POTENTIAL OF MAMBILA PLATEAU AS A CRADLE TOURISM DESTINATION: A SWOT ANALYSIS

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Abstract
The Mambila Plateau in Taraba State is a well-known tourism haven in Nigeria. The Plateau is famous as a scenic tourism hub. Its potentials as a centre of Nigeria's cultural tourism is generally understated. This is despite the fact that it is probably the longest human-occupied region in Nigeria having been continuously inhabited by related people for about 5000 years. Importantly, it has been established as the cradle of the Bantu group of languages. Bantu is the largest group of languages in Africa that spans across more than 20 countries and is spoken by over 200 million people. This makes the Mambila Plateau an attractive cultural tourism destination. Therefore, this paper presents a SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the Mambila Plateau as a cradle tourism destination. Among its strengths are the fact that the remnants of the original Bantu language speakers still occupy the area and there are many scenic attractions to complement the cultural experience of cradle tourists. The weaknesses include lack of physical infrastructure and supportive facilities and amenities. Opportunities include possibilities for tourism investments and a potentially large cradle tourist source region, while frequent violent conflicts and competition from Cameroon for cradle tourists are the threats.
Keywords: Cradle Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Mambila Plateau, Root/Ancestral Tourism, SWOT Analysis

Introduction
The Mambila Plateau is generally accepted as the cradle of the Bantu people. The Bantu is the largest African language family, consisting of about 500 languages with over 240 million speakers spread across more than 20 countries in Africa, covering an area of approximately 9 million sq. km. (Fillipo, Boesten, Stoneking & Parkendorf, 2012). According to Huffman (1970), the Bantu migration is one of the most impressive of all cultural movements ever in the history of the world. Fillipo et al. (2012) concurred that the expansion of the Bantu languages was spectacular and among the most momentous events, especially in African history. The Bantu languages are believed to have originated over 4000 years ago in the Grassfield area of Western Cameroon and its adjoining Mambila Plateau region of Nigeria

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(Blench, 2000; Fillipo et al., 2012; Zeitlyn & Connell, 2003). The language quickly spread southward and eastwards on the African continent and became dominant over many autochthonous languages in those areas. It must be conceded that the nature of this expansion or migration of the Bantu languages is still a major source of debate and even controversial. Though there are several other and more complex issues involved, at the basic level, there are two schools of thought: demic diffusion or language shift.

Demic diffusion or movement represents the school of thought with the belief that there was an actual migration of population out of this cradle area to the southern and eastern parts of Africa (Berniell-Lee et al., 2009; Oslisly, 1995; Rocha & Fehn, 2016). Through either warfare or superior agricultural practices and technology, the group overcame the indigenous population of the areas and became the dominant language group. The initial group of migrants either split early in the migration process, with one group moving eastwards and another moving southward through the Congo (Early-split theory) or they split much later on from the Congo basin (Late-split theory). The language shift (cultural diffusion) hypothesis postulates that the language only spread across the region without necessarily involving a massive population outmigration (Vansina, 2009). In essence, the language that eventually birthed the Bantu family of languages had an appeal that resulted into its spread and assimilation by others and eventually became the prevalent dominant language group in Africa.

Whatever the school of thought or mode of spread of the Bantu languages, there is an agreement among scholars that the movement of this group of languages across the African subcontinent represents a major and impactful event of significant cultural proportion. And all this momentous cultural revolution, one of the greatest ever on the African continent, started, partly, from the Mambila Plateau. According to Zeitlyn and Connell (2003), the present Mambila Plateau indigenous people are the "Bantu that stayed home." This is an affirmation of the immense historical and cultural significance of the Mambila Plateau region, which can easily become a cultural tourist destination for cradle tourism.

Study Area: The Mambila Plateau

The Mambila Plateau is one of Nigeria's top tourism secrets, once described as "the crown jewel of Nigeria's tourism." The Mambila Plateau is in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria. It is bordered completely on the south and east by the Republic of Cameroon. It is approximately 3,765.2 km² in size and located on latitudes 5°31' and 7°18' N and longitudes 10°18' and 11°37' E. It has an average elevation of about 1600 metres above mean sea level (amsl). It is the second largest plateau in size and the highest in altitude of the four largest plateaus in Nigeria (the others being Jos Plateau, Obudu Plateau and Biu Plateau). The Gang Peak, also known as Chappal Wadi, is the highest peak in West Africa at 2,419 m (7,936 ft) amsl. The Mambila Plateau had an estimated population of 299,800 in 2016 based on

2006 national census data (NPC, 2016), much a shadow of its estimated one million population in the 19th Century before the Fulani slave raiding activities depopulated the region to only a few thousands by the beginning of the 20th Century (Hurault, 1998). The region is currently occupied by the Mambila, Kaka, Kambu and Panso ethnic groups, who inhabited the area centuries earlier than the Fulani who arrived in the 19th C and made the place their home. These are the most populous ethnic groups even as many of the towns and villages are now home to Nigerians of different ethnic nationalities. Gembu, a sprawling town on the hills on the plateau, is the headquarters.

