EVALUATION OF TOURISM RESOURCES IN THE KEDJOM KEKU FONDOM AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTHWEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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Abstract
Tourism plays a vital role in the economic development of many countries and regions worldwide, offering opportunities for employment generation, cultural exchange, and revenue generation. Cameroon is blessed with diverse natural and cultural resources that have the potential to attract tourists from around the globe. One such region within Cameroon is the North West Region, which encompasses the Kedjom Keku Fondom. Kedjom Keku Fondom remains a popular tourist destination, offering a range of attractions catering to visitors/tourists interested in history, culture, nature, and adventure. The objectives of this paper seek to examine the overview tourist potentials in Bamenda Grassfields as well as human potentials such as traditional dance, craft and arts, photography and photographs, architecture memories, indigenous fabric and traditional museums which attract tourists to the Kedjom Keku fondom. This paper argues that tourists could explore and exploit the rich diversity of human potentials who want to learn about the history and culture of the Kedjom dynasty. Besides, the natural landscape also gives the beauty of fondom with its charming caves, waterfalls, forests and natural scenic rocks and mountains. Thus, this offers a refreshing and picturesque view for visitors. Data was gleaned from primary (oral information and testimonies). Secondary sources include relevant books and ethnographic sources such as photographs. The study adopts qualitative methods. Besides, over 80% of the information was oral in this study. The finding reveals that Kedjom Keku offers a rich cultural and natural heritage that visitors can explore and enjoy. The paper concludes that with further development of tourism infrastructures in Bamenda Grassfields, investors will be interested in promoting tourism development that attracts more visitors and contributes to Kedjom Keku Fondom and North West Region, Cameroon.
Keywords: Evaluation, Tourism Resources, Implications, Tourism Development

Introduction
Tourism is an important economic sector with the potential to contribute significantly to the development of many countries worldwide. Cameroon, located in Central Africa, has a rich cultural heritage and diverse tourism resources, including natural, cultural and historical attractions. The North West Region of Cameroon is known for its natural, cultural and historical significance, with Kedjom Keku Fondom being one of the most important cultural sites in the region. This topic aims to evaluate the tourism resources in the Kedjom Keku Fondom and their implications for tourism development in the North West Region of Cameroon. The Kedjom Keku Fondom is a

traditional chiefdom located in the North West Region, which encompasses several cultural and historical potential to attract tourists to the region.

Kedjom constitutes one of the chiefdoms of the Bamenda Grassfields. It is important to indicate that the area known as the Bamenda Grassfields was also referred to as the Western Grassfields (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982). Kedjom Keku is found in Tubah Subdivision in Mezam Division, North West Region of Cameroon. Kedjom Keku is situated along the Bambui-Fundong Highway, some 25km from Bamenda City. Today, the Kedjom Keku people are known as the Babankis. Kedjom Keku is known for its beautiful landscapes and rich cultural heritage. Despite its tourism potential, the village remains unfamiliar to the outside world. However, the potential for tourism in Kedjom Keku from a human perspective is significant. By developing tourism, the village can benefit economically, socially, and environmentally while preserving its unique cultural heritage and promoting a sense of community among its people.

Tourism can provide significant economic benefits to the local community by creating jobs, generating income, and stimulating the growth of small businesses. By encouraging the development of tourism in Kedjom Keku, the village can become a hub for cultural exchange, allowing visitors to experience the unique traditions and customs of the local population. This can help preserve the village's cultural heritage and create a sense of local pride and ownership. Thus, from a human perspective, there is much to be gained from developing tourism in Kedjom Keku. Therefore, this fondom has significant potential for tourism from human perspectives, such as annual festival dance, arts and crafts, traditional architecture, indigenous fabric, traditional museum and photographs, making it an ideal place for tourists seeking adventure, cultural relaxation and ecological beauty.

Research Objectives

The paper seeks to address the following objectives:

- examine the tourism potentials of the Bamenda Grassfields.
- explore the possibility of promoting tourism in Kedjom Keku while considering its impact on the local community.
- provides a comprehensive understanding of the potential for tourism development in Kedjom Keku, considering the human factors and ensuring that the development is sustainable and beneficial to the local community.

Research Methodology

This paper extensively utilised primary, secondary, and ethnographic sources. Oral interviews were conducted in the Kedjom Fondoms and Bamenda city involving various key informants such as embroiders, conservators, woodcarvers, farmers, fon, cultural custodians, teachers, kingmakers, and the Regional Delegate of Arts and Culture (North West Region) using a question guide. These oral sources played a crucial role in

providing valuable data and complementing the written material, offering eyewitness accounts and a significant orientation for the study on tourism. Secondary sources were also consulted, including published books, journal articles, and unpublished theses directly and indirectly related to the subject matter. Furthermore, ethnographic objects such as photographs were essential to enhance the quality of the paper. The researchers served as authors' collections of some photographs, while others were from family albums in Kedjom Keku. These ethnographic objects are valuable information sources for understanding the study area's tourism resources.

Literature Review

According to Abam (2019), since the opening of the Babungo Museum in the North West Region, it has attracted a lot of visitors to see the sculptures and other artwork displayed in the museum, specifically beaded throne, stools, staff, musical instruments, masks, and pipes as well as promoting cultural tourism in the North West Region. Among museums in the North West Region, Babungo Museum presents a sample of objects from the rich cultural and artistic heritage which have promoted cultural tourism in the region.

