MASQUERADING IN TRADITIONAL FESTIVAL OF THE SOUTH-EAST OF NIGERIA: AESTHETICS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO CULTURAL TOURISM

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Abstract
Masquerading is a unique cultural festival in the South-East of Nigeria, well recognized for maintaining and showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the people. More so in the current predicament of mono economy in the country, other sources of income and revenue generation are of utmost importance. The study examined the aesthetic value of masquerading in traditional festival of the South-east of Nigeria and their contributions to cultural tourism. The main data collection technique used for the study was the observer as participant method with in-depth interview. Findings showed that masquerade festivals in the South-east are prominent for their high aesthetic values which are exhibited mainly in the forms, materials, colour of masks, costumes, as well as their performance. Also the mammoth crowd drawn by the festival, level of preparation and excitement derived from masquerade entertainments confirmed its fascinating character. Finally, many tourism potentials abound in the festival ranging from the capacity to extend tourist stay, create new attractions and economic activities as well as trigger rural development of various types. Therefore, masquerade festival in the South-east of Nigeria can satisfactorily promote cultural tourism and increase avenues for income and revenue generation. In recommendation, the festivals should be properly documented, repackaged and included in the tourism calendar by the concerned stakeholders.
Keywords: Masquerade festivals, aesthetic, fascination, tourism potentials.

Introduction
Culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment (Asiwaju, 1997). It is what gives order and meaning to the linguistic, social, politic, economic, aesthetic, religious and philosophical modes and organization of a people, nation or ethnic group. This is to say that culture to a large extent is the sum total of all things that refers to peoples mode of dressing, creativity, social etiquette, eating habit and choice of food and roots of people, symbols, language , songs, stories, celebrations (e.g. festivals) and all expressions of our way of life

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(Obioha, 2010). Culture, therefore, distinguishes one human group from others and human group from other animals.

Among all the various components of culture, festival stands out as a true manifestation of people's way of life in any traditional society. African festivals uphold their myths, legends, rituals and communal norms. Therefore, cultural traditions manifest in the festival of any named society (Ezenagu & Olatunji, 2014). Festivals afford people the opportunity to celebrate and learn age long traditions. Traditional festival makes a people a homogenous community and provides an avenue by which they can be identified.

Many festivals and cultural performances abound in Nigeria but most remarkable among them is the masquerade festival, which is most spectacular in the South-east. Kunle (2006) defined masquerade festival as a return of the ancestors in masquerades form in occasions where they constitute a major attraction. They are marked with colourful display of different masquerade such as *Ojionu, omabe, Mgbadike* and *Mmanwu*. The Igbo tradition holds it that masquerades are spirits of returning fathers or incarnate dead or ancestors who periodically materialize to interact with the living people, to help or admonish them in various ways and to be fed and honoured by them (Cole and Aniakor, 1984).

Apart from new yam celebration, masquerades appear during initiation of members, expulsion of a deceased member from the cult, interment of a traditional ruler, beginning of farming season, harvest period or new year celebration. In the remote past, masquerades functioned mostly as a means of maintaining peace and order. They were mainly instruments of social regulation, instilling discipline in offenders of law, cheats and thieves, debtors and even stubborn wives. (Cole and Aniakor, 1984). In addition to their relevance in entertainment, especially during the period when farming pressures have slackened, masquerades are platforms for the display of cultural values and aesthetics and this justifies them as a means for cultural identity, not just in this area of study but, in Africa as a continent. Soon after the arrival of Christianity, masquerade display faced serious opposition on the ground that it is fetish, which resulted in the loss of patronage and recognition (Ifegbo, 2015).

In this present dispensation, when tourism has turned out as one of the most lucrative industries in the world, the people of the South-east of Nigeria being richly endowed with numerous and vibrant masquerade festivals have been unable to harness them to their advantage, despite the associated huge tourism potentials in masquerades and their performance. Based on this premise, the study investigated the contributions which masquerade aesthetics in masquerade festivals of the South-East could make to cultural tourism promotion

Objective

The general objective of the study is to examine the aesthetic value of masquerade festivals of the south-east of Nigeria and their contributions to cultural tourism. Other specific objectives are to:

i. Identity the Aesthetic elements of masquerades and their Performances.
ii. Ascertain the extent to which masquerade displays fascinate spectators (Tourists and indigenes).
iii. Tourism potentials of masquerade festivals in the South East.

