

Organisational forgetting in historic public buildings: Climate Adaptation and Industry 4.0 Challenges in Nigeria's PWD Legacy Buildings (1947–1966)

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International Journal of Frontiers in Engineering and Technology Research, 2026, 10(02), 059-067

Publication history: Received on 15 May 2026; revised on 24 June 2026; accepted on 26 June 2026

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53294/ijfetr.2026.10.2.0017>

Abstract

Nigeria's First Republic regional legislative buildings in Kaduna, Ibadan and Enugu remain physically visible, yet the project documentation needed to explain their design, construction, alteration, conservation and climate-responsive adaptation histories has largely disappeared. This paper investigates the paradox of physical survival and documentary loss in Nigeria's built heritage. Its objective is to examine how public-sector institutions lose, neglect, or disown built-environment knowledge over time and to explain why such loss matters for sustainable conservation, adaptive reuse, climate-responsive retrofitting and Industry 4.0 readiness. Using archival searches, field observations and comparative review of six legislative buildings constructed between 1947 and the 1960s, the study identifies four mechanisms of organisational forgetting: restructuring-induced amnesia, technological discontinuity, post-conflict purposive forgetting and generational discounting. The findings suggest that documentation loss is not merely an archival or technological failure, but a behavioural and institutional problem shaped by fragmented responsibility, weak stewardship, resource rationalisation, disrupted organisational memory and limited accountability for preservation outcomes. The paper argues that Industry 4.0 tools such as digitisation, automated cataloguing, cloud storage, artificial intelligence and digital twins can support heritage management only when institutions first establish custodial ownership, metadata discipline, documentation audits and preservation routines. It further shows that missing drawings, alteration records, material specifications and maintenance histories obstruct climate-sensitive conservation because they make it difficult to assess embodied carbon, plan adaptive reuse, evaluate structural vulnerability and design low-impact retrofits. The paper proposes a documentation governance framework and a pilot heritage documentation programme anchored in public works institutions, universities, archives and professional bodies. It contributes policy-relevant insight for sustainable built heritage preservation and Industry 4.0 transformation in developing economies.

Keywords: Built heritage; Climate-responsive conservation; Documentation governance; Industry 4.0; Organisational forgetting.

1. Introduction

Buildings are among the most informative material artifacts of the past because they preserve evidence of cultural identity, technological capability, political authority, social organisation and institutional ambition. Historic buildings are not merely physical artifacts. They are repositories of technical knowledge, cultural identity, political authority and institutional memory. Their conservation requires more than the maintenance of walls, roofs, finishes and structural systems. It also requires preservation of the project knowledge through which buildings can be interpreted, maintained, adapted and transmitted. Conservation scholarship emphasises that the significance of historic buildings rests not only in their material fabric, but also in the historical, cultural, emotional, technical and procedural knowledge through which

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they are understood and protected [1, 2]. In organisational terms, the storage of such knowledge is not limited to drawings or physical files; it also encompasses digital records. It also includes the memories and interactions of people, their routines, professional cultures, institutional structures and external archives [3, 4, 5].

This concern is urgent in Nigeria, where major regional legislative buildings constructed during the late colonial and First Republic periods remain physically visible while their project documentation has become partial, inaccessible, or missing. Six regional legislative buildings are central to this paper. These buildings were constructed between 1947 and 1960. They include; the Northern House of Parliament in Kaduna, the Lugard Memorial Council chamber both in Kaduna, the Old Western Hall and Parliament Building of Western Nigeria in Ibadan and the Old Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly and Eastern House of Parliament in Enugu. The structures of these historical buildings embody the regional political identity of the time, the constitutional transition, administrative modernisation and architectural experimentation. However, these buildings now present a preservation paradox. While their physical forms remain visible, the documentary knowledge required to interpret and conserve them has survived unevenly. Although not all the buildings examined are treated here as formally listed heritage monuments, they are historic public buildings with heritage significance because of their association with Nigeria's regional political history, constitutional transition and public works architecture.