Ambo et al. (2022) attest that the West Region of Cameroon is a honey spot for ecotourism owing to the huge ecotourism potential with multifarious natural and cultural attractions, which, if judiciously or efficiently harnessed, could make ecotourism in this region a lucrative one. The authors explained that Mount Oku is the second-highest mountain in West Africa and home to birds such as the Bannerman's turaco, which is unique to the region. Other ecotourism potentials enumerated by the authors include the Kilum-Ijim forest, Lake Nyos, Caves and Mankon Museum, which attracts tourism in the region.

Kimengsi et al. (2018) delve that Bafut is blessed with rich cultural tourist attractions such as museums, arts and crafts, festivals, historical attractions and building, as well as cultural displays which attracts tourists. They justify that the palace museum hosts various antiquities and artistic patrimonies. The museum, which is a major source of touristic attraction, is also in a plural perspective, with a combination of historical, ethnographic, stylistic and anthropological aesthetics analysis and a collection of objects linked to the rites of the prestige nature of the Bafut inhabitants.

Bruggemann (2016) examines that accommodation facilities, weather, destination location, the ability to relax, access to the beach, landscape and people and cultural amenities were the most important pull motivations for German tourists to visit German Colonial Legacy in Cameroon. Among this German colonial legacy in the North West Region, which attracts German tourists annually, are the German Fort and the Palace of Bafut Architecture. Funjea (2016) explains that the presence of a rich cultural museum, indigenous iron production sites, sculpture production, arts and crafts, annual festivals, and historical sites and monuments have attracted a lot of tourists in the

Babungo Fondom leading to the sustainable development in the North West Region.

Eyong et al. (2023) postulate that the establishment of hotels, motels and Inns along Bambui and Bambili communities has attracted tourists in the North West Region of Cameroon. For instance, international tourists sent on special missions or visiting lecturers to the University of Bamenda and other government officials used these facilities until the end of their missions. To add, these facilities promoted tourism in the Tubah Municipality as tourists feel more comfortable visiting attraction sites like Lake Bambili, Mbewi forest, and Babanki-Tungoh Crater.

The researchers have identified the tourism potentials in the North West Region from the existing literature. Most of these studies did not emphasise the link that tourists could explore and exploit the rich diversity of human potentials who want to learn about the history and culture of the Kedjom dynasty.

Overview of Tourist Resources in Bamenda Grassfields

Cameroon is one of the cradles of tourism in Africa. She has several tourist sites such as national parks, game reserves, beautiful lakes, coastal beaches, waterfalls and mountain peaks. These sites have brought in tourists from Africa, Europe, Asia, South America and North America. Therefore, Cameroon has yet to receive tourists from all over the world. The growth of the tourism industry in Cameroon has contributed to socio-economic development. There is no contradiction that Cameroon is often described as Africa in miniature based on human and physical features. Historically, on the 3rd of December 1974, the former president, Amadou Ahidjo, issued an order to improve airports, railways and hotel accommodations for tourists. Still in this line, Law No 91-8 of 30 July 1991 was passed to improve the Cameroon heritage and management. The objective was to call for the protection and promotion of monuments, objects and artistic interests (Csapo, 2007). Based on the aforementioned, Bamenda Grassfields is presently in the North West Region of Cameroon.

The North West Region of Cameroon is located between latitudes 5°40'N and 7°N and longitudes 9°45'E and 11°10'E. Situated at an average altitude of 1550m above sea level, it is bounded to the North by the Adamawa Region, the East by the Western Region, the West by Nigeria, and the South by the South West Region (see figure 1). The Region is divided into seven divisions, each headed by a Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) and 34 Sub-divisions, each headed by a Divisional Officer (D. O). It had a total population of 1,933 358 inhabitants in 2014, estimated to be slightly above 2,000,000 by 2022, with a surface area of 17,300 km2 (Ambo, 2022).

The Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon is considered a tourist destination with a significant economic impact on the local population due to its distinctive physical and human characteristics that attract visitors. These features are classified as follows:

Cultural Tourism: Bamenda Grassfields is home to several ethnic groups with unique cultural practices and traditions. Visitors can experience the rich cultural heritage of these communities by attending cultural festivals, visiting traditional palaces, and participating in traditional dances and ceremonies. For example, the Bafut Palace Museum and Mankon Palace Museum in the Mezam Division,

Nature and Wildlife: The region is blessed with an array of natural attractions, including rolling hills, waterfalls, and dense forests, which provide an ideal habitat for a wide range of wildlife. Visitors can go hiking, bird watching, or take a safari tour to explore the region's natural beauty. For example, Klium-Iji, Forest (Boyo and Bui Division), Kimbi Game Reserve (Boyo Division), and Kifem Fall (Bui Division).

Adventure Tourism: The varied terrain of Bamenda Grassfields offers numerous opportunities for adventure tourism, including mountain climbing, rock climbing, and zip-lining. For example, Mount Oku (Bui Divison), Menchum Fall (Menchum Division), and Abbi Fall (Momo Division).

Historical Sites: The region has several historical sites that showcase its colonial past, including old mission stations, colonial buildings, and museums. For example, The Bafut Palace and the German Fort (Mezam Division).

In connection with the Kedjom Keku fondom, tourism remains an indispensable cultural heritage because it represents their identity, enables communication and participation and has a fundamental understanding of their beliefs, values, ideologies and other intangible aspects of their culture. This study is prompted by more attention, or something needs to be done to preserve and document these potentials which attract tourists. In this light, touristic attractions in Kedjom Keku have been unsung for by the local community while the human features are still mute. Still, if probable documentation and protection are established, Kedjom Keku will be a circuit of tourist attractions around Cameroon and remain a place for social interaction and entertainment. Kedjom Keku has something for everyone, from cultural immersion to nature and wildlife exploration, adventure tourism, historical sites, agro-tourism, and sports tourism. It is a must-visit destination for anyone seeking a unique and authentic travel experience, making the argument visible as the human potentials are discussed below.

