Benchmarking Tourism Curriculum in Nigeria

Pat Uche Okpoko, Ph.D,
Department of Archaeology and Tourism, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Introduction

This paper was conceived for four main reasons. First, to contribute to the growth of this fledgling industry/programme so as to ensure its sustainability. Second, to expose us to the dynamics of this subject and its interdisciplinary nature. Third, to create an atmosphere of peace and harmony, and prevent the "bad blood" and heated debates that almost always characterize National Universities Commission's (NUC's) accreditation of tourism courses in Nigerian universities. And fourth, given my expertise in this field, to put the record straight and ensure that our approach to tourism research and teaching is in tandem with international best practices and standards.

Nigeria's tourism industry has had a chequered history since 1953, when the first attempt to harness cultural tourism was made by the Colonial Antiquities Commission. The inauguration of an Ad-Hoc committee on tourism and the formation of the Nigeria Tourist Association in 1959 and 1962, respectively did not help matters as the industry lacked institutional, infrastructural and personnel structures required to promote a vibrant industry. Nevertheless, some positive developments became manifest in 1976 following the establishment of Nigerian Tourist Board (NTB) to manage the industry. Among them is the allocation of an appreciable sum of money for tourism development. In 1992, the Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) was established to replace NTB and subsequently strengthen the industry. A national policy on tourism was launched two years earlier. The 1992 Act, which established NTDC at the apex, also recommended the establishment of a State Tourism Board in each state and local government tourism committees in all the local government areas of the federation. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation is the coordinating ministry. Private sector participation in tourism has also been enhanced following government's privatization programmes. Furthermore, a number of institutions, including universities, have established departments of tourism to provide the manpower that was hitherto lacking. And like other degree programmes being run in the universities in the country, the tourism programmes have to be regulated by NUC to maintain standard.

Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) is a tool employed by NUC to ensure quality control and/or uniformity in the academic programmes of universities in Nigeria. Its Academic Standards Department has four main divisions - planning, curriculum development, industrial collaboration and facilities and infrastructural planning and development - through which the above objectives are to be actualized. The curriculum

© 2012 P.U. Okpoko

division sets the BMAS for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in all Nigerian universities. In setting the BMAS for tourism and hospitality programme, NUC placed it under "Agriculture C" group of disciplines. Thus, the entry requirements and course contents are anchored on those of faculties of agriculture. The core subjects that a candidate must have credit passes in the ordinary level secondary school certificate examination to qualify for admission are: agriculture, chemistry, mathematics, biology etc. NUC also requires students who have gained entry into tourism and hospitality management to take a number of core courses offered in the faculty of agriculture to qualify for the award of a degree in tourism. NUC also outlines the minimum facilities, including library and laboratory that should be put in place. It is against these requirements that NUC insists that accreditation of tourism programmes in the universities must take place.

Dynamics and Interdisciplinary Nature of Tourism

It must be noted at the onset that tourism is multi-faceted. It is also a very diverse and pervasive subject that touches every facet of life and society. Thus, when viewed from the activities and experiences encountered by tourists from the moment of leaving home to the moment of return, a broad range of types of tourism can be discerned. At the core of these activities/experiences are transportation, accommodation and sustenance. These core elements, referred to as the essential components of the tourism product, must be encountered by tourists in one form or another during their visit to any destination. Further subtypes can be delineated using the destination contents and attractions as well as the distance or the political jurisdiction visited. In this case, culture and nature play invaluable roles. It is in the light of this diversity that Mcintosh and Goeldner (1990 in Cooper, 2008) posit that tourism can be taught… in a number of disciplines including: sociology, economics, psychology, anthropology [archaeology], political science, geography, ecology, agriculture, urban and regional planning, marketing, law, business and education. This means that a wide range of subjects can teach tourism and bring to it various ideas and methods of study (Okpoko *et al*, 2008). Consequently, tourism suffers from the difficulties of location "in a sea of competing academic territoriality and competing constituencies" (Coles *et al*, in Cooper *et al*, 2008).