Review of Related Literature

According to Karabaeu in Esekong and Ekpeyong (2012), traditional festivals are the most ancient form of culture and a celebration that reminds people of a society of whom they are, keeps them abreast of each other and continues to remind them of their origin. It is a unique celebration that strengthens the togetherness of a people and binds them together in the same ideology. Laopodi (2003) opined that festivals are cultural artifacts which are not simply bought and consumed, but which are also accorded meaning through their active incorporation into people's lives. They are better described as indispensable heritage which give community its sense of identity, and to visitors' access to information, experience and activities emanating from the festival which can help them, their (visitors) feel attached to a place (Ezenagu and Olatunji, 2014). Considering the meaning, Nsofor & Maduakor (1979), gave an overview of festivals in Igboland as "periods in Igbo society set apart by communities or groups of individuals for commemorating important events which may be connected with homage to God, gods, ancestors and spirit, or they may be connected with the transition from one season to the other. In almost all cases, festivals are part of these commemorative events and ritual overtones can be detected in majority of these festivals". It is a period of rest from strenuous daily activities affording the people quality leisure time to consume all the entertaining cultural aesthetics of the events (Orji, 2001).

During festivals, people from neighbouring communities, visitors from far and wide, tourists and fun seekers are drawn, not necessarily to enjoy food, but mostly to witness the unique aspects of the culture of host communities, such as masquerades, dance, native music, drumming and decoration at the celebration arena (Ifegbo, 2015). Features in traditional festivals, according to Raj (2003), are those specific activities which are fascinating and hold spectators spell bound. Achilonu (2006), revealed that masquerade is the most fascinating popular feature in the celebration of festivals in Igbo land and some ethnic groups in Nigeria. Apart from festivals, they appear in many occasions. Cole and Aniakor isolated the occasions in which they appear as initiation of members, burial of a member or an important elder, beginning or end of farming season, harvest period or New Year. Some masquerades appear only at one festival, while the majority

appears at many or all (Igbo culture, 2000). Of all these occasion, they are more numerous in festivals than others with accompanying high performance.

Many festivals are specifically designed for the display of masquerades which is popularly known as "*Mmanwu*" (Masquerade) festival. In the south-east of Nigeria, it is a festival particularly designated for the appearance of all kinds of masquerades who engage in colourful display of acrobatic skills and dances (Mowang and Okiliya, 2013). Examples of such festivals in the south-East include Omabe (Nsukka), Ikeji (Arondizuogu), *Mmanwu* cult (Ihembosi) *Mmanwu Okumkpa* (Afikpo) and *Ijele* (Aguleri). During this type of festival, all the villages in the host community field their own masquerade, even the neigbouring communities come with their masquerades, drummers and dancers (Nwadike and Nwoke, 2012). Okachi (2011), added that masquerades appear and come in different versions not only to showcase themselves but to represent the people's culture and values as they form an integral part of the life of their owners. They added that in such occasion, masquerades numbering up to eighty are in attendance while a few appear during burial or coronation ceremonies. In most African societies, masquerade festivals, serve as centres of attraction in the traditional environments, and since they take place during traditional holiday periods like Christmas, they attract full participation by sons and daughters who work in cities and towns outside their traditional communities. The festivals are therefore looked forward to with enthusiasm as periods of homecoming or re-unification with kindred families.

Masquerade display is very colourful in the sense that they are accompanied with drumming, singing, exotic dances and incantations (Ifegbo, 2015). During occasions of their outing (festivals), they add glamour to the event and serve as a form of entertainment and therefore a tourism attraction (Nwanna, 2017). Their performance hold people spell-bound with their spectacular and wonderful performances and therefore promote an atmosphere of joy (Opusuji, 2000). Their costumes constitute a major attraction. Most masquerades appear in flamboyant dresses of colours of yellow, red, green, blue and white. Omosule (2011), reveals that the apparel worn by *Egwugwu* masquerades and their followers provide visual aesthetics. Ezenagu and Olatunji (2014), further confirmed the fascinating character of masquerade festivals, say that it involves the display of various kinds and ranges of masquerades which parade and entertain people around the community. Some are looking fearful and powerful, while others are being light hearted and appear in colourful robes. The head mask, head dress, mask cloth and their accessories make up the aesthetic value of masquerades. The masks are beautifully sculptured or decorated to reflect different aspects or facets of communal life and experience best known and interpreted by the users of the masks (Mowang and Okpiliya, 2013). Igbo masks reflect mystical power, terror, aggressiveness, beauty and ugliness, masculinity and spirituality. They are expressive, reflective and responsive. (Ukaegbu, 2018). Some masquerade clothes have symmetrical patterns of various colours which