Research Findings: Tourist Resources in Kedjom Keku Fondom

Kedjom Keku Fondom is unique and culturally known in the North West Region of Cameroon, with a range of tourist attractions that offer visitors a glimpse into the area's history, traditions, and way of life. From the traditional regalia and artifacts displayed in the local museum to the picturesque landscapes, architecture memories, and vibrant cultural festivals, Kedjom Keku Fondom has something to offer every type of traveller. In this context, the tourist attractions in Kedjom Keku Fondom, from a human perspective, are particularly noteworthy, as they provide visitors with a more

personal and immersive experience of the local culture and customs. This subheading will explore some of the top human-centric tourist attractions in Kedjom Keku Fondom, highlighting their cultural significance and appeal to visitors.

Annual Dance Festival (*Kebeng Ke Ndong*) and Tourism

The *Kebeng Ke Ndong* festival is one of the most attended traditional dances in Kedjom Keku, reflecting the people's cultural heritage, forming part of human values that attract tourists. Among the famous dances which attract tourists are *Nzowain,* Masquerade and *Njang*. The *kebeng ke ndong* dance or the flute dance hauled tourists because of its specific venue and date in conformity with the organisers for celebration. Historically, the phase of *kebeng ken dong* around 1866 led to the split of the Kedjom people into Kedjom Keku and Kedjom ketinguh (Vubo, 2001).

According to the oral tradition, the *kebeng ke ndong* was a form of evening entertainment held in the largest compound, in this case, that of the wealthiest person – the Fon. The dance had been taught to the princes by Abang Kembong before his final departure to the princes and princesses. Eventually, it became a village affair practised by everyone. The dance evolved in form and style and very likely borrowed from neighbouring entities; for example, the steps are called "*mbi'se*" (the Chambers are also called "*mbi*". *Over the centuries, many aspects have been added, making it more complex than the original evening divertissement. It grew into a recreation at post roofing grass harvest for the Fon's palace in the dry season (so-swain or so-kentolem), which is why it is also called "ndu- nyingse Fon" while the Okie also have a feast of grass,* (Viyu, B. M., Per. Com, 2023).

This dance was an exceptional ceremony hosted by the Fon yearly to commemorate the living memories of all princes and warriors who died during battles the fondom fought, especially in inter-tribal Wars (Wihbongale & Nkongwibuen, 2023). A glaring example was the nine years of war between Kom and Kedjom around 1887. The cause of this war was Fon Yuh's (Kom) arrogance. Yuh's plan of subjugation of Kedjom was hatched when a hunter (a Kedjom man) caught "Kwifon's animal" (kebo), a leopard-and Kedjom Kwifon skinned the animal and Fon Yuh of Kom challenged the autonomy of Kedjom to do so. As a result, the Kedjom Kwifon was forced to declare war with Kom under Fon Vugah I in about 1887 (Mutan, 2001). An informant put it in his words why the *Kebengkendong* dance was celebrated in the fondom:

> *Eventually, the dance became a post-harvest festival or carnival when the people had enough leisure time to celebrate a backlog of deaths, do inter-in-law gift exchanges and engage in fresh marriages. Fundamentally, it is celebrated to re-emphasise the unity of the tribe and re-enact cultural ties with neighbouring friendly and kindred tribes. It now takes the form of an elaborate pageant retracing high moments of Kejom Keku history and displaying acquired trophies. At the*

> *end of the dance, Kwifon (the regulatory organ) presents current problems and gives a new orientation to the village after a ritual probe in the Kwifon wood* (Viyu, B. M., Per. Com. 2022).

Besides, this celebration recognised a brave Fon Mbwuwain (Mbwungeng) who passed without leaving a successor. *At the same time, this dance was characterised by prayers for the protection of the indigenes and a hitch-free planting season and bumper/buffer harvest in the fondom* (Tongwain, G. C., Per. Com, 2023). A Kingmaker of the fondom re-counts that many initiations was carried out in the village before the dance date was announced by Kwifon (Kwifon is a supreme ruling authority of the village). *Still, if there was a death in the palace, such as a prince, princess or queen, this commemoration was halted until the burial rites were performed* (Chumbom, N. F., Per. Com 2023). He adds that "*this dance lasted two to three days and was held twice over one to two weeks. These two periods were designated as the first dance, kebeng ke mbi, held in mid-December. In contrast, the last dance was called kebeng ke bam, celebrated on the first week of January each year, announced by the Kwifon*" (Chumbom, N. F., Per. Com 2023). The reason for the second dance was a make-up session which allowed everyone to re-emphasise the cherished maxim *vəghəŋ dì`a kənyʉ kə mù`* meaning "we are one".