Central to this history is the colonial and early post-colonial agency that was responsible for public infrastructure and government buildings. This was the Public Works Department commonly referred to as the PWD [6]. The PWD was tasked with the preservation of records, drawings, design briefs, construction correspondence, professional attributions, approvals, maintenance files and alteration histories of all public infrastructure works [7]. In addition, successive administrative changes, restructuring, and fragmentation of public works responsibilities further weakened the continuity of this knowledge system. The problem is therefore not simply that records are missing; it is that the organizations that should remember these buildings appear to have lost part of their custodial memory.

This paper asks: what behavioural and institutional mechanisms explain the loss or inaccessibility of project documentation for Nigeria's First Republic regional legislative buildings and how does this loss affect climate-responsive heritage preservation and Industry 4.0 readiness? It answers this question through archival investigation, fieldwork, interviews and comparative analysis of six legislative buildings. The paper contributes to built heritage and organisational memory scholarship in three ways. First, it shows that built heritage preservation in developing economies requires documentation governance, not only physical conservation. Second, it extends organisational forgetting theory into a post-colonial public works context. Third, it argues that Industry 4.0 readiness in heritage preservation depends on behavioural and climate-adaptation readiness: custodial accountability, institutional ownership, metadata discipline, alteration records, material knowledge and preservation routines. Without these conditions, digital technologies may reproduce rather than solve analogue forgetting.

2. Theoretical Framework: Organisational Memory, Forgetting, and Built Heritage Documentation

This paper is anchored in organisational memory, organisational forgetting, post-colonial archival theory and behavioural concepts of responsibility, ownership and stewardship. Within this context, organisational memory refers to the way through which institutions retain and retrieve their past experience, knowledge, routines, records, practices and interpretive systems [3]. In the case of the PWD which was a public-sector design bureaucracy, project memory would have resided in architects and engineers, drawing offices, approval routines, departmental registries, technical standards and public archives. When these memory locations are disrupted by restructuring, staff turnover, relocation, weak cataloguing, or poor archival transfer, records may become functionally lost even when some physical documents still exist. Recent work such as Foroughi et al.,[5], Coraiola et al., [8]; Sen et al.,[15], treats organisational memory as distributed across individuals, culture, transformations, structures and external archives rather than as a static repository.

Organisational forgetting provides the second anchor. Forgetting occurs when organisational knowledge becomes unavailable, inaccessible, abandoned, or disconnected from present practice [10, 11]. It may be accidental, where knowledge disappears because it was not consolidated, transferred, or protected, or purposeful, where organisations abandon knowledge seen as obsolete, inconvenient, or inconsistent with new priorities. In post-colonial public institutions, forgetting may arise less from strategic renewal than from administrative rupture, political transition, weak records governance, civil conflict, institutional renaming, and psychological distance between current officials and inherited records.

Proponents of post-colonial archival theory like Stoler [12, 13]; Nerlekar and Orsini [14] strengthen this argument by showing that archives are not neutral containers of evidence. Cases of missing drawings, inaccessible files, uncatalogued

plans, or departments unaware of inherited records should therefore not automatically be read as deliberate destruction; however, they should not be dismissed as meaningless gaps. This is because, archives are shaped by power, classification, governance, and silence [9]. They may reveal how institutions prioritise some forms of memory while allowing others to disappear.

The behavioural dimension explains why institutions may fail to preserve records even when preservation is valuable. Diffusion of responsibility occurs when multiple offices could plausibly be responsible for old files, allowing each to assume that another office is the rightful custodian [16]. Psychological ownership suggests that people are more likely to protect objects, tasks, or institutions they experience as 'theirs' [17]. Stewardship theory similarly argues that organisational actors protect long-term institutional interests when they identify with the organisation's continuing mission [18]). Where current staff view PWD-era records as old, irrelevant, or belonging to another administrative generation, stewardship weakens.

A second behavioural mechanism is justificatory inertia: the tendency of individuals or organisations to treat plausible constraints as sufficient explanations for inaction, thereby closing down inquiry into feasible alternatives. In documentation contexts, lack of digitisation equipment, poor storage, or limited funding may be real constraints, but they become behaviourally consequential when treated as final explanations rather than problems requiring adaptive response. This logic draws on bounded rationality, motivated reasoning, defensive routines and weak accountability for reasoning processes [19, 20, 21, 22].