lend the whole form of a rainbow appearance. Even the movement of the masquerade contribute to their aesthetics (this could be funny or awkward). Masquerades deliberately and aggressively arouse and sustain terror and fear all in the bid to add glamour to their display (Ukaegbu, 2018). Masquerade costumes and their performances in display arena, especially during festivals are major attractions for tourists.

Cultural tourism therefore, entails travel directed towards experiencing the arts, heritage and specific character of unique places (Okachi,2011). The diverse indigenous African cultures can be perceived as having a latent comparative advantage in the development of cultural tourism because they possess unique cultural and natural based attractions. More so, in the modern African world, masquerades are taking on new forms and purposes to meet new needs and conditions while they continue to play significant functions (Okachi, 2011). Such new forms in the contemporary times include increased interest in issues that address politics, theatre, economy, sustainable development and tourism.

Mowing and Okpiliya (2013), in affirmation states "in Africa today masks and masquerades have assumed very important roles in the development of tourism which has suddenly elevated the status of mask carvers particularly in Cross River State and the neighbouring Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria". During masquerade festivals, sons and daughters of the land return en-masse from far and wide, and even friends, in-laws, business associates, political partners and fun seekers/tourists are drawn to the host community where they part with huge sums of money, thereby enhancing the local economy (Okoye, 2006). There in the host destination, they spend on feeding, accommodation, refreshments, transportation, buying of tickets and other tourism associated needs like art works and handicrafts (souvenirs). This improves their personal incomes and at the same time reassures revenue generation for the community and the government.

Research Methodology

The study employed ethnographic research method and particularly used observer-as-participant technique, and therefore sought to observe and analyze the named indigenous masquerade festivals in the south-east of Nigeria in relation to their aesthetic values and contribution to cultural tourism. Due to this nature of research, the researcher tried to be personally present throughout the festive period to document the needed information in the festivals with respect to the research topic.

The field work was carried out through in-depth-interview, (key informant interview) with the locals and people working in the tourism industry. Observations and practical demonstration of traditional masquerade performers, including their costumes were documented. The study also used qualitative analytical and interpretative method to process the collected data. The equipment used in data collection were tape recorder and camera

(photography) which were very useful during transcription of performance texts.

The data for this research work was basically gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include observation, oral interview and occasional participation both in the field and homes of key informants. The secondary sources were collected from journals, textbooks, theses, conference and workshop materials, seminars papers, monuments and historical documentation. Library and archival materials, as well as historic features relevant to the study were very useful. The area covered in this study is the south-east of Nigeria, whereby three communities well known for their masquerade festivals were specifically studied, namely: Arondizuogu in Imo State, Ibagwa-Aka in Enugu State and Awka in Anambra State.

Historical Overview of the Festivals and Their Procedures: *Omabe* Masquerade Festival.

The Area and its People

Ibagwu- Aka shares boundary with Enugu Ezike and Itchi (North) Obukpa (south), Ihekpu Awaka (east) and Ibagwa-Ani (west). It is domiciled in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area of Enugu State. This is situated in Enugu North Senatorial zone of which Nsukka is the headquarters. The four communities that make up Ibagwa-Aka are Echara, Amaebo, Ezema and Isiagu.

In terms of cosmology, they, belief that their ancestors influence their lives from the world beyond, and therefore establish communication link with the dead through divinations, rituals and worship. These eventually take the form of festivals in which masking display plays an important role.