It should be noted that in between the two dances are minor forms of entertainment, making the whole period a cultural jamboree. *We have war games like sawa'a, while recently, the Fon introduced a compulsory display of masquerade dance and participation of dancing groups during this festival. On this note, the Keben ken dong festival has experienced modification since the enthronement of Fon Vustiboung on April 20, 2006* (Viyu, B. M., Per. Com, 2023). In this light, tourists find interest in understanding the modification of the festival as participants while making the turnout overwhelming. The Fon of fondom narrates that "*in the past, this annual dance was memorialised with a heavy gun firing through the demonstration of guns, swords and spears to give honours to the Fon and showcase their military valour to the onlookers. This proves that the Kedjom people had been a warring fondom*" (Fon Vustiboung, V. B., Per. Com. 2023). The Fon adds that the cultural ambience during this festival was the participation of "green dressed masquerades" called *sukwe or nakang* and *nku*'. *The streets of Kedjom Keku were heavily crowded on the festival days with 'sukwe or nakang' dressed with creeping stem grasses and leaves to cover their faces as well as painted with black and white substances to avoid easy identifications* (see plate1), (Fon Vustiboung' V. B. Per. Com. 2023). According to the words of an informant:

> *We note that sukwe speaks a ritual language of the spirits, which is both comical and idiolectal. The nku' versus Sukwe conflict is a later-date elaboration of the Keben Ke Ndong drama. The sukwe build a barrier to block the two nku's and call the names. This brings about a lot of excitement, especially when they disrupt the drumming and dancing. This is called drama spectacle. Then the protagonist nku's*

salutes/pays reverence to the Fon and disappears into the Wood (land of the spirits) (Viyu, B. M., Per. Com. 2023).



Plate 1: *Sukwe or Nakang* in Kedjom Keku.

With a personal insight from an informant, a close look at the language of the *Nakang* revealed a fairly regular speech pattern. The *nakang* mostly used two types of utterances-statements which were either exclamatory or descriptive, and imperatives, which were either in the positive or negative form. The masquerade made the utterances after observing a person or situation. For example, the masquerade might exclaim, "How nice you look", or announce, "A piece of food" (Menang, 1983). The descriptive or exclamatory statement is followed by a related imperative like 'take and eat'. The number of utterances produced by the *nakang* remains small owing to the nature of interaction and a restricted use context.

In this light, a few utterances will be examined as a tool for tourist attractions in the fondom. First, the *nakang* approaches a group of well-dressed people as he shakes an object that produces a rattling sound and is supposed to be used in divining. He stops in front of the group and, still shaking the object, says: *ŋgɔ`s ji ga fə a ma fə* (The oracle had said it. How lucky am I). After repeating this several times, he asked for a present, the logical proof of his good luck (*ta ma pfuo*). Give me the present and let me go. Secondly, a well-dressed man is making his way to the dance. The *nakang* ran after exclaiming: *bɔŋa wu bɔŋ* (How nice you look). He is visibly flattered and as he turns around to look, the *nakang* seizes the opportunity, stands in the person's way and others: *ta ma pfuo* (pay me for the compliment and let me go (Akumbom, J-P., Per. Com. 2023).

In addition, the *nku 'Kedjom* and *nku' mesiencha* (as illustrated in plate 2a-b), protected by *'tefwof te nku'* made the festival attract tourists (Ngong, J., Per. Com. 2023). The *nku' Mesiencha* was a war trophy supposedly wrested

from the Vusi (the people of Babessi). It is differentiated by its white tattooing called "white *nku*'" from the *nku'* Kedjom (black *Nku'*, *Nku' Fene, Nku'* Kedomburg*),* which is from the fondom. This *'nku'* is black like those of other brother Tikari polities. During outings from the palace green, the "white *nku*" pays honour visits to the opposite end of the village from the 'black *Nku'* and reunites at the *kelam* to rest before the final grand entry onto the green for climactic displays.

The Kilam in question is currently that of Fon Awoenti. The two nkuhs, after their honour tour of the village, would make a final stop there to rest before the ultimate display. During the final display, the 'black nku' makes symbolic gestures with its batons, threatening to send the white one away because they do not "join house"-this was a dramatic conflict in the manner of classical dramas, after which there is reconciliation and purgation of emotions. In this light, *"Nku' Mesiencha"* always enacts a dramatic mock escape towards the end of the dance. *In the course of escaping, it would then be arrested by a woman and restored to the assembled village, while most often, the woman was heavily rewarded* (Viyu, B. M., Per. Com. 2023).

Festivals such as traditional dance are important, particularly in cultural tourism. The presence of this traditional dance and event is being enjoyed and celebrated by local people and international tourists (Nadine, 2012). The entertainment of this festival remains a hub for touristic attractions in Kedjom Keku Fondom because the use of flutes and drums gives a nice rhythm adorned by spectators who enjoy this traditional dance.



2a **2b**

Plate 2a-b: *nku' Kedjom* and *nku' mesiencha.*

Crafts and Art Objects

Tourists are drawn to Kedjom Keku due to the presence of traditional handicraft centers. The Fondom is home to highly skilled craftsmen and women specialising in traditional handicrafts such as carving, weaving, blacksmithing, horn and calabash designing, and embroidery. These crafters

create beautiful objects that continue to captivate tourists. According to some scholarly works, Kedjom Keku (Big Babanki) was one of the Fondoms with a well-established handicraft center, and the primary artisanal occupation of the people was wood-carving.

With their artisanal dominance in the Bamenda Grassfields, the Cameroon Handicraft Company was established in 1969 in Kedjom Keku and collapsed in 1974. It is located in the North-West Region of Cameroon. The company was founded during the Federal Republic of Cameroon era, with the primary objective of promoting and preserving the cultural heritage of artisanal works in the Fondom and training indigenous people interested in the craft. The craftsmen involved in the company were known for their ingenuity and diversity of craft activities, which included pottery, weaving, carving, and other forms of traditional handicrafts. The objects they produced were of exceptional quality and were highly valued for their artistic and cultural significance (Abong, 2023).