Built heritage preservation is increasingly linked to adaptive reuse, low-carbon urban transformation and climate-responsive retrofitting. Historic public buildings contain embodied energy and material value, but responsible adaptation depends on documentation: drawings, material specifications, ventilation strategies, roof details, drainage histories, maintenance records and alteration files. Where such records are missing, conservation professionals rely more heavily on visual inspection, conjecture, invasive investigation, or costly reconstruction of building information. Documentation loss therefore weakens the evidence base for passive cooling assessment, flood resilience, structural reinforcement, adaptive reuse and lifecycle carbon evaluation.

The same logic applies to Industry 4.0. Digital twins, AI-assisted cataloguing, cloud repositories, geospatial mapping, and building information modelling can support heritage preservation only when reliable analogue or field-generated data exist. Digital twins require accurate geometry, material data, condition records, maintenance history and updating protocols. AI-assisted cataloguing requires scanned records, usable metadata, classification rules and human verification. Where institutions do not know what records exist, who owns them, or how they should be classified, Industry 4.0 systems inherit the disorder of the analogue archive.

This framework leads to four analytically derived mechanisms examined in this paper. Restructuring-induced amnesia refers to loss of retrieval knowledge when institutions are renamed, divided, relocated, or reorganised. Technological discontinuity refers to exclusion of important records when their format does not fit available preservation technologies or workflows. Post-conflict purposive forgetting refers to politically sensitive non-preservation, restricted access, or neglect where documentation is tied to contested histories. Generational discounting refers to weakening of responsibility when current staff perceive inherited records as belonging to another administrative or historical era. These mechanisms are not presented as established constructs in prior literature; they are theory-informed analytical categories developed to explain the documentary condition of the cases.

3. Methodology

This paper adopts a primary qualitative multi-case study design, using data generated within a broader research project on Nigeria's regional legislative buildings. It draws on archival searches, site visits, photographic documentation and semi-structured interviews to examine how project documentation for six Public Works Department legacy buildings became fragmented, inaccessible, incomplete, or missing. Archival searches were conducted at the National Archives Enugu, National Archives Ibadan and successor institutions to the Public Works Department. Fieldwork was conducted between July and November 2024 and included site visits to all six buildings, photographic documentation and semi-structured interviews with seven informants, including archivists, legislative staff, and institutional custodians. Interview data were thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns in custodial practices, access constraints and institutional attitudes toward documentation.

The empirical base consists of six legislative buildings in three historically significant regional capitals: two in Kaduna, two in Ibadan and two in Enugu. These cases all belong to the same building type, are linked to Nigeria's regional legislative institutions and allow comparison across Northern, Western and Eastern regional contexts. The study draws

on four categories of evidence: archival materials; field-based observation and photographic documentation; comparative architectural evidence relating to form, materiality, spatial organisation, climatic response and institutional function; and evidence of absence, including missing drawings, unavailable design briefs, inaccessible files, uncertain authorship, fragmented custody and reliance on researcher-produced sketches or as-built documentation.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, evidence relating to documentation availability and absence was organised by building and region. Second, each building's documentary condition was classified as original, partial, reconstructed, secondary, unavailable, or custodially uncertain. Third, these patterns were interpreted through organisational memory, organisational forgetting, post-colonial archival theory and behavioural preservation concepts. Trustworthiness was addressed through triangulation across archives, field observations, photographs, historical records, interviews and cross-case comparison. The study is limited by the small number of informants, uneven archival access across the three regions and the difficulty of distinguishing physically destroyed records from uncatalogued or inaccessible records.

4. Findings: Documentary Fragmentation Across the Six Legislative Buildings

The analysis shows that the buildings have survived physically, but the project knowledge required to explain their design, authorship, construction history, alteration and conservation significance has survived only in fragments. Table 1 summarizes the documentation profile.

