

CHALLENGES FACING IDOMA CULTURE IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The Idoma people of Benue State are one of the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria with amazing cultural heritage ranging from dances, cuisine, fashion, festivals to events. Some of these cultures include the Ije-alekwu Masquerade Dance, Ogirinya Dance, and the New Yam Festival, which formerly attracted people from near and far places. The apparent indifference and dwindling participation in the cultural activities by especially Idoma youths necessitated this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors responsible for Idoma people's apathy towards their cultural heritage with a view to understanding whether or not it affects tourism development. Using the survey method, questionnaire was designed and administered to residents of Otukpo Town of Benue State, North Central Nigeria. The research instrument was validated by 4 experts in the Department of Hospitality Management, School of Applied and Natural Sciences, Federal Polytechnic, Bida. Frequency count and percentage were used to analyze the data collected, while the Chi Square (X^2) analytical technique was used to test the formulated hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis, which states that the level of participation of the Idoma people in their cultural activities adversely affects tourism development, was accepted. This implies that a time will come when the Idoma culture will go into oblivion with the erosion of all of its economic and social benefits if this trend is not checked. Findings further showed that religion influenced the abysmal participation in cultural activities in Idoma land. In order to unravel the issues in this study, systematic advocacy programmes should be organized for residents in their communities, schools and churches, to enlighten them on the significance of culture in regional and national development. No doubt this will rekindle in residents new zeal and passion for their culture and strongly minimize prejudices hampering the growth of cultural tourism in Idoma land.

Keywords: Idoma culture, Idoma people, cultural tourism, tourism development

Introduction

Ogezi (2018) reports that the Idoma people are indigenes of Benue State in North-central Nigeria, by the South-eastern flank of the region. Idoma land stretches from the southern banks of the River Benue to the northern fringes of Igbo land, South East Nigeria. According to the Idoma People's Congress (2013), Idoma land covers 9 local government areas in western Benue State. These are Ado, Agatu, Apa, Obi, Ohimini, Agbadibo, Oju, Okpokwu and Otukpo local government areas. The cultural activities of the Idoma people mark them out as an important destination for cultural tourism. Culture represents the totality of the way of life of a people. Different people have different cultures which are peculiar to and distinguish them from other people. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019), culture and tourism have mutually beneficial relationship which can strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of regions and countries. Culture is increasingly an important element of the tourism product, which also creates distinctiveness in a crowded global market. Gill (2013) defines culture as a system of knowledge, beliefs, procedures, attitudes, and artefacts that is shared within a group. According to Smith (2009), cultural attractions in the tourism industry include heritage sites, performing arts and venues, visual arts sites, festivals and events, religious sites, rural environments, indigenous communities and traditions, crafts, language, modern popular culture, creative activities and other forms of cultural aspects. These products of tourism constitute some of the travel motivations around the world. Smith (2009) also describes cultural tourism as passive, active and interactive engagement with cultures and communities, whereby the visitors gain new experiences of an educational, creative and/or entertaining nature. Destinations have come to realize that tourism and culture are important economic drivers (Zhu, 2013). Tourists now engage in trips to destinations in order to experience and receive satisfaction from alien cultures. No doubt, tourism has assumed a vital role in the development of destinations worldwide. In most cases, culture is a major asset for tourism development as well as one of the major beneficiaries of this development. Culture is a major factor in the attractiveness of most destinations, not only in terms of tourism, but also in attracting residents and inward investment (OECD, 2009). This study, therefore, affords the government authority the opportunity to appreciate the benefits of cultural heritage of Idoma in order to fashion out strategies that boost cultural tourism in that domain.

Statement of the Problem

The Idoma people are one of the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria with amazing cultural heritage ranging from dances, cuisine, fashion, festivals and events. Some of these cultures include the Ije-alekwu Masquerade Dance, Ogirinya Dance, and the New Yam Festival. These cultural activities could be jointly taken or undertaken individually during special occasions such as chieftaincy title celebration, burial of renowned title holders and new yam

festivals. The cultural activities have for long been a source of pride and identity for the Idoma people. As they troop out en mass to participate actively or passively, the presence of visitors from near and far places can be noticed during the cultural activities. Over the years, this cultural tourism has led to the boosting of commerce, friendship and sustainability of local heritage in Idoma land.