Before 1961, Mambila Plateau was part of a mandate of the League of Nations (1922-1945) and later a trusteeship territory of the United Nations (1945-1961), which was controlled and administered by Britain and referred to as Northern British Cameroon (Lenshie & Gambo, 2014). After independence for both Nigeria and Cameroon in 1960, the fate of the trusteeship territories was decided through a plebiscite. The residents of the territories, through a vote, decided to join Nigeria. Consequently, it is safe to assert that earlier documents that mentioned only "western or westernmost part of Cameroon" as the cradle of the Bantu included the Mambila Plateau region.

The Mambila Plateau is famous as a scenic tourist attraction destination. It is hardly ever portrayed as the ancestral home of the Bantu and the springboard of an incredible cultural revolution of a global magnitude (refer to Figure 1). It is also hardly mentioned as probably the longest human-occupied region in Nigeria. Zeitlyn and Connell (2003) contended that the region has been occupied by related people for more than 4000 years, which means that the Mambila people may claim to have originated *insitu*. Archaeological evidence provided by Hurault (1979; 1986; 1988) and Tueche (2000) indicated that the Mambila Plateau has been inhabited by the same culture continuously for a period of about 5000 years. This knowledge will add to the attractiveness of the Plateau as a tourist destination for domestic and international tourism.

This paper, therefore, examines the potential of the Mambila Plateau, through a SWOT analysis, for cradle tourism development. Cradle tourism is a special form of root or ancestral tourism where distant descendants of a region pay a visit, generally for knowledge and/or curiosity rather than to trace back their roots in order to fulfill an emotional, spiritual or sentimental desire.