Table 1 Documentation gap across six legislative buildings

Building	Region	Available documentation	Missing/incomplete documentation
Lugard Memorial Council Chamber	Kaduna, Northern	Partial plans; historical brief; photographs; site evidence	Design process records; original correspondence; complete construction documentation
Northern House of Parliament	Kaduna, Northern	Original drawings of extensions and as-built drawings of Chamber; committee records; photographic and field evidence	Original design correspondence; some authorship records; complete construction files
Old Western Hall	Ibadan, Western	Researcher-prepared as-built drawings; historical references; field observations;	Original PWD drawings; design briefs; construction records; professional correspondence
Parliament Building, Western Nigeria	Ibadan, Western	As-built drawings; opening programme; institutional/library records; summarized construction records	Architect attribution; original construction records; detailed design correspondence
Old Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly	Enugu, Eastern	Researcher sketches; field observations; photographic evidence	Original drawings; design brief; construction records; custodial trail
Eastern House of Parliament	Enugu, Eastern	Student sketches; site evidence; limited secondary references	Original drawings; design brief; correspondence; construction and alteration records

Table 1A Current functions of the six legislative buildings

Building	Current Function
Lugard Memorial Council Chamber	Meeting venue, Council of Emirs and Elders
Northern House of Parliament	Kaduna State House of Assembly complex
Old Western Hall	Event centre
Parliament Building, Western Nigeria	Oyo State House of Assembly
Old Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly	Ministry of Finance (chamber unused)
Eastern House of Parliament	Enugu State House of Assembly

Table 1A shows that each building has undergone some form of institutional, administrative, or functional transition since its original PWD-era use. For instance, each transfer of custody from colonial PWD to regional government to state ministry to legislative assembly to event centre represents a potential rupture in documentary continuity, consistent with the restructuring-induced amnesia mechanism described in Section 5.

These functional differences influence preservation incentives and custodial responsibility. Active Assemblies produce ongoing administrative records but may not prioritise historical documentation. Repurposed buildings without designated heritage stewards face higher documentation loss risk.

Five findings emerge. First, physical survival does not equal documentary continuity. The six buildings remain part of Nigeria's built environment, but records needed to explain design logic, construction process, professional authorship, alterations and conservation requirements are incomplete. Fieldwork and site observation became necessary precisely where archival records were unavailable.

Second, reconstructed evidence often substitutes for original project documentation. In the Western and Eastern cases especially, as-built drawings, researcher sketches, photographs and student sketches became essential because original PWD drawings, design briefs and construction records could not be consistently located. This does not invalidate the architectural analysis, but it changes the epistemic status of the evidence: current knowledge depends partly on reconstruction, inference and secondary documentation rather than preserved institutional records.

Third, political and ceremonial records appear more available than technical project records. Opening programmes, institutional library records, legislative proceedings and historical addresses have survived more readily than design briefs, drawings, construction files and professional correspondence. The state appears to remember proceedings and ceremonies more effectively than the physical infrastructure that housed them.

Fourth, custodianship is fragmented. Evidence was sometimes obtained through individual officers or legislative staff rather than stable archival systems. Such personal custody is fragile because records and retrieval knowledge can disappear with staff transfer, retirement, death, or institutional relocation.

Fifth, documentation survival is regionally uneven. The Northern cases retain relatively stronger traces, including partial plans, drawings, institutional records, photographs and site evidence. The Western cases retain some institutional and ceremonial records but rely heavily on reconstructed as-built drawings. The Eastern cases appear most vulnerable, with substantial dependence on sketches, field observation, photographic evidence and limited secondary references. This does not prove deliberate erasure, but it shows that documentation loss is not neutral: some architectural histories become easier to reconstruct while others become more speculative.

Overall, documentation loss changes what can be known. Without original drawings, design briefs, correspondence, authorship records and construction documentation, architectural interpretation depends more heavily on visible form, oral traces, site observation and inference. The documentation gap therefore, affects conservation planning, architectural interpretation, institutional accountability and public memory.

5. Mechanisms of Organisational Forgetting

Restructuring-induced amnesia occurs when institutional reorganisation breaks the relationship between records, custodians and retrieval knowledge. In the PWD and successor institutions, project documentation did not reside only in files; it also resided in routines, professional relationships, office structures and tacit knowledge about where records were kept. When ministries are renamed, divided, relocated, or absorbed into new departments, physical records may survive while the pathway for finding and interpreting them collapses. The movement of the source study across Houses of Assembly, libraries, archives and individual officers suggests dispersed rather than stable custody.