Omabe masking festival in Ibagwa-Aka takes place once in every four years. It is a great occasion marked by cultural rites, sumptuous feasting and masking. Masking assumes a spectacular prominence as a visual expression of the people's sense of communication to their ancestors, as well as the perpetuation of that historical chain of continuity reflective of their ideals, norms, values, aesthetics, character-traits and accomplishments all of which are associated with their ancestors.

A legendary account has it that *Omabe* was brought into Ibagwa-Aka through the effort of a certain woman returning home from a market near Awka. On reaching Okwero in Imirika Ibagwa, at late sunset, she perceived the supernatural mission to launch the *Omabe* spirit. Another plausible view asserts that *Omabe* emanated from the Ibagwa soil.

Procedure

There are three (3) major components of the *Omabe* festival.

Preparation

a. The *Ikpo Ogu* (means buying hoe). Women purchase hoes for their husbands in advance of one year. This reminds the community of the need to make adequate preparation for the festival, such as packing enough food for the

feast since the festival takes up to one year for the processes involved, from the return of the masked spirits to their departure.

b. **The *Ihuji* (Meaning Roasting Yam):** This phase declares the *Omabe* year. The Umuma (*Omabe* initates) take the yams with them to *'Ugwu Nkporkpo'* where they camp for one month. At this stage, they undergo rigorous training for the *Omabe* transformation which requires the most suitable maskers and music players.

c. **The *Igbuekwe* (Meaning Boating the Wooden Gong):** The day of arrival to the village by ***Omabe*** spirits is announced by custodians of the ritual calendar. Also other necessary preparations like costume and mask making, building of *Omabe* house or repairing old ones, weeding and repairing roads and pathways, public squares and compounds are done.

2) ***Odama* (The Arrival or Descent of the *Omabe* Masked Types)**

The *Umuma* brandish green palm fronds about which signify the arrival of the living spirits of their ancestors from the mythical hill (*Ugwu nkponkpo*). They commune with elders first in the cult houses and in the village square with the members of the community. The masked spirits are accorded a warm reception by the community signifying the status of *Omabe* as the real owner of the land for the period of its 1 year sojourn to the people. The *Omabe* spirits visit households during which they are presented with people's problems and pledge of sacrifice they will make if *Omabe* solves their problems. On this day the celebrants and their guest troop out in great numbers in the evening, covering both sides of the road in eager expectation of the *Omabe* masquerade. Supporters brandish green palm fronds, dane-guns and matchets, parade the road while boastfully proclaiming the spectacular pageantry and splendor which their anticipated masquerade have.

3) **The Departure Phase**

a. ***Igbo ma aya* (Appeasing *Omabe*)**: Sacrifices are made in order to mitigate the wrath of the gods.

b. ***Egwu otobo* (*Omabe* music at the village square):** This is strictly for the *Omabe* initiates and the dancing is usually done without the masquerades.

c. ***Ula ma* (The departure of the *Omabe* spirit):** Marks the grand finale of the occasion. It involves the period of propitiation and the *Omabe's* trip to the mystical hill in order to process the numerous petitions and supplications from the people. It is a crucial aspect of the festival as the result might be reward or punishment depending on the dominance of the people's virtue or vice.

Ikeji Festival

Arondizuogu is domiciled in Ideato L.GA of Imo State, and has common boundaries with the following communities. Akokwa, Umualoma, Umuago and Umuduru Egbeagur. Arondizuogu is made up of two clans, namely: Iheme and Izuogu.

Procedure for the Celebration

The celebration of the festival last for four market days with the following activities:

- ***Ekeodu*:** The first day is committed to buying all the items of food stuff, life stock, drinks and every other need for the festival celebration at their big market called "Eke Ndianiche".
- ***Orie Egbugbu*:** On this day, the livestock prepared for the festival is sacrificed to the ancestors by killing it before the sacred altar. For Christians, they pray and thank God for His many blessings and for continued protection over them. Also on the same, day, family heads and benefactors pay homage to the "*Eze*", the traditional ruler of the town. It is a day of thanksgiving to the gods for the year's rich harvest as well as obeisance to the elders and rulers of the land. This activity is called" *Ibu Ihu*". Also significant about this day is the outing of newly masked spirits in Arondizuogu. In this era of Christianity, thanksgiving mass is celebrated in the church, while some family heads choose to pray over the livestock, thanking God for numerous blessing before it is slaughtered and prepared for food.
- ***Afor Oso Mmawu*:** This day marks the climax of the festival, whereby both the old and new masquerades appear in their colourful costumes and in large numbers. The old masquerades cluster at "*Afo Ndi Ekwuru*" where they display variety of activities like parade, acrobatics, dancing and magic. The smaller masquerades go to smaller markets in the community. Before going to the market, they pay the Eze homage as a mark of respect. As the name suggest, this is the day they pursue women and the middle age children about to create fun, and even block the roads to create awareness and ask for appreciation.
- ***Nkwo Achi***: All the activities of *Oso Mmanwu* continues on the fourth day, the only difference is the shift of venue to *Nkwo Achi* for big Masquerade and other small nkwo markets for the smaller ones.
- ***Eke Ndi Aniche:*** The masquerades perform the *ichipu akpata* ceremony, signifying that the festival has come to an end. Although this ceremony was so violent in the past involving destruction of vegetation, vengeance through the use of charms and magical powers in the remote past, but the onslaught of Christianity and the coming of the early missionaries eradicated such practices.

The origin of *Ikeji* festival in shrouded in mythology. Historical evidence, however, suggests that *Ikeji* began as a ceremony to mark the harvest of the first tendrils of yam. Therefore "*Ikeji*" is a shortened form of "*Ikeji isi* (to detach the tendrils of the yams) which is done in order to preserve seed yams in the barn. The ceremony of Ikeji was performed by Obunukpa (the father of Izuogu who discovered Arondizuogu) at Arochukwu. Therefore Izuogu usually travelled to Arochukwu, his ancestral home for this great celebration until mid- 20th century and until then, the festival was celebrated in September and served as a forum to bring back Aros in diaspora (Aro Uzo) in a massive annual home coming to the ancestral homeland. Since after then, from the mid

20th century, the festival became localized in Arondizuogu and the date was agreed to between March and April (the period during which Izuogu travelled to Arochukwu when they were the host).

Mmanwu Cult in Ihembosi Anambra State

The term "*Mmanwu* in Ihembosi, Anambra State refers to a particular unique specie of masquerade known as "*Mmanwu Ozoebule*". Communities in Anambra where this masquerade is found includes Nnewi, Ozubulu, Ihiala, Ihembosi, Ukpor, Okija, Uli, Azia, Unubi, Amichi , Utuh, Ebenato, Mbosi, Ezinifite, Osumenyi, Osumoghu and Ogbaru. The masquerade is said to have originated from a place called Abor or Aboh in Delta State.

Procedure of *Mmanwu* Festival

Preparations start with weeding and cleaning the village/market square by the women, while youths take charge of the pathways/roads leading to neighbouring communities. Bounties are prepared and hung on the road sides to create awareness and beautify the community. The Ekwuru houses is also prepared by cleaning or repainting as the case may be.

Night practice of the *Mmanwu* cult dance begins two weeks to the festival. Three days before the commencement, the big wooden slit gong (Ekwe) is sounded in the early hours of the day and late in the night to remind people of the approaching festival. Within two weeks of the commencement each village takes their turn to host according to seniority, this implies that the festival lasts for ten non consecutive days (there are ten villages in Ihembosi).

Findings

Objective One

Identify the Aesthetic Elements of Masquerades and their Performances

The aesthetics of masquerade display in the South East was discovered to comprise of the forms, materials and colors of masks and costumes, as well as their performances.

The mask heads are of various sizes depending on the masquerade types. Some are at least twice the life-size, while others are more or less. Some of them have typically exaggerated features, particularly the eyes and mouths. The mask head (*isi mmanwu*) is often made of wood carvings of a replica of the head of animals (e.g crocodile, bull, python, etc.),birds or other creatures. Some of the mask heads look beautiful, while others appear ugly. There are also fearful and intimidating ones, but all evoke excitement. Masquerade regalia are mostly made up of Raffia silk, cotton and calico. For some masquerades, the costume ensemble consists of colorful strips of fabrics and pieces of leather of different designs and colours (see plate 1).



Plate 1: Masquerade in colouful strips of fabric and pieces of leather of different designs and colours. Source: (Survey Data, 2015)

For Some masquerades, their head is covered by a wide strip of thick fabric which flows down in form of a gown (see plate 2) and adorned with geometric shapes of repetitive patterns made with two contrasting colors.