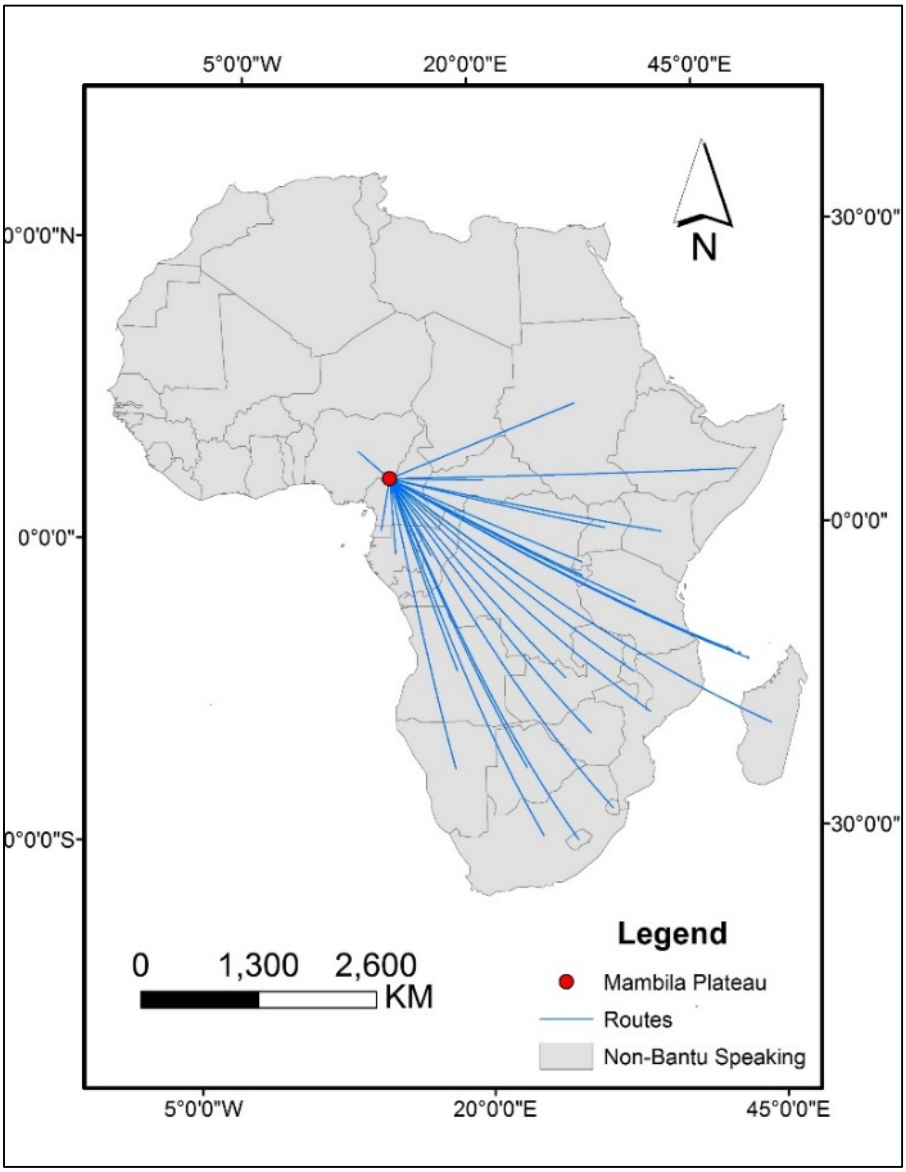


Figure 1: The Mambila Plateau as the Cradle of the Bantu People
Source: Mapped Using Data from World Atlas (www.worldatlas.com)

The Concept of Cradle Tourism

Root/Ancestral Tourism

Tomczewska-Popowycza and Tarasb (2022) defined root tourism as international travel to places of one's own, or one's family, relatives, ancestral origin for sentimental or other emotional reasons. It could also be for the purposes of rediscovering one's roots, searching for identity and belonging, visiting friends and relatives, exploring family history, reliving past

memories, exploring the places from stories shared by family members or history books, or simply because of practical convenience or familial obligation. Root tourism is only one of many names associated with this type of tourism, including ancestral, heritage and genealogy tourism. Tourism Intelligence Scotland (TIS) (2021) described ancestral tourism as a visit to (a place) partly or wholly motivated by need to reconnect with your ancestors or roots.

Root/ancestral tourism is an upswinging tourism form that contributes significant numbers and amounts of tourists and money to destinations. Some of the most important ancestral tourism destinations in the world include Ireland, Israel and Scotland (Ancestry, 2016; Kelner, 2010). Hogan (2019) reported that an estimated one million tourists visit Ireland annually to investigate their roots. Kelner (2010) illustrated the benefit of partnerships in promoting ancestral tourism. "Birthright Israel" is an ancestral tourism project promoted by the government of Israel and private partners that as at 2010 had brought hundreds of thousands of tourists into Israel and contributed more than $500 million to the country's economy. Tomczewska-Popowycza and Tarasb (2022) pointed to some interesting statistics in the case of Scotland as well. They stated that about 213,000 tourists visit Scotland on ancestral tourism and contribute an estimated $101 million annually. TIS (2021) claimed that these numbers had grown closer to 800,000 ancestral tourists annually, with a plan to increase it to about 4.3 million by 2025. Other benefits of ancestral tourism include higher quality of life (Backer, 2019; Sie, Pegg, & Phelan, 2021), knowledge and emotional fulfillment (TIS, 2021).

The African continent has also become an important ancestral tourism destination, especially for the African diaspora from the US, South America and the Caribbean. In 1965, African American writer, Alex Haley, visited Juffureh, Gambia as a homecoming. He claimed to have traced his African ancestry through stories told in the family about their slave ancestor - Kunta Kinte - to the tiny village at the mouth of the Gambian River. His book "Roots", which subsequently captured part of these family stories and was serialized on television by same name, in the 1970s and 1980s in the US, started a wave of ancestral tourism to Africa by Africans in the diaspora. For some time, the fervor appeared to have quieted down but recent efforts by African governments, especially on the West African coast to tap into this tourism form has resuscitated it. Ghana's "Homecoming Festival," which was started in 2000, yielded much benefits for the country from ancestral tourists, mostly African Americans. The central theme was the story of slavery and the many slavery landscapes ("slavery capes") that abound in the country.

On a smaller scale, Lagos State has invested in the slavery capes narrative to draw in ancestral tourists from the Caribbean as well. For most of these tourists, ancestral travel to Africa is largely about emotional and sentimental closure. It provides an important link between their current and past (lost) identities and in the process helps in the construction of a

supposedly more complete identity that provides emotional healing, or at least some sense of it, for the tourists.