However, observations in recent times have shown that the usual excitement, enthusiasm and expectation for Idoma cultural activities have significantly reduced especially among the youth in Idoma land. Corroborating, Onoja (2005) opines that Idoma language and culture is completely vulnerable within the context of globalisation, characterised by the dominant role of international financial institutions, transnational corporations and the 'ubiquitous presence of their agents, money and ideas', along with changes in individuals and corporate life-style. All of these are heightened by new conditions of intensity, proximity and even almost intimacy with what used to be external, far away worlds arising from or associated with massive developments in communications and technology. This is disturbing especially as we realize that the youths are interestingly future custodians of national, regional and ethnic cultures. If this trend persists, a time will come when the Idoma culture will go into extinction. The foregoing constitutes the research gap in the light of the extant literature which this study seeks to fill. This study, therefore, seeks to assess the challenges of Idoma culture in tourism development.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of indifference towards Idoma cultural activities?
2. To what extent does the participation level of Idoma people in their cultural activities affect tourism development?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the causes of apathy towards Idoma cultural activities.
2. To determine whether or not the participation level of Idoma people in their cultural activities affects tourism development

Conceptual Literature

Elements of Culture

Language is one of the essential elements of culture. According to the Sociology Group (2018), every culture has a particular language which is passed by the person it belongs to the next generation and the following generation has to learn the language. Language is a medium or an instrument which is used to express one's view and to keep forward one's opinion. Language still presents the most significant motivation for travel and destination choice today. For example, language tourism develops communicative competence in acquiring foreign languages (ResearchGate, 2018). Apart from travelling to learn a language, people also travel to

destinations where they would not experience barriers in communicating with the residents. Corroborating, Ramnani (2012) reported that fluency in the local language used at the destination was regarded as a facilitator of positive experiences, whereas lack of knowledge of the local language created a language barrier that inhibited positive experiences.

Norms decide the rules and regulation of a society (Sociology Group). In the view of Harcourt (2016), norms are the agreed upon expectations and rules by which a culture guides the behaviour of its members in any given situation. For example, a destination might have taboos or sacred places that should not be desecrated. Understanding a destination's norms is crucial to avoid unpleasant reactions from locals.

Symbols are the basis of culture. A symbol is an object, word, or action that stands for something else with no natural relationship that is culturally defined. Everything one does throughout their life is based and organized through cultural symbolism (Lumen Learning, 2019). For example, the Idoma people can easily be identified from the crowd while in their white and black stripe attires. Symbols such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words- help people understand that world. They provide clues to understanding experiences by conveying recognizable meanings that are shared by associates (Lumen Sociology, 2019).

Role of Culture in Tourism Development

Culture is an important tourism product. In our contemporary time, one of the reasons tourists travel to destinations is to experience exotic cultural heritage, such as dress code, cuisine, festival, carnivals, etc. According to the OECD (2009), culture and creative industries are increasingly being used to promote destinations and enhance their competitiveness. Singh, Agarwal and Tyagi (2016) assert that Cultural factors have the broadest influence, because they constitute a stable set of values, perceptions, preferences and behaviour that have been learned by their beliefs, language, rituals, art, and technology, style of dress, religion and political systems. Culture is the soul of travel; it is where the charm of tourism lies. Culture is also the source of prosperity and development of tourism. Being attracted by a country's culture, visitors come and they spend lot of money on the specialized artistic and many other things available over there.

As Sanusi (2002) posits, without cultural heritage, there would not be any tourism. One's future depends on the others. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2003) emphasize that cultural tourism is important for various reasons; it has a positive economic and social impact, it establishes and reinforces identity, it helps build image, it helps preserve the cultural and historical heritage, with culture as an instrument, it facilitates harmony and understanding among people, it supports culture and helps renew tourism. As cultural tourism gives the destination an identity, it gets known, this attracts interests and people which again helps to mark local production. Furthermore, culture is the lifeblood of

a vibrant society, expressed in the many ways we tell our stories, celebrate, remember the past, entertain ourselves, and imagine the future. Participating in culture can benefit individuals in many ways, some of which are deeply emotional. They are a source of delight and wonder, and can provide emotionally and intellectually moving experiences, whether pleasurable or unsettling, that encourage celebration or contemplation (Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2019).