The company played a significant role in promoting the culture of the Fondom and preserving its rich artistic legacy. It also provided employment opportunities for many skilled craftsmen and contributed to the local economy. Over the years, the Cameroon Handicraft Company has become a symbol of pride and excellence in traditional craftsmanship. It has helped promote Cameroon's cultural heritage locally and internationally (Virsi, 2023), while attracting tourists during this era.

The Cameroon Handicraft Company's collapse did not halt handicraft craftsmanship in the Fondom. Skilled crafters continued to run local handicraft workshops, which grew into prominent centers. The degree of craft specialisation achieved through the apprenticeship system made this local craft centers exceptional in the Fondom. These centers produced varied art objects that attracted tourists from countries such as Switzerland, the Czech Republic, America, Spain, Nigeria, and Ghana. These arts were sold at craft workshops, market outlets, and open-air places, particularly in Chubali Square in the Fondom. These captivating objects showcased the cultural heritage of the Fondom and served as a profitable business for the crafters.

Tourists who visited Kedjom Keku purchased some objects, while others sought to understand the meanings behind the arts. This is because the art objects conveyed precise messages about a specific period, event, lifestyle of the people, and cultural values. Additionally, some crafters distribute their handicrafts to cooperatives in Bamenda city, such as the Bamenda Handicraft Co-operative Society Limited and the Presbyterian Handicraft Center. *In contrast, others sell their art through roadside stands within the Cameroon region. As a result, they indirectly showcase their art, which attracts tourists to visit the Fondom and purchase more artisanal objects as souvenirs* (Veneh, D. Z., Per. Com, 2023).

An example of the cultural and traditional significance of artisanal works in the Fondom, which tourists were attracted to, can be seen in the design of some carved stools. These stools were royal symbols, with some reserved for the Fon, such as those with concave tops and protuberant rims,

as they were believed to hold full spiritual power (as depicted in plate 3a-c). The royal stool in question was designed for Awonti (c.1845-c.1866) during the Kedjom migration through Kephem Ke fəmbum (see plate 3a).

The intricate carvings on the stool depict the strength of warriors and sorcerers who invoked the protective spirit of the spider to guard the Fon's throne. A similar stool was designed during the reign of Awonti, which was lost during the separation of Kedjom (see plate 3b). However, the design was remembered through historical narratives from praise singers about the old Fondom. Upon command from the Fon, it was revived and carved in the twentieth century during the reign of Fon Vubangsi (c.1936-1979).

The human head on carved stools represented war trophies or captives, while the human eyes represented the Fon as an overseer in the chiefdom. Plate 3(c) depicts the settlement of the Kedjom people in their present site during the reign of Fon Vugah II (1979-2004). This royal stool represented the Fon's might and power in their great cultural heritage over the years. The red colour on the stool signifies the bloodshed during wars in case anyone dares to attack or fight against the authority of the royalty. The spirit of the leopard represented protection and strength, while the warriors represented security, and the flautist represented divination towards the ancestors and the gods. Additionally, the stool represented victory and the conquering spirit of the ancestral spirits (Abong, 2023).



3(a) 3(b) 3(c)

Plate 3a-c: Royal Stools in Kedjom Keku. **Source:** Wihbongale (2022).

Photography

Photography is a trusted evidence medium and has become a part of ecotourism in recent years. According to a photographer, "*photography concerns visual communication and expression based on the production of a permanent record of an image*" (Mbicho, J., Per. Com, 2023). The North West Region of Cameroon, also known as the Bamenda Grassfields, is a popular destination for photographic tourism due to its rich natural and human landscapes, with Kedjom Keku no exception.

Photographic tourism is a form of special interest tourism in which visitors travel to a specific place to capture unique subjects through photography (Vutsise, V. L, Per. Com, 2023). Kedjom Keku is a popular destination for photographic tourism due to its unique cultural practices and traditional handicrafts. Visitors can capture images of skilled craftsmen and women producing intricate and captivating art objects. Additionally, tourists can take pictures of cultural festivals and ceremonies, such as the planting festival, which showcases the rich's cultural heritage.

The natural and human beauty of Kedjom Keku fondom has attracted numerous tourists to visit and engage in various forms of photography, including architectural, landscape, art, documentary, and wildlife photography. In addition to these types of photography, some tourists are also interested in institutional photographs displayed on photographic stalls or in the palace museum, which showcase the tangible heritage of the people. *Photographs are a tool that renders information authentic, as they embrace all communication media and can tell a story more effectively than words. They command the viewer's attention and create more sensations than written narratives* (Vugah, M. V., Per. Com, 2023). As a result, *"photographs serve as living memories of the past in the present, and they can attract tourists to the study area because they help the receiver (tourist) accept the message as trustworthy and authentic"* (Kemie, C., Per. Com, 2023).

Photographs have played a significant role in documenting the history of Kedjom society, spanning various aspects such as politics, administration, economics, and social and cultural lifestyles. "*It is noteworthy that photographs have the power to make history, document events, preserve memories, and move us to act. They have the ability to capture moments and preserve them for eternity, reinforcing personal integrity in both good and bad times"* (Abongvumbueh, S., Per. Com, 2023). Tourists who view these photographs are left with various emotions, from creating memories and smiles to experiencing excitement or sadness as they revive memories. *Hence, destroying a photograph, whether at a personal or official level, is a ruthless gesture of rejection because it conveys memories of past events that interest tourists* (Ndimba, C., Per. Com, 2023).