In a review of more than 200 journal articles on roots tourism, Tomczewska-Popowycza and Tarasb (2022) noted three fundamental elements that appear to cut across the various conceptions and definitions of root tourism, no matter what name it is called. The first element is that of an international travel. Generally, the tourist's ancestors came from a different country from the one the tourist was born in and, therefore, "the need to get to that distant land" (Ray & McCain, 2012). The second element is that the destination is the place of origin of the tourist's ancestors, ethnicity or family. The third is that the destination invokes an emotional response, which may be understood as the foundation of the entire root travel/tourism enterprise.

Root/ancestral tourism is a form of cultural tourism because ancestry, ethnicity and family which are at the core of ancestral or root tourism are cultural phenomena. However, cultural tourism may be undertaken without the personal emotional responses that ancestral tourism is expected to elicit. In its generic form, cultural tourism is the visit to cultural sites or destinations for the sake of knowledge and to explore other cultures but does not necessarily involve any personal ancestral or family connections to the destination (Dzhaman, 2016).

Cradle Tourism: A Conceptualization

Cradle tourism is conceived of as a connection between the more encompassing cultural tourism and the more focused root/ancestral tourism. It is the travel to an ancestral place for the purposes of cultural curiosity and awakening without the emotional and sentimental evocation that are associated with root/ancestral tourism. Being a cradle, the destination is supposed to have some cultural significance and connections to the tourists, yet that link is so distant and removed that instead of emotions, it probably elicits more of a curiosity, significant enough for the tourist to pay it a visit. Like the generic cultural tourism destination that provides knowledge and assuages curiosities only, cradle tourism provides the tourist with an opportunity to interact with a destination imbued with significant history for the purpose of gathering knowledge or plugging in a curiosity. However, like ancestral travel, it is not a random election of destination but one that is linked to the tourist's cultural roots and history. Unfortunately, the ties are too loose to ignite the flame of emotions in the tourist. Emotional response may be far removed from the experience because of the extent or distance of time since the ancestral umbilical cord was severed a long time ago. Moreover, there are no exact locations in the cradle area, such as a street or a famous landmark that marks a particular point of special attention and attraction. However, in place of an emotional transfiguration, a pride (self-esteem) in the journey and acquisition of knowledge (experiential travel) may serve as worthy replacements and rewards as they are important tourism consumption drivers (Chan & Chu, 2016).

Mesopotamia and Egypt are famous historically as cradles of human civilization. They have attracted thousands of visitors curious about the region and what they represent. Tourists have also visited its ancient sites. Many of the tourists are drawn to them not only for research and knowledge but because they feel some distant connections to the places. The Mambila Plateau is probably more similar to Anatolia in Turkey as a cradle; both are regarded as the origins of the Bantu group of languages and the Indo-European group of languages, respectively. Unlike the Anatolia region, which is now occupied by the Turks who are not part of Indo-European language speakers; Turkish belongs to the Altaic language family (Stachowski, 2015), the Mambila Plateau cradle region is currently occupied by the remnants of the original Bantu speakers. This could be advantageous for the promotion of cradle tourism on the Mambila Plateau because a part of the ancient Bantu speakers still subsists in the homeland and could be an attraction.

Speaking about the Indo-European languages, they are spoken by about 3.5 billion people. The proto-Indo-European language was believed to have originated from the Anatolia region in Turkey between 6000 and 9000 years ago (Bouckaert et al., 2012). An alternative proposed origin area is the Pontic-Caspian steppes around the Black Sea region (Chang, Cathcart, Hall & Garret, 2015). The Anatolia region is also famous for many cultural attractions among which are the ruins of the ancient cities of Troy, Ephesus and Miletus, and important cultural artefacts such as the Temples of Artemis and Apollo. These are important tourist attractions in their own rights. It is, however, difficult to exclude the fact that the idea of Anatolia birthing the Indo-European languages contributes to the attractiveness of the region to some tourists or if previously not known, their education to this fact may add to their excitement and experience of the region. Inclusion of any archaeological sites to this fact, museums or material and immaterial evidence to support such claims may turn out to be decisive in improving the experiential outlook of some tourists. The argument, therefore, is that the fact of this linguistic origin can be a powerful narrative to generate or enhance tourism in the area.