Technological discontinuity occurs when inherited records are excluded because their format does not fit present preservation tools or workflows. Architectural documentation often includes large-format drawings, tracing sheets, blueprints, maps, fragile plans and annotated files. Where institutions lack large-format scanners, conservation storage, or metadata systems, difficult records may be excluded from digitisation or cataloguing. The absence of equipment becomes organisational forgetting when no alternative method is attempted, such as sectional photography, outsourced scanning, manual cataloguing, university partnerships, or phased digitisation.

Post-conflict purposive forgetting describes selective non-preservation, restricted access, or institutional neglect of records connected to politically sensitive histories. This mechanism is most relevant to the Eastern cases, where documentation appears weakest and where regional dissolution, civil conflict and post-war institutional disruption complicate archival continuity. The argument is cautious: absence does not prove deliberate erasure. Records may be lost through war, relocation, humidity, poor cataloguing, or administrative collapse. For this reason, purposive forgetting is treated as a plausible explanatory hypothesis rather than a confirmed finding.

Generational discounting occurs when current institutional actors do not experience inherited records as part of their present responsibility. This tendency may be reinforced by identity-protective cognition, whereby officials unconsciously distance themselves from colonial-era or First Republic documentation that no longer aligns with their current institutional or political identity [23]. PWD-era documents were produced more than six decades ago by officials, architects, engineers, and administrators who are no longer available. Current staff may view such documents as old, irrelevant, or belonging to another ministry or political era. Where present institutions do not see themselves as custodians of PWD-era project knowledge, preservation becomes peripheral.

The four mechanisms reinforce one another. Restructuring scatters records and weakens custodial memory; technological discontinuity makes difficult formats easier to neglect; post-conflict conditions may make some records politically sensitive or less likely to be recovered; and generational discounting normalises the loss by making old records appear irrelevant. Together, they explain why the documentation gap is durable and why equipment procurement alone cannot solve it.

6. The Behavioural Preservation Paradox and Industry 4.0 Readiness

The evidence reveals a behavioural preservation paradox: Nigeria's First Republic regional legislative buildings remain materially present, but the institutional memory required to understand, conserve, adapt and digitally transform them has weakened. Physical survival is not the same as historical or climate-responsive preservation. A building may remain standing, occupied, repainted and repurposed while its original drawings, design intent, construction logic, maintenance history, alteration record, authorship, material specification, passive environmental strategy and symbolic meaning become unavailable.

The paradox is behavioural because documentation loss is produced not only by decay, weak technology, or poor storage, but by institutional action and inaction. Records become functionally absent when institutions fail to assign responsibility, preserve retrieval systems, update catalogues, transfer custody, document alterations, or cultivate stewardship over inherited public assets. If these behaviours collapse, records may exist somewhere but remain practically inaccessible. In such a condition, the archive is not simply lost; it is institutionally disowned.

This has direct implications for climate-responsive conservation. Historic legislative buildings cannot be responsibly adapted to contemporary climate conditions without knowledge of their materials, structural systems, roof profiles, drainage arrangements, ventilation logic, past modifications, and maintenance vulnerabilities. Documentation gaps make it difficult to determine whether a building should be conserved, retrofitted, adaptively reused, structurally strengthened, or digitally modelled. They also increase the risk of inappropriate interventions, such as replacing

climate-sensitive original elements with unsuitable modern materials, ignoring passive cooling features, or undertaking alterations that weaken heritage value while failing to improve environmental performance.

The same problem limits Industry 4.0 readiness. Digitisation is often presented as the obvious solution to heritage documentation problems, but digitisation cannot recover records that have not been inventoried, cannot classify materials that have not been described, and cannot produce reliable digital twins without dependable building data. Digital twins require measured geometry, asset condition data, materials information, maintenance histories, and updating protocols. AI-assisted cataloguing requires scanned records, metadata standards, classification rules, and human verification. Cloud storage requires ownership, access control, institutional continuity and preservation policy. Without these prerequisites, digital systems may simply reproduce analogue disorder in a new technical format.

The central issue, therefore, is not whether Industry 4.0 technologies are useful. They are useful when embedded within documentation governance. The more fundamental question is whether institutions possess the behavioural readiness to identify, own, classify, preserve and update the knowledge that digital technologies are expected to process. In the Nigerian public works context, Industry 4.0 readiness must begin with memory discipline before technological sophistication.

