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Paper: “Gouvernance Durable et Dynamique de la Fréquentation Touristique de la Grotte de Dimba (RD Congo)”

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Corresponding Author: Daniel Mudinga Mudinga

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Peer review:

Reviewer 1: Koffi Norbert Konan
Alassane Ouattara University, Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire

Reviewer 2: Bokini Séverin
Université de Parakou, Bénin

Reviewer 3: Blinded

I. Evaluation Criteria

#	Question	Score	Comments
1	The title is clear and appropriate to the content	2.5	The title is informative but does not faithfully reflect the manuscript's scientific content. It would therefore be advisable to reformulate it. Suggested title: "Sustainable Governance and Trends in Tourist Attendance at the Dimba Cave (DR Congo)."
2	The abstract presents the objectives, methods and results	2.5	The abstract correctly sets out the objectives, methodology, main results and recommendations. It would nonetheless benefit from being reorganized around the following structure: context, study objective, methodology, results, and recommendations.
3	Few grammatical and spelling errors	2.5	The text is generally well written. Some repetitions, overly long formulations, and terminological inconsistencies remain to be addressed in order to improve editorial quality. In addition, the manuscript would benefit from page numbering and from clearly separating figure/table captions from the body-paragraph text.
4	The methods are explained clearly	3	The methodology is relevant and scientifically coherent. However, certain methodological choices (sample size, projection assumptions, validation of the statistical models) would benefit from stronger justification. The systemic approach is well introduced. However, the sample of 69 tourists/year is presented as "representative" without a sample-size calculation formula or justification of the confidence level adopted (unlike other studies of the same type), and this should be justified. The choice to exclude tourism authorities "to avoid bias" introduces a bias of its own, as it deprives the study of an institutional perspective that is useful for analyzing governance.
5	The results are clear and free of errors	2.5	The results are clearly presented and supported by appropriate statistical analyses. The figures are relevant but could be more thoroughly interpreted in the text. Their quality should also

			be improved (see Figures 3 and 7), and the predominantly descriptive approach should be strengthened with more analytical depth. Table 1 presents a "Prominence (compared with Nkamba)" column uniformly rated "Low" over 5 years without an explicit scoring scale; the method used to assign this rating is not described. In addition, the regression equation ($Y = -7.70 \times X + 15715.30$) produces a very high intercept, indicating that the Year variable was not centered/recoded. This presentation choice should be corrected or justified, as it may be pedagogically confusing. Furthermore, it is advisable to reorganize the outline of the results section as follows: 1. Ineffectiveness of the Governance of the Dimba Cave 2. Impact of Governance on the Dynamics of Tourist Attendance at the Dimba Cave 3. Prospects for Sustainable Governance of the Dimba Cave
6	The conclusions are accurate and supported by the content	3	The conclusion remains generally proportionate to the data, but the claim of a "linear decline without disruption" through 2035, based on only 5 years of observation, is a strong extrapolation that would benefit from being further nuanced in the text rather than simply listed as an assumption.
7	The references are complete and appropriate	2	The bibliography is substantial but heterogeneous (several sources are undated web pages ("n.d.") or reports from non-academic organizations). The proportion of peer-reviewed articles directly related to the Dimba Cave itself is low (few prior studies specific to the site), which is understandable given the scarcity of research on the topic, but this should be flagged as a limitation. Full harmonization according to the ESJ bibliographic style is recommended.

II. Overall Score

Score obtained : 18 / 35

That is : 51.42%

Overall assessment: Good

The manuscript broadly meets the scientific requirements of the European Scientific Journal, whose evaluation is based primarily on scientific validity, methodological rigor and technical quality, rather than on the presumed impact of the results.

III. Major Strengths of the Manuscript

The manuscript presents several important scientific qualities:

- An original research question addressing the sustainable governance of a natural heritage site of international interest
- A coherent articulation between tourism, conservation and territorial governance
- A methodology based on a systemic approach and multidimensional statistical tools (PCA, MCA, MFA, Spearman correlation and regression) suited to the research problem
- A discussion connected to the issues of world heritage and sustainable development
- Concrete recommendations likely to inform public policy on the management of protected natural sites

IV. Main Recommended Improvements

Prior to publication, it would be advisable to:

1. Strengthen the justification of the sampling strategy and of the projection assumptions through 2035
2. Make the methodological limitations of the study explicit
3. Reorganize the presentation of the results
4. Reformulate the study objective (suggestion: analyze the influence of sustainable governance on the dynamics of tourist attendance at the Dimba Cave)
5. Reduce the predominantly descriptive approach in favor of a more analytical one
6. Deepen the critical discussion by comparing the results more thoroughly with recent international studies
7. Fully harmonize the presentation of the bibliographic references according to the ESJ style

V. Reviewer's Recommendation

Editorial recommendation (ESJ)

- ☐ Accepted without modification
- ☐ Accepted after minor revision
- ☐ **Returned for major revision and resubmission**

VI. Comments to the Authors

This manuscript constitutes a relevant scientific contribution to the field of environmental governance and sustainable tourism. The study stands out for the quality of its conceptual framework, the diversity of the statistical methods employed, and the relevance of its operational recommendations. The proposed improvements concern:

- 1 Reorganizing the abstract

2. Strengthening the theoretical framing of the introduction and proposing a precise study objective (suggestion: analyze the influence of sustainable governance on the dynamics of tourist attendance at the Dimba Cave)
3. Deepening the methodological justification: detail and justify the size and composition of the tourist sample (formula, margin of error, confidence level); make explicit the scale used to rate the site's "prominence" relative to other destinations; discuss more explicitly the limitations of the 10-year projection derived from only 5 annual data points, including a confidence interval around the projected value of 45.8 visitors in 2035; clarify why tourism authorities were excluded from the sample despite being central to the governance analysis
4. Reorganizing the presentation of the results;
5. Strengthening the scientific discussion ;
6. Harmonizing the bibliographic references according to the ESJ bibliographic style.