The attributes of cradle tourism do not lend themselves to generation of massive tourism traffic inflow all at once because its appeal is specific but not exclusive to a group of people. It must be admitted that cradle tourism is first and foremost an intellectual appeal to scholars and researchers in the tourist source region. A trip to an origin of a group of languages would probably appeal first to scholars and researchers before it does to the general public. The trip does not necessarily need to involve a research or scholarly component other than the need to fulfil an intellectual curiosity. It is, however, possible to have a rash of research and scholarly products from this intellectual visit as a byproduct of the trip. This initial phase of cradle tourism could be the catalyst for a larger tourists' traffic from the source regions. The "positive report" of returning tourists, through scholarly expositions, may propel a wave of scholarly excursions by students of archaeology, history, linguistics, geography and tourism from source regions. These may also be decisive in

arousing further curiosity, the type of basic, non-scholarly, intuitive and pioneering curiosity of the adventurer. These door-opening phases would be in anticipation of greater tourist traffic, a mass that would consist of those with more general purposes, among which may be the need, desire and/or curiosity to reach the cradle destination. This desired phase would arise from the availability of much more tourism activities than only the dryness of distant cradle past that does not pull at any sentimental strings of attachment.

Despite an apparently narrow appeal and relatively restricted space, cradle tourism could also ride on the wave of other tourism forms and vice versa. A popular cradle tourist destination could open up the region to tourists outside its source region, those whose curiosity may be aroused and others for whom cradle tourism is the vehicle of information about the destination. Once it takes a firm foothold, cradle tourism destination would have an assured source of tourists. Generally, only a few tourists travel for a single specific purpose. Most travelers may have a primary purpose of travel but there are several other purposes that culminated in the decision to embark on a trip to a destination. Cradle tourism may be subsumed under other tourism purposes until it gains enough popularity to drive its own tourist traffic.

The SWOT Analysis of Mambila Plateau as a Cradle Tourism Destination.

SWOT:

SWOT is an acronym for strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. According to Baran and Basol (2019), SWOT analysis is one of the most commonly used methods of identifying the capabilities of a tourism resource. The objective of SWOT analysis is to determine the potentials of a resource, the assets available and the obstacles to fulfilling such potentials. SWOT evaluates the strengths and weaknesses, which are internal factors, and opportunities and threats, which are external factors, of a resource (Sammut-Bonnici & Galea, 2015). The intention is to develop an effective strategy that would achieve any sets of goals and objectives based on the identified set of factors, internal and external, and how they can be harnessed (strengths and opportunities) or minimized (weaknesses and threats) to help the enterprise.

SWOT Analysis

Diagrammatically, SWOT analysis is presented as a rectangle of four quadrats, each section representing one element of SWOT. Table 1 presents the summary of the SWOT analysis.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of Mambila Plateau as a Cradle Tourism Destination

STRENGTHS *Remnants of the original Bantu speakers subsist *Nyo Heights Cradle destination *Excellent scenic beauty *Excellent climatic conditions *Adventure tourism opportunities, e.g., Gang Peak is the highest point in West Africa *Ancient artefacts and cultural attractions, e.g., the Stone Thrones of Nyo and its fortes, shrines *Archaeological sites *A landscape that looks like what the ancestors beheld before the expansion (still relatively virgin) *Agricultural tourism (Highland Tea Plantation and factory, temperate crops).	**WEAKNESSES** *Frequent ethnic crises *No famous monuments to complement cradle tourism *Insufficient physical infrastructure, e.g., good road network, electricity and energy, communication, health facilities *Dearth of interesting complementary tourism activities *Insufficient tourism expertise *Inadequate tourism policies, programmes, projects and plans *Insufficient appreciation of potentials of tourism, especially on the Mambila Plateau
OPPORTUNITIES *Potentially large tourism source population and region (200 mil Bantu speakers and 20 countries) * Economic diversification policy of the federal government *Proposed location of the largest hydropower plant in Nigeria *Large virgin land area for investment and development *Opportunities for partnerships and collaborations (local, national and international)	**THREATS** *Frequent violent ethnic conflicts and crises *Large-scale land degradation due to overgrazing and poor land management *Loss of authentic culture and heritage *Competition from other Bantu cradle regions such as the adjacent Grassfield region of Cameroon

1. Strengths

The Mambila Plateau is a famous scenic tourism destination in Nigeria. Its enchanting hills and valleys, striking waterfalls and springs, and excellent climatic conditions are some of its most alluring selling points. The road that leads up from the plains to the Plateau snakes its way across the massive shoulders of the steep escarpments. The settlements on the slopes and top of the Plateau are fascinating, some of which stand above the thick fogs that form a constant wave of clouds and presents an incredible sight of looking down at the clouds. It is an experience that is not on the tourism menu of any

other part of Nigeria. The highest peak in West Africa, the Gang Peak (Chappal Wadi), superintends over the Plateau. It is the target of many adventure tourists who seek to summit its peak.

