing their consolidation into durable development instruments.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to cluster theory by demonstrating that cultural and social capital can partially compensate for infrastructural deficits in urban tourism development, particularly in Global South

cities. At the same time, it challenges deterministic interpretations of clustering by emphasizing the decisive role of political commitment, governance alignment, and institutionalization. Cultural density may catalyze innovation, but it cannot substitute for sustained public policy support.

In practical terms, the findings suggest that urban tourism diversification strategies must move beyond event-based experimentation toward formalized governance mechanisms. This includes integrating cultural and artisanal tourism into national tourism strategies, decentralizing decision-making authority to municipal actors, and establishing permanent multi-stakeholder coordination platforms. Without such measures, initiatives like RICATs risk remaining symbolic showcases rather than engines of structural transformation.

Finally, this study opens avenues for future research on the political economy of tourism innovation in African cities. Comparative analyses of cluster initiatives that achieved institutional continuity, as well as longitudinal studies examining the transition from pilot projects to public policy instruments, would deepen understanding of the conditions under which cultural clustering can contribute to sustainable urban tourism development.

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