Additionally, photographs provide insight into people's past lifestyles, offer meaningful evidence of events, and promote social networking among people, groups, and institutions. For example, photographs of Fons Simon Vugah I, Philip Vubangsi, Simon Vugah II, and Vuabangsi Benjamin Vutsiboung, along with their brief biographies, provide tourists with a valuable understanding of how the fondom was / is governed (see plate 4a-d).

Plate 4a shows Fon Simon Vugah I, who relocated the Kedjom people from Kephem to their present location. He ruled from 1896 to 1936 and was the son of Fon Awenti, who governed Kedjom from 1865 to 1896. Similarly, Plate 4b depicts Fon Philip Vubangsi, who ruled Kedjom from 1936 to 1979 for 43 years. He was the successor of Fon Vugah Simon I, and on 22nd June 1979, he disappeared at the age of 90 while serving the Basel Mission Church as a catechist. Fon Vubangsi was also a remarkable woodcarver who preserved the

traditional crafts and arts of the fondom, exemplified by his cherished works of art on display in the palace (Mundi, 1990).

Plate 4c shows Fon Vugah Simon II, who succeeded Fon Philip Vubangsi and was born in 1940. He received his education at the Basel Mission School in Kedjom Keku. He underwent a three-year training program at the Catechist Training Institute of the Presbyterian Church in Nyassoso from 1961 to 1963. After his training, he served as an Assistant Pastor in various congregations of the Bamenda Grassfields. In 1974, he was summoned by his father and started a private business as a chemist. Fon Vugah Simon II was enthroned as fon in 1979 and disappeared in 2004 (Knöpfli, 1988).

Plate 4d illustrates Fon Vubangsi Benjamin Vutsiboung, the current Fon of Kedjom Keku Fondom, born on 4th April 1965. He is the stepbrother of Fon Simon Vugah II, exiled from the fondom by the Kwifon Society. Fon Vubangsi Benjamin Vutsiboung attended Government School Kedjom Keku, where he obtained his First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC). He is a professional driver working with the Food Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Yaoundé (Neku, 2011).

These photographs of the Fons who have ruled and the current Fon who still governs the fondom continue to attract the attention of tourists. Some tourists who carry their cameras enjoy taking pictures of these photographs and ask questions such as who took the picture, where it was taken, why it was taken, and what occasion or event it was taken for, as they wish to know and preserve these memories. Therefore, "*photographs serve as tangible materials that can extract information and gain insight into their historical background, growth, usage, relationship with the artist, and writing medium*" (Ndimba, C., Per. Com, 2023).



4(a)



4(b)



4(c)



4(d)

Plate 4a-d: Photographs of Kedjom Keku Fons.

Architecture Memories

The organisation and structure of Fondoms (palaces) in the North West Region showcase the beauty of traditional architecture constructed by the indigenous people as a sign of loyalty to their Fon. These traditional architectures, found in fondoms in the Bamenda Grassfields, serve various functions and preserve the people's cultural heritage. The Kedjom Keku Palace is a complex of traditional buildings that serves as the seat of the Kedjom dynasty. It comprises several interconnected structures, including the Fon's residence, the queen's residence, and the council chambers. Visitors can explore the palace grounds and gain insight into the history and culture of the Kedjom people.

Additionally, the Fon of Kedjom Keku fondom has three well-constructed local traditional houses roofed with grass called *Ntsi* (see plate 5a). The *ntsi* (Fon's house or building) is the oldest structure in the palace compound and is considered a shrine in which ancestors of the Kedjom people live. Again, *ntsi* accommodate the things used by the Fon, such as throne (kefoyn), cup (ku), dress (ketunu), spear (ntus) and umbrella (kelyenu). At the same time, wooden pillars were attached to the buildings where he resides, which gave beauty to the building (Viyu, M. B., Per.Com. 2023). In plate 5 (b), the Executive members of the Kedjom Keku Students Union (KEKSU) from the University of Bamenda, Cameroon, visit the palace. During their visit, the Fon expressed his desire to capture a photograph with them, specifically in front of the *Nsti*.



5(a)



5(b)

Plate 5a-b: Front View of *Nsti,* Kedjom Keku.

Furthermore, the buildings within the palace were deliberately separated from each other for security reasons. In a raid, such as inter-tribal wars or evil plots to harm the Fon, locating the Lion (Fon) among the Ntsi buildings in the palace would be difficult. The palace guards were also kept unaware of where the Fon spent his nights to avoid any potential traitors to the throne. To address these uncertainties, the Fon implemented a rotational security roster between the *Ntsi* buildings at night to ensure stringent security measures in the fondom. This strategy allowed Fon to remain relatively free from possible exposure and attacks from enemies, opponents, and conspirators who disagreed with his traditional policies. *These memories of royal architecture attract tourists to the community interested in learning the people's history, understanding how the thatched royal houses were constructed and taking photographs in front of the Ntsi* (Vuyof, F., Per. Com. 2023).

Other traditional buildings within the palace interest tourists due to their historical significance and activities. One such building is the "royal prison," used to discipline wayward princes, princesses, and even queens. This long, dark room was off-limits to everyone except the prison guards, and those locked up there had committed offences such as stealing, fighting, violating dress codes, or disobeying the Fon's orders. While in prison, their freedom and rights were restricted, and they were not allowed to communicate with other palace residents or contact their families. They were provided with food, bathing facilities, and a lavatory but were closely monitored by the guards. *If a detainee became ill, the guards would inform the Fon and take appropriate measures to restore their health. Once a detainee had shown signs of improvement and demonstrated a willingness to be respectful and self-disciplined, the Fon would order their release* (Fon Vutsiboung, V. B., Per. Com. 2022).