The average height of the Plateau is approximately 1600m amsl with steep escarpments that range between 500m and 1200m amsl in the north, south and east (Hurault, 1998). This elevation grants the Plateau a temperate-like climatic condition with the lowest temperature regimes of any inhabited area in the country. Annual average temperatures are between 20^{o} and 25^{o}C. In some places, the weather conditions are too cold for many insects such as flies and mosquitoes to survive; their presence are curtailed and their spread limited. Rainfall is experienced over 8-9 months every year with a short dry season. This climatic condition is responsible for the cultivation of the largest tea and coffee plantations in the West African sub-region. The Highland Tea brand is considered one of the best in the world (Munlip & Yuno, 2019).

The Mambila Plateau has a plethora of cultural tourism resources. Nyo Heights, considered as the cradle of the Bantu, is the most continuous habitation in Nigeria, dating back to about 3000 BC (Hurault, 1988). Importantly, the remnants of the ancestors still subsist. The current occupants of the area are regarded as the "Bantu who stayed home" (Zeitlyn & Connell, 2003). The archaeological sites and several other interesting monuments such as the Dawadi rock heaps (Richard, 2014), whose antiquated origins appear to have been lost, are important sites to visit. The Guuala, the highest peak of the Nyo Heights, is another favorite of adventure tourists. The traditional fortes (Bang) of the pre-modern settlements are a lesson on the level of warfare development of the local people long before colonialism. These are circles of deep trenches dug around the settlements to provide safety and security and deter attacks from other ethnic groups. They provide a glimpse into the past military history and expertise of the Mambila people.

The kaleidoscope of cultural features includes historic battlefields, traditional religious shrines, ancient stone thrones and traditional music and dances. The annual World Tourism Day celebration on the Mambila Plateau features a range of cultural dances, music and artistic performances that light up the entire region and beyond. There are also three museums displaying rich cultural and historical artefacts to add colour to the tourism experience. The import of this narration is that beyond visiting Nyo Heights region, the cradle region, the entire Plateau is a touristic experience that rivals any in Africa in scenic beauty and cultural attractiveness. With the appropriate itinerary, a cradle tourist will be regaled with much more than knowledge and satisfying a curiosity. It is a beautiful region, one that almost every cradle tourist would be proud their ancestors originated from. Moreover, the Mambila Plateau is still, compared to the urbane nature of many other cradle regions, a virgin area with much of the landscape probably having only changed a little in the thousands of years between. Cradle tourists would see pretty much a landscape that their Bantu ancestors probably beheld more than 4,000 years ago.

2. Weaknesses

There is a litany of shortcomings that weaken the potentials of Mambila Plateau as the ideal cradle tourism destination. Unlike the Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Egypt and other famous cradle tourism areas, the Mambila Plateau does not have famous monuments that would complement cradle tourism. For example, contained within the Anatolia region of Turkey alone are five UNESCO World Heritage sites. The Mambila Plateau cannot match such abundance of tourism resources. It would have to create its fame, especially by promoting its local monuments and archaeological sites to attract world attention. This requires a lot of resources, energy and expertise than may be readily available. The political will to pull all these together does not appear to be strong enough as well.

There is also inadequate physical infrastructure. The road network of the state and around the Mambila Plateau and the interconnections between towns and villages and also to the tourist attractions are very poor. Most roads are untarred and have no public transportation between villages. Bridges are not available across streams and rivers and a large number of roads are not accessible in some periods of the year. Hospitals, medical supplies and accommodation facilities are also poor. Public utilities, such as pipe borne water, are not available and electricity is iffy at best. Only a few telecommunication providers are available on the Plateau as well. Currently, other than sightseeing, the only other major activity undertaken by tourists is hiking. A dearth of activity variety due to inadequate infrastructural development is a weakness that requires remediation.