Background Information of Otukpo

The study was conducted in Otukpo. The Government of Benue State (2018) reports that Otukpo Local Government Area is one of the oldest local government areas in Benue State, but also the traditional headquarters of Idoma people, where its paramount Chief, the Och'Idoma has his palace. Otukpo Local Government Area came into existence in 1923, with its headquarters at Otukpo. It then comprised twenty-two (22) districts, and was known as Idoma Native Authority. However, with the local government reform of 1976 and subsequent local government creation exercises, the present Otukpo local government now has thirteen (13) council wards. It lies between latitudes 7⁰⁰ and 7⁰ 30N and longitudes 7⁰ 30 and 8⁰ 10E. Otukpo, which is centrally located between the Tiv, in Benue State and the Igala area of Kogi State, is bounded in the North by Apa and Ohimini Local Government Areas in the South East, Ado Local Government Area in the South and Olamaboro Local Government Area in Kogi State in the West. The projected population of Otukpo Town is estimated at 38,880 (Owoicho and Ogwuche, 2018). The people of Otukpo are predominantly peasant farmers, growing various types of food crops.

Research Methodology

Study procedure

- a. Participants (Respondents): 200 subjects participated in the study. In the three wards (Otukpo Town Central, Otukpo Town East and Otukpo Town West) studied, questionnaires were administered in fairly equal proportions.
- b. Instrument: The questionnaire used in this study was validated by 4 experts in the Department of Hospitality Management, the Federal Polytechnic, Bida, Niger State, Nigeria. Well-structured questionnaires were used for data collection. The questions were constructed to appear under specific sections so as to address the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study. Such sections in the questionnaire included those pertaining to finding out information on respondent's demographics, attitudes towards the cultural activities as well as a section on residents' preference for their cultural activities. Questionnaires were administered hand-to-hand by the authors, with the assistance of 4 research assistants.

- c. Sampling: While the systematic sampling was used to select the fourth house in every street in Otukpo Town, random sampling was adopted in the administration of questionnaires in those households. Data for the study were collected from residents of Otukpo who fell under the categories of students, apprentices, farmers, traders and civil servants.
- d. Method of data analysis: The Chi Square analytical technique was used to test the variables in the null hypothesis at 5% level of significance. In this case, the level of participation of Idoma people in their cultural activities was measured to see if it has any impact on tourism development.

The number of questionnaires used was based on the population of Otukpo Town, using the Kenya Projects Organization (KENPRO) (2012) which states that for a population ranging from 30,000 to 40,000, the sample size to be used is 380. Using the projected population of Otukpo Town of 38,000 at 0.5%, 200 questionnaires were administered on the adult population only.

Results and Discussion

An explanation for non-participation of most Idoma people in cultural activities is depicted in Table 1. Analysis in Table 1 shows that 178 respondents representing 89% of the respondents were of the view that they had difficulty in accessing the events centre for cultural activities. It is only an insubstantial 22 respondents in this analysis that looked to the contrary. This result corroborates with researchers' observation concerning bumpy and dusty road leading to the events centre. The condition of the roads no doubt must have contributed to the lukewarm attitude displayed by the locals towards participation in cultural activities. This is a worrisome situation because empirical studies show that destinations with well-built transport infrastructure attract more tourists (Murphy, Pritchard and Smith, 2000). Worthy of note is the fact that tourists may seek alternative destinations if they are inhibited by inefficiencies in transport (Crouch, 1994 and Shih, 2006). According to the United Nations (2019), accessible tourist destination enables all people to participate in and enjoy tourism experiences. It is an ongoing endeavour to ensure tourist destinations, products and services are accessible to all people, regardless of their physical limitations, disabilities and age.

In Table 2, analysis indicates that 84% of the respondents asserted that their religious beliefs and inclinations constituted the major barrier for their lack of participation in cultural activities. The Idoma people of Benue State are predominantly of the Christian faith, and possibly have been instructed to steer clear of cultural activities that have no scriptural connotations. In the perspective of Kim (2001), Christian evaluation of popular culture is almost uniformly negative, with just few exceptions. Where we sense secularity, we have negative evaluations of it. Having rejected it, we focus on the negative aspects of popular culture, such as violence, lustfulness, and the occult. The implication of this withdrawal from culture, in the long run would amount to

a complete or absolute depletion or extinction of Idoma cultural heritage. However, the preservation of cultural heritage is of great significance to both locals and tourists. For example, Tuan and Navrud (2008) reports that the economic benefits accruing from the preservation of a cultural heritage are primarily received by visitors and non-visitors. Visitors are willing to pay to access the site. The cultural activities of the Idoma people are truly classified under event tourism, which according to Hussain (2012) as adapted from Getz (1991) have the potentials for creating positive images, improving quality of life and the environment, attracting residents and investors. Other potentials are attracting quality tourists, stimulating demand, increasing visitor spending and length of stay. According to Snowball (2016), the Cultural Times assesses the contribution of cultural and creative industries to economic growth and reports that they generate US\$250 billion in revenue a year, creating 29.5 million jobs worldwide.