Plate 2: Masquerade with head covered by a wide strip of fabric which flows down in form of a gown. **Source:** (Survey Data, 2015)

The repetitive patterns of fabrics are often decorated with cowries on the waist of some masquerades, and also wearing strings of large brass bell at their waist or a textile ornament used to hold the upper and lower gear together. Some Igbo masquerades dress in amorphous bundles of raffia (see plate 3), and innocuous heaps of cloth that rise and shrink during performances, thereby adding to the aesthetics.



Plate 3: An Igbo masquerade dressed in Amorphous bundles of raffia.
Source: (Survey Data, 2015).

Mgbadike of *Ikeji* masquerade cult normally appears clad in a net-like fabric, whereby the outline seems like a human being is visible, but in the real sense of it, a mirage.

The pride of a masking organization rests upon the performance. Once the masquerade cult through drumming, singing, playing the flute and hitting the gong produces the music, the festive atmosphere becomes charged and masquerade performance is at its peak. The hand clapping by the aroused spectators further intensifies their performances. At that point, the masquerades are let loose and their various skills will be in display. For this reason, performance is at its peak at the arena (ie village or market square) than within the hamlets. There are those that sing like angels, dance gracefully and amazingly, while some are popular for their magic performances. *Aburuja* is reputed for its jokes, well known for clowning and story-telling and often preferred by women and children whom it regales with fantastic stories of its imaginary exploits. *Ojionu* is the athletic, wipe-wielding and fear inducing type, which exudes the agility and vitality of youth. It is remarked for pursuing and whipping women, children and cheeky spectators even over a

long distance. *Mgbadike* is regarded as a belligerent spirit prone to acts of aggression which is why it is leashed. Otherwise, it could cause havoc by jumping over fences, pulling down trees or walls. It is known for exhibiting physical strength and fearlessness.

Another point of highlight in masquerade festival in Igbo land is the masquerade parade which normally happens on their main market or village arenas when all new, old and ceremonial masquerades assemble at the central arena. It is a captivating activity of assorted masquerades and groups with melodious performances and enchanting displays.

Objective two

Ascertain the extent to which masquerade displays fascinate spectators (Tourists and indigenes).

The mammoth crowd drawn by the event is a clear expression of people's level of interest in masquerade festivals. Returnees from the big cities in the country and diaspora friends, business associates, political partners, as well as in-laws and people of neighboring communities make up the crowd. Even homes in the host communities are emptied of their occupants, all are drawn to the village square except for the elderly and the sick.

Their level of preparation is another indication that the residents so much desire the festival. They suspend their business activities and other commitments and devote their time to preparatory activities like weeding and clearing celebration arenas and local roads, pruning of trees on the path ways connecting neighboring communities, provision of seats, shades and decorating the arena. As part of the preparation, they declare the festive period "A week of peace". The week when there should be no quarrelling, fighting or burial activity.

The level of excitement derived from the celebration is very enormous. During masquerade festival in Igbo land, a day is set aside for the main carnival, when new, old and ceremonial masquerades assemble at the central arena. It is also the day that masquerades pursue individual spectators in the race known as "*Oso nmonwu*, The aim of which is to deliver a stroke of the whip known as "*Mgbajara*". Such exciting spectacle is witnessed so well in *Ikeji* and *Mmanwu* festival: a multifarious assemblage of masquerades, countless masquerade groups, enchanted participants, resonant flutists, dramatic actors, comedians and surging multitudes. Whips are essential excitements during such festivals and to be whipped by a masquerade is probably the most pleasurable part of *Ikeji* festival, especially for indigenes of the host community. Each time a masquerade gives a well-delivered stroke and the whip descends on a victims leg with a loud crack, male spectators shout in unison to herald a stroke well delivered. If otherwise, a weakly delivered stroke is met with a jest and the masquerade responsible will be taunted with songs.

Additionally, the way the audience swell and push forward just to have a clear view of the masquerade performances at the stage, without

minding the lashes from the whipping masquerades who control movement at the arena is a pointer to the level of fascination of the audience. This happens on the main carnival day, when the village squares and major roads connecting other communities are lined by multitudes of people engulfed by the performing masquerades. It is not unlikely to find the motorways blocked by masquerade activity on such peak days with restriction of free movement.