There is also the problem of inadequate manpower and expertise in the tourism industry. Consequently, tourism policies, plans, programmes and projects are poorly conceived and executed. Also, there are no adequate and appropriate information and promotion outlets and strategies available. The Nigerian government's approach to tourism development at the national level leaves much to be desired. For a country that declares a diversification of its mono-economy a priority, the lack of a clear focus and thrust is eminently displayed in the lack of a coordinating full-fledged ministry for tourism; tourism is currently subsumed under the Ministry of Information and Culture. The visa policy is another serious indictment of the government at the highest level. Visa procedures to visit Nigeria are not only cumbersome but discouraging for tourists.

The participation of the private sector in tourism development in the country is also poor. There is hardly the necessary synergy between the government, the public and private sectors and the host communities. This, coupled with poor appreciation of history and culture, has resulted in the loss of many cultural monuments that could have added value to the tourism industry. These weaknesses at the national level translate into obstacles for tourism development at the local levels.

3. Opportunities

A major opportunity for the Mambila Plateau as a cradle tourism destination is the fact that it has a potentially large source region. Figure 1 presents the potential area where cradle tourists may come from within Africa. These are the countries with Bantu language speakers.

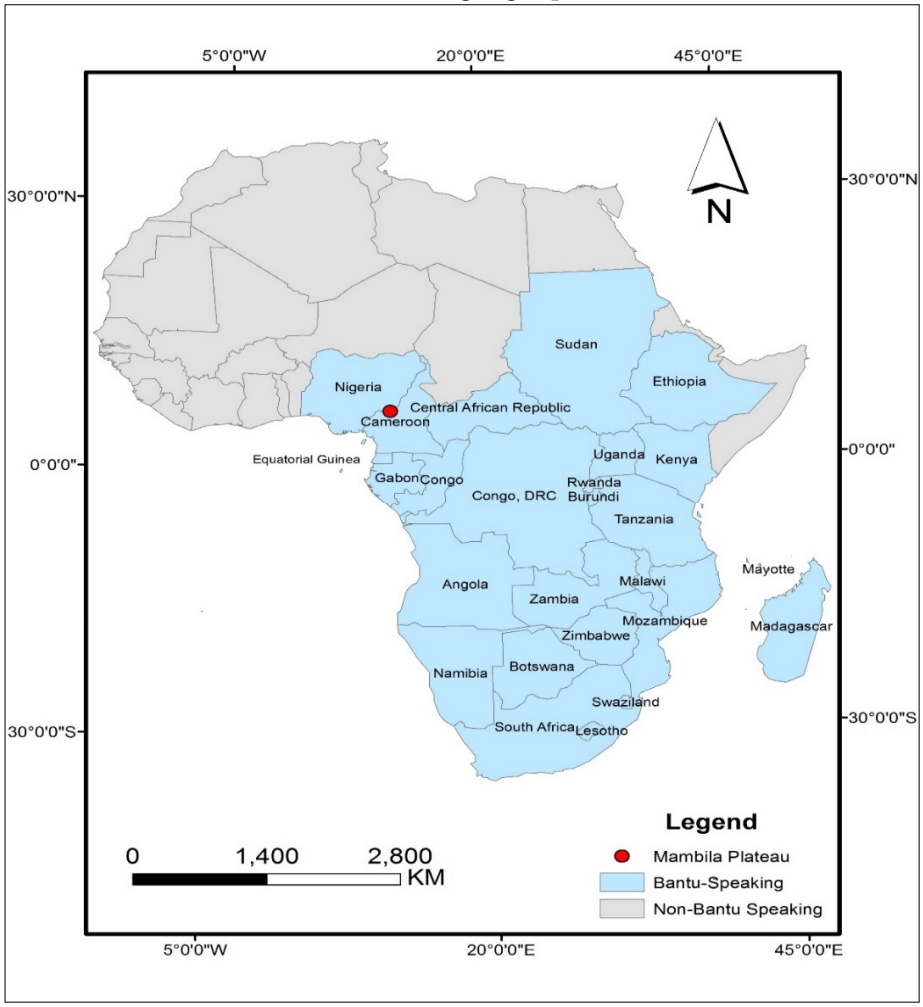


Figure 2: Potential Cradle Tourism Source Region for the Mambila Plateau Source: Mapped Using Data from World Atlas (www.worldatlas.com)

With an estimated population of about 250 million Bantu speakers, there are opportunities to attract a small percentage to undertake cradle tourism. As earlier indicated, it requires several things to fall in place at the right time: the right tourism climate; adequate, proper and targeted promotion; great itinerary and tour execution; and the appropriate political support to simplify the tasks of furthering the cause of tourism. A related opportunity is the fact that the Nigerian government has engaged in the

diversification of the economy from almost complete reliance on oil for revenue to other sectors of the economy. Tourism stands tall among other sectors and while it is not yet given the prime of place, it is expected that in the not-too-distant future, it will be called upon to take a leading role in the country's economic diversification drive. When the opportunity arises, the industry should have positioned itself to take full advantage of it.