Table 3 represents a graphical explanation of the attitudes of Idoma residents towards their cultural activities. In the analysis therein, while the attitudes of 50% of the respondents were generally poor, 39% of the residents' attitudes were confirmed to be fair. In Table 3, it is also clear that the attitudes of 9.5% of the respondents were simply good, remaining a meagre 1.5% of the respondents in this equation that had excellent attitudes towards their cultural activities. The result in Table 3, therefore, implies that the residents of Otukpo are highly indifferent to their cultural activities. The attitude of the residents may not be unconnected with the negative effects of globalization on the cultures of the Idoma people. Nilson (2010) explains that globalization is the process by which different economies and societies become more closely integrated, and concurrent with increasing worldwide globalization, there has been much research into its consequences.

Hebron and Stack (2013) defined globalization as the further development of the process initiated over many centuries, reflected in the trade expansion, exploration, conquest, migration, colonization, technological advancement, and so on that have taken place throughout world history. According to Ugbam, Chukwu and Ogbe (2014), globalization is a new form of colonialism that further enriches the rich and the powerful. In fact most Nigerians believe that the process of globalization has impacted negatively on their country's development and that the country would have been better without it. For example, regarding the poor countries, Aimiwu (2004) maintains that globalization is responsible for entrenching poverty, and ruthlessly grinding the poor everywhere, not only widening that gap between the rich and the poor, between countries and within countries, but actually, like Dracula, thriving on the blood of the poor. This sentiment is given more credence when globalization is viewed from the cultural perspective. For instance, Oni (2005) emphasizes that major critics of globalization from Africa have argued that globalization is destructive to African culture and development. This is indeed responsible for the near-cultural erosion in many African communities.

Table 1: Accessibility challenge of residents in reaching events centre for cultural activities

Accessibility	No. of respondents	Percentage
YES	178	89.0
NO	22	11.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Work (2018)

Table 2: Adverse impact of religion on the participation of Idoma youths in cultural activities

Religion	No. of respondents	Percentage
YES	168	84.0
NO	32	16.0
Total	200	100

Source: Field Work (2018)

Table 3: Attitudes of Idoma residents towards sustenance of their cultural heritage

Attitude	No. of respondents	Percentage
Poor	100	50.0
Fair	78	39.0
Good	19	9.5
Excellent	3	1.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Work (2018)

Test of Hypothesis

In testing the hypothesis, Table 3 was employed in doing the analysis using the SPSS and the Chi-Square analytical technique.

Chi-square Tests for Table 3

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	11.137 ^a	3	.734
Likelihood Ratio	9.950	3	.019

Linear by Linear Association	8.949	1	.003
N of Valid Cases	200		

a.3 cell (37.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.21.

Chi-Square Result:

H₀: The level of participation of the Idoma people in their cultural activities adversely affects tourism development.

H₁: The level of participation of the Idoma people in their cultural activities does not affect tourism development.

Decision rule: Reject H₀ if P-value < 0.059 (i.e. 5% level of significance). Since the P-value .734 > 0.05, then we do not reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, the level of participation of the Idoma people in their cultural activities adversely affects tourism development. This implies that the Idoma people of Benue State, Nigeria participate very little in their cultural activities, and gradually sending their cultural heritage into oblivion.

Conclusion

Culture remains a people's identity, and no two cultures are exactly the same. Therefore culture as an essential commodity and motivation for tourists' trips should be preserved and packaged for sale. Insights from this study have shown important barriers responsible for the apathy displayed by Idoma people towards their cultural heritage. Accessibility issues and religious prejudices formed the major obstacles that shaped the attitudes of Idoma people negatively against their culture. In consideration of those, pragmatic steps should be taken to contend with the listed drawbacks. Firstly, government should build and regularly maintain all roads leading to domains and centres of cultural activities and festivals in Idoma land. This intervention will encourage many residents and visitors to attend the cultural activities. Secondly, government collaboration with NGOs and faith based organizations is very important in creating the synergy required in sensitizing the residents and locals on the numerous benefits of their cultural heritage. This advocacy is expected to be regular and effective. Lastly, there should be curriculum enrichment that introduces culture as a compulsory subject to be taught in both primary and post primary institutions in Idoma land. These suggestions are important measures that should be replicated in other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria and foreign locations that are experiencing same cultural dearth like the Idoma people in order to revive them for prosperity and posterity.

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