7. Diagnostic Framework, Policy Application and Pilot Implementation

If documentation loss is produced through identifiable mechanisms, heritage policy should move from general recommendations to mechanism-specific intervention. The purpose is not simply to call for more digitisation, but to identify the behavioural and institutional conditions under which digitisation, AI-assisted cataloguing, cloud archiving and digital twins can become useful.

Table 2 Diagnostic framework for built heritage documentation

Mechanism	Diagnostic indicators	Targeted intervention
Restructuring-induced amnesia	Staff cannot identify record locations; records are scattered across ministries, archives, libraries, or individual offices; no central inventory exists.	Conduct documentation audit; create centralised inventory; appoint historical liaison officers; establish interdepartmental archival protocols.
Technological discontinuity	Large-format drawings, blueprints, maps, or fragile files are excluded; lack of scanners or equipment is cited; no alternative workflow exists.	Use sectional photography, outsourced scanning, university partnerships, phased cataloguing and written justification for excluded records.
Post-conflict purposive forgetting	Access is delayed or denied; gaps correspond with political disruption, war, institutional dissolution, or contested regional identity.	Use neutral archival support, university-led documentation projects, oral histories and transparent access policies.
Generational discounting	Documents are described as old or irrelevant; preservation depends on retired staff or informal contacts; no active initiative exists.	Create stewardship roles; include documentation duties in job descriptions; orient staff on institutional history; recognise preservation work.

A practical implementation pathway can begin with a Public Works Heritage Documentation Pilot Program covering one building from each historical region: the Northern House of Parliament in Kaduna, the Parliament Building of Western Nigeria in Ibadan and the Eastern House of Parliament in Enugu. The pilot should be jointly anchored by the relevant state ministry responsible for works or housing, the state archive, the House of Assembly, a university architecture department and a professional body such as the Nigerian Institute of Architects or a project management institute.

The pilot should proceed in five stages: (i) *documentation audit*, (ii) *stabilisation of fragile records*, (iii) *low-cost digitisation*, (iv) *metadata/cataloguing* and (v) *climate-responsive interpretation*. Its first output should not be a complex digital twin, but a verified documentation profile, a basic digital repository with access rules and a retrofit-readiness

brief identifying what is known, what is missing, what must be surveyed and what climate-responsive interventions are feasible.

The main obstacles are political sensitivity, bureaucratic resistance, uncertain record ownership and weak funding incentives. These can be reduced by framing the pilot as a sustainable infrastructure and climate-resilience project rather than a blame-seeking archival investigation. A modest funding model could combine state support, university research capacity, professional association participation, donor heritage grants and in-kind technical support from students in architecture, surveying and information management. In this sense, documentation governance becomes the bridge between built heritage preservation, climate adaptation and Industry 4.0 transformation.

8. Conclusion

The findings have implications for heritage policy, public works governance, climate-responsive conservation, Industry 4.0 readiness and SDG 11.4. Historic public buildings should be treated not only as physical assets requiring maintenance, but also as knowledge assets requiring records, custodianship, interpretation, access and periodic updating. Project close-out should include archival transfer, while maintenance departments should update records after major alterations.

For climate-responsive conservation, documentation is the basis for responsible retrofit. Without reliable information on materials, structure, ventilation, drainage, roof systems, alterations and maintenance history, adaptation may become technically unsafe, environmentally inefficient, or damaging to heritage value. For Industry 4.0 readiness, the paper cautions against treating digitisation, cloud storage, artificial intelligence, digital twins and automated cataloguing as self-sufficient remedies. These tools can improve preservation only where institutions already know what records exist, who owns them, how they should be classified and who is responsible for access and updating.

The study is limited by the small number of informants, uneven archival catalogues and the difficulty of distinguishing physically destroyed records from uncatalogued or inaccessible records. The purposive forgetting mechanism is therefore offered as a plausible explanatory hypothesis requiring further testing. In conclusion, Nigeria's First Republic regional legislative buildings require more than physical maintenance and digital enthusiasm. They require institutional memory. Until the behaviours that produce organisational forgetting are addressed, climate-responsive heritage preservation and Industry 4.0 transformation will remain incomplete.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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