Another building found in the fondom was used as a traditional court. Law and order and the administration of justice are upheld in most Fondoms within the Bamenda Grassfields region, including Kedjom Keku. The Fon, regulatory societies, traditional council, and traditional court ensure that issues and cases arise within the community fairly and justly. In Kedjom Keku,

there was a building that served as a traditional court where members of the royalty were punished if they committed any wrongdoing. However, it is important to understand the judge's functions before delving into the crimes and offences. The traditional councils were responsible for creating laws based on the customs and traditions of the community, evaluating crimes committed, and referring them to the traditional court, where the chief judge presided, or to the quarter council / court, where the quarter head acted as the judge.

Additionally, the regulatory societies were tasked with executing the decisions reached by the traditional council and / or court, ensuring that justice was served within the traditional court system and offences were classified as either major or minor. Examples of major offences included rape, murder, adultery (especially with Fon's wife), witchcraft, aggravated theft, and land fraud. *These cases were heard in the village court, with the Fon serving as the chief judge and delivering the final judgment. Minor offences, such as disobedience of the Fon, persistent defiance of guardians, refusal to perform communal labour, fighting, and non-payment of debts, were tried in either the quarter or village traditional court, depending on the nature of the offence* (Fon Vutsiboung, V. B., Per. Com. 2022).

More so, fines and punishments were an integral part of the judicial system, with fines in the quarter courts ranging from a jug of palm wine and a fowl to a goat, depending on the severity of the crime. In contrast, fines in minor cases were determined by the Fon and special elders selected from the village court. In cases where the guilty party failed to respect the court's verdict or was noted to be recalcitrant, the kwifon would visit their compound to ensure discipline and restore order. For more serious crimes such as manslaughter, rape, and adultery with the Fon's wife, the punishment could be excommunication or banishment from the Fondom.

While the punishments weighed heavily on the offenders and their families, the villagers' greatest concern was to see justice served and major offences end (Fon Vutsiboung, V. B., Per. Com. 2022). The traditional architecture of the Fondom is an expression of its rich history, and the buildings serve as a draw for tourists interested in exploring the area's history, people's lifestyles, and traditional governance, including the political, economic, social, religious, and cultural institutions of the palace.

Indigenous Fabric

Traditional regalia in Kedjom society and other groups in the Bamenda Grassfields are an important aspect of their culture. During the early nineteenth century, traditional silk, raffia, and wool outfits were manufactured and mostly worn by chiefs, family heads, and affluent people in society (Wihbongale, 2021). Our forefathers handed down these regalia and many people use them to identify their ethnic group and promote their culture (NW / Sa / e / e, 1997). Another definition explains that traditional regalia is a dress that portrays the rich cultural heritage and needs to be preserved, improved, and passed on to future generations (Bitoh, 2017).

In the Bamenda Grassfields, and particularly in Kedjom Keku, the production and use of traditional regalia (attire, wear, cloth) were linked to the religious, political, economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and contact experiences of the people (Wihbongale, 2021). The indigenous people from this Fondom dressed in traditional regalia (see plate 6) called *daleh*, *toghu*, and *danshiki* (Veliesu, H., Per. Com. 2023) and African arts fabrication reflected the people's culture and way of life. Therefore, apart from the conventional sources of recorded history, African cultural values could also recover certain missing elements through their recovered artworks (Ndeh & Ngeh, 2015), as traditional wear portrays their identity and culture.



Plate 6: Traditional Regalia.

The traditional cloth was adorned with unique symbols that easily identified it as either for royalty or non-royalty. Depending on the wearer's status, the robes were cut and sewn in one of two permissible ways. Nowadays, outsiders often assume that anyone who can afford such an expensive robe is entitled to wear it on special occasions. However, they need to be made aware that there is a traditional law that tailors must strictly follow. For the robe that anyone was permitted to own and wear, the upper black section had to be cut square, showing a V-form in front and behind when worn. For Fon's robe, the upper section was cut in a circle and displayed a curved concave shape where the upper black materials were joined with the lower printed piece.

Additionally, the decoration on Fon's robe was different, including the so-called "moon," a round emblem that was an appliqué ornament on the back of the garment (Knöpfli, 2002). The moon symbol on the Fon's traditional wear had cultural significance linked to their migration. During Fon Vugah I's reign (c. 1898-1936), the moon design represented the light of conquering darkness, while during wandering around Kefem Kefumbum after the separation to Kedjom Keku and Kedjom Ketinguh around 1866, this design was used as the light of the gods, ancestors, and Fon over the darkness of their oppressors.

Thus, the moon signs on every Fon garment were an ever-present reality (Wihbongale, 2021).

The traditional ceremonial clothing worn by chiefs during installation ceremonies, such as those made from leopard skins, as well as designed regalia composed of a three-legged traditional stool, spear and shield for defence, walking stick, and fly whisk, offer significant potential for cultural tourism (Akama & Sterry, 2002). Furthermore, under the long outer garment, the attire consists of a pair of shorts, a singlet, an under-gown, and two "aprons" called *ngwasih* tied around the waist, with the longer one in front and the slightly shorter one behind, forming something like a skirt.