Cradle tourism could open up the political, economic and social space for various forms and types of partnerships to be launched and to thrive. Partnerships between source and destination countries, public-private partnership and business partnerships between entrepreneurs within Nigeria and between Nigeria and cradle tourists' source countries could blossom. Collaboration between scholars and researchers, and exchange programmes between universities could open other vistas of opportunities for all involved. Important also is the opportunity for the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments to work together towards promoting the general Bantu cradle region for tourism development. Instead of being in direct competition, the two countries could cultivate a complementary relationship as Bantu cradle countries to their benefits.

The longstanding designation of the Mambila Plateau as potentially one of the major sources of hydropower in Nigeria is another important advantage to the region. The government has proposed to harness the abundant hydropower of the region to generate 4.7 million KWh (4,700 MW) of electricity annually. This would make it the largest hydropower plant in Nigeria (Munlip & Yuno, 2019). The contract, already awarded, has been stalled as a result of political and economic difficulties. However, it is envisaged that this project will ultimately be undertaken and completed in the not too-distant future. The fact that much of the plateau is not developed is an opportunity for investors, government and the community to work together towards preserving and conserving the environment for a more controlled and well-directed development that would secure important archaeological, material and even intangible resources necessary for the advancement of tourism in the area.

4. Threats

One of the major threats to tourism in the region is frequent violent conflicts and crises that rock the Plateau. With increasing population, land degradation and political manipulations that have pitched ethnic groups against one another, the Mambila Plateau has exploded in bursts of violence (Hurault, 1998). The long history of slave raiding of the Mambila people by the Fulani during the 19th Century and current division of land that appears skewed in favour of the latter settlers has conspired against permanent peace in the region for quite a number of decades (Hurault, 1998). It must be admitted though that the frequency and intensity of the violence have diminished greatly over time. Tourists and visitors have been spared the brunt of the violence as the crises and conflicts are usually targeted and non-random.

The presence of security personnel, a police division and an air force regiment have deterred the occurrence of the crises. The recent long spell of non-violence ushers in promises of a permanent relative peace in the region. Unfortunately, a large swath of Nigeria, including Taraba State, where Mambila Plateau is located is experiencing serious security challenges at the moment. Terrorism, insurgency and banditry are threatening the lives and livelihoods of citizens in many parts of the country and have created an unsafe and dangerous environment for travel and tourism.

There is currently a great deal of land degradation stemming from overgrazing by livestock, particularly cattle, deforestation and soil erosion from agricultural activities. This poses serious threats to the famed scenic beauty of the region. The loss of authentic culture and heritage in the area due to cosmopolitanism, religious and socioeconomic factors is also a real threat to cradle tourists' experience. Much history has been lost and forgotten as a result of many factors such that not much may be remembered from storytelling about the distant past of the area. Then there is the issue of competition for cradle tourists from the Grassfield region of the Cameroons that share borders with the Mambila Plateau region. This area has also been identified as part of the cradle region and would pose serious competition for cradle tourists.

Conclusion

The Mambila Plateau with an array of extraordinary natural endowments has the potentials to attract a diversity of tourists from the Bantu source region to visit the site of their old-removed ancestry. The onus rests on promoters to strategize on turning the current barren desert of cradle tourism on the Mambila Plateau into a wellspring of international tourism. The floodgates of visitors to the cradle of their cultures must be opened with a well-developed plan of action. Such a plan should include a sparking stimulus (tourism packages), an initial target agency (tourist source region) and an appealing tourist base (tourist destination attractiveness) on the Plateau that captures the imagination of the target group.

The plan should also address the rampant insecurity in the country and Taraba state, which is a pre-requisite to travel and tourism. Nigeria is a Bantu speaking country, with many of the cultural groups not resident on the Mambila Plateau. They also form part of the Bantu who "left" home. Leading them home successfully to the Plateau should be a virile test of any action plan that would bring the international Bantu tourists' home.

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