The overwhelmed behavior of the audience, who join in the singing and dancing of the masquerade from where they are watching exhibits high level of excitement and fascination. Even at some point of their enchantment, they begin to clap to the rhythm of the music produced by the masquerade cult.

Objective three

Tourism potentials of masquerade festivals in the South East.

Some of the big masquerade festivals in the south-east of Nigeria (Igbo land) are filled with numerous attractions which are spread over the period of celebration. Majority of the festivals last for four consecutive market days, a period equal to one week when reckoned with the Igbo calendar. There are those which last for up to two weeks or as long as a month, each of these days has a special significance and represents one of the several dimensions of the festival. More so, the spectacle of each day's activity is sufficient to satisfy and engage the visiting tourists. From time to time, new attractions are created in masquerade festival of some parts of Igbo land. Examples include pseudo masquerade Acts, (include men carrying on activities which are in defiance of scientific logic. For instance, a man carrying palm wine in a small basket from which he occasionally takes a sip. It may include fetish looking acts. One may dress like an African medicine man and also act it. Clowning (eg Uncle JB or Papa Loolo), staging of masquerade music genre (e.g Pericoma, Ezewishi, Nwatadibia etc). There are also attractions like Raffle draw, Role reversals as the case may be.

Many economic activities abound during the period of the festival celebration, such as sale of VCD and DVD of waxed masquerade displays and the music which is very interesting and popular among the Igbos, ticket sales for seats and raffle draws, transport and communication services, provision of catering, accommodation and refreshment facilities. In addition to the gainful employment of the natives, some specialize in the designing and making of masquerade costumes, production of artworks and handicrafts which are sold as souvenirs, while others run service shops like barbing and hair salons, as well as business centres.

There is evidence of developments which are funded both by the government and from the dividends of the festival hosting. Sponsorship from corporate bodies, private businesses and donations yield huge amount of money to the hosting communities.

Masquerade in the South-East of Nigeria is remarked for its ability to draw people from far and wide, irrespective of their different ethnic, political,

cultural or religious background. This creates room for interaction and socialization and subsequently narrows such gaps. In addition, the re-union occasioned by the mass return of natives provides a fertile ground for them to foster love and demonstrate brotherhood among themselves thereby promoting tourism.

Conclusion

The South-East of Nigeria is grossly endowed with masquerade festivals which are very high in aesthetic values, comprising of the forms, materials and colours of masks and costumes as well their thrilling performances.

Also included are their music and dance, fun making and magic display. Their movements in unique patterns of fabric sew produces yet another form of aesthetics. It is therefore certain that masquerade festival in the south-east has the ability to successfully promote and sustain cultural tourism.

Again, the numerous aesthetics identified in these festivals are responsible for the great fascination exhibited by spectators (visitors & tourists) which also increases their willingness to spend reasonable time period in the destinations.

Recommendation

Masquerading in most traditional festivals of the South-East, Nigeria is recognized for its hypnotic and amazing character, and has severally been commended for holding spectators spell-bound. On this premise therefore, the following recommendations were made:

- The host communities endowed with this cultural heritage should not consider masquerade festival as just a source of entertainment, but a means of improving their personal incomes and accruing revenues for their community development.
- The host communities in collaboration with the local government should plan and organize the festivals at least once a year to create awareness and increase the people's participation.
- The tourism department of the local government should endeavor to identify and certify the availability of sufficient aesthetics in the festivals.
- Since the celebration will be on a large scale, government should assist them financially and also make sure that safety and security is guaranteed. Philanthropists and corporate bodies can also be approached for fund raising.
- Tourism expert services are necessary in the repackaging of the celebration in a way that will appeal to both locals and international tourists, for cultural tourism promotion.
- Standard lodging and catering establishments are important, as a way of encouraging overnight stay and increased spending by the tourists and visitors.

- Increased revenue can be achieved by mounting ticket offices in all the gateways connecting the host community and the neighboring towns. Sale of VCD and DVD of recorded masquerade shows and music turn in reasonable amount of money.

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