The outer garment comprises three pieces of fabric sewn together: an upper part of black cotton fabric, a middle section of printed material, and another black piece at the bottom (Anembom, H., Per. Com. 2023). Based on the significance of this traditional wear in Kedjom Keku and the entire Bamenda Grassfields, tourists hold great respect and attachment to it. The traditional clothing provides a unique connection to the local people and their history, which remains meaningful and memorable, as some tourists purchase it as a souvenir for themselves and their loved ones.

Traditional Museum

A traditional museum, also known as a royal museum, is a physical institution established in palaces that aims to attract tourists to the Bamenda Grassfields by collecting, preserving, and exhibiting cultural, historical, scientific, or artistic objects and artifacts. The region has several well-known royal museums, including Monkon, Bafut, Babungo, Bali Nyonga, Kedjom Keku, and Nso. The Kedjom Keku royal museum, in particular, draws visitors from around the world due to its rich collection of cultural artifacts, which are curated and displayed in exhibitions open to the public for viewing and learning. Museums play a crucial role in preserving and protecting cultural artifacts for future generations; through these artifacts, the people's history and way of life can be represented (Oldumiye et al., 2013). The objective of a museum is not only to collect and safeguard the palace's patrimony but also to educate the public about their heritage and the culture of other people, provide entertainment and relaxation for visitors, and project a positive national image on the international stage, particularly through tourism (Asombang, 1990).

The traditional museum in Kedjom Keku has a well-structured layout and display method, with exhibits arranged in sequential order and interactive displays of cultural artifacts such as pottery, wooden objects, calabash decorations, woven cloths, photographs, and contemporary arts to enhance the visitor experience. To help visitors understand the significance of these artifacts displayed on the shelves of the museum building, a museum attendant has been trained to run the museum. The attendant's role is to receive visitors, explain the cultural importance of the artifacts, and provide a deeper understanding of the collections created by the local people.

Additionally, *the museum offers educational programs, guided tours, and special events to engage visitors during their visit to the Fondom* (Vuyof, F., Per. Com. 2023). *However, it is important to employ local museum experts who can tell stories that reflect the history and growth of the community and highlight important events in its evolution and socio-political organisation* (Akama & Sterry, 2002). In this way, the Kedjom Keku museum visitor experience is enhanced, and tourists are provided with a fascinating understanding of the cultural heritage of the Kedjom people, including their traditional artifacts, cultural practices, and history. The surrounding area of Kedjom Keku offers a unique opportunity for visitors to explore and enjoy the exhibits and learn about daily life and customs, culture, ecology, and adventure in the North West Region of Cameroon.

Discussion

The evaluation of tourism resources in the Kedjom Keku Fondom provides valuable insights into the potential for tourism development in the North West region of Cameroon. The findings of such an evaluation can have several implications for the future growth and sustainability of tourism in the region. First, Kedjom Keku Fondom possesses a rich cultural heritage, including traditional dance, arts and crafts, traditional architecture, indigenous fabric, traditional museums and photographs that could attract visitors interested in cultural tourism.

The study area produced various items such as masks, idols, stools, and ornaments (Ngwa, 1997). This finding suggests that cultural tourism is a center for tourism development in the region. The implications include preserving and promoting cultural traditions, establishing cultural tourism routes, and creating opportunities for local communities to participate in tourism activities. Therefore, the culture and arts of the people provide an opportunity for cultural tourism with compelling attraction (Worlu, 2007).

The findings revealed that diverse natural landscapes, including mountains, forests, caves, waterfalls and wildlife, could attract tourists interested in Kedjom Keku and the North West region ecotourism. The conservation and sustainable management of natural resources remain imperative to promote the tourism sector in the region. According to Tchindjang & Etoga (2022), the beauty of natural landscapes is only equalled by its charm and fascination produced by the features which attract tourists.

Also, the ongoing socio-political upheaval in Anglophone regions has affected this fondom and their tourists' potential. The region's insecurity scares national and international tourists from visiting these rich human potentials in Kedjom Keku fondom. With the presence of natural landscapes and the interesting cultural heritage of the study area, tourists have not been exposed to wider audiences for the past six years due to the Anglophone crisis (Wihbongale & Nkongwibuen, 2023).

By considering these potential findings and their implications, policymakers, tourism authorities, and local communities can work together

to develop a sustainable tourism strategy for the North West region of Cameroon. This strategy should prioritise the preservation of cultural and natural heritage, the improvement of infrastructure and accessibility, and the empowerment of local communities, ultimately leading to a responsible and inclusive tourism sector that benefits both visitors and residents.

Conclusion

The evaluation of tourism resources in the Kedjom Keku Fondom provides valuable insights into the potential for tourism development in the North West region of Cameroon. The findings highlight the rich cultural heritage, such as traditional dance, arts and crafts, traditional architecture, indigenous fabric, traditional museums and photographs, making it an ideal place for tourists seeking adventure, cultural relaxation and ecological beauty.

These findings have several implications for the future growth and sustainability of tourism in the region. By embracing responsible tourism practices, emphasising community participation and empowerment, and fostering the preservation of cultural and natural heritage, the North West region of Cameroon has the potential to attract tourists, generate income, create employment opportunities, and contribute to the overall socio-economic development of the area.

In essence, evaluating tourism resources in the Kedjom Keku Fondom is a foundation for informed decision-making and strategic planning in tourism development. It provides a roadmap for leveraging the region's unique assets and ensuring that tourism growth occurs sustainably and inclusively, benefiting visitors and local communities. With careful planning and implementation, the North West region of Cameroon can unlock its tourism potential and establish itself as a desirable and responsible tourism destination.

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