Pearce (1979, 1989: 4-5 in Okpoko and Okpoko 2002: 18) identified six topic areas that geography contributes to tourism as follows: "spatial patterns of supply, spatial patterns of demand, the geography of resorts, the analysis of tourist movements and flows, the impact of tourism and models of tourist space." Archaeologists study the place of cultural resources in tourism development. As Ekechukwu (nd) puts it, "Archaeological sites and the discoveries made from them are important icons or focal point upon which tourism is developed… Thus, archaeologists focus more attention on the cultural dimension, especially its impact on the host cultures, their cultural paraphernalia and value system." Similar areas of interest, but with

some deviation in study domain, subject and approach, catch the attention of sociologists and anthropologists. Consequently, they focus attention on: "the tourists, relations between tourists and the local, the structure and functioning of tourist system, [the impacts of tourism] or the consequences of tourism" (Cohen 1984, Pearce 1989:5). The contributions of management revolve around the business of tourism anchored on the four management functions of planning, organizing, motivating and controlling in an effort to harness the potentials of tourism. Scholars in agriculture often emphasize rural or agro-based tourism. While economists stress the following areas: cost-benefit analysis, resource allocation, the use of public goods in the development of tourism, and the balance of payment effects of tourism (Gray, 1982, Pearce, 1989:5). Hence, each of the above disciplines discusses tourism, and given its perspective, emphasizes different aspects of the subject. Sometimes, clauses such as management, culture and leisure etc are used to denote the area of emphasis or orientation of the programme a particular discipline has adopted in tourism research and teaching. What this means is that each of the disciplines brings to tourism aspects of its specialization in which it is comparatively advantaged. It must be stressed here that a combination of these diverse inputs often helps to strengthen tourism and promote its sustainability.

Given this context, it does appear that Leiper's model of the tourism system provides a middle point, because it incorporates interdisciplinary approaches to tourism. "It is not rooted in any particular subject or discipline but instead provides a framework within which disciplinary approaches can be located" (Cooper *et al*, 2008:7). The three basic elements of Leiper's model are: (1) the tourists, the main actors that stimulate demand and supply, and who experience, enjoy and/or anticipate tourism products and services; (2) geographical elements, namely the travel-generating region, the tourist destination region and the transit route region; and (3) the tourism sector, which refers to the range of businesses and organizations involved in delivering tourism products (Cooper *et al*, 2008:7).

Indeed, an ideal tourism curriculum is one that incorporates the core elements of tourism and models as delineated above. It must include the dynamics and sensitivities of tourism, namely the tourists and what interest them; the host destinations that offer saleable cultural and natural products; accommodation which, provides safety and comfort to visitors; transportation through which they get to the destination and the means of moving around in the destination; and sustenance, which keep body and soul together. Dwyer *et al* (2010) delineate these to include *transport services* and *ground contents* (accommodation, tour services, food and beverage, entertainment etc.). Other areas of interest or tourist appeal such as culture and nature can also be covered. These fundamental contents should guide curriculum development in tourism. As Hovik and Heiberg (1980 in Okpoko and Okpoko, 2002) rightly observed, "once the basic features of tourism emerge, the use of slightly different categories/approaches does not matter".

Hence, to limit the requirements/inputs to agriculture alone using the NUC BMAS will only end up weakening the programmes/industry and ultimately mar the process of tourism development in the country.

The Place of Ministry of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation

It is instructive to note that the Federal Government of Nigeria has in its wisdom, and after a process of historical evolution and modification, placed tourism under the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation. The ministry and Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation, one of its parastatals, were given, among others, the responsibility to: (1) encourage people living in Nigeria to take their holidays within Nigeria, and people living elsewhere to visit Nigeria, (2) assist in the development of museums and historic sites, parks, game reserves, beaches, natural beauty spots, holiday resorts and souvenir industries and (3) set up a tour operating company to be known as National Travel Bureau to operate tour services within and outside Nigeria. As it stands today, Nigeria hosts major annual cultural fiestas including the Abuja Carnival, at the national level, and Argungu Fishing Festival, Osun Osogbo Festival and Calabar Carnival etc., all at the state level. These cultural fiestas have catalytic effects and therefore promote visitation to other sites, cultural and natural, within Nigeria.

That Nigeria chose to promote culture-based tourism at this time is not a mere coincidence, but a product of careful scrutiny and assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of our tourism products and services *vis-à-vis* other competing destinations. Furthermore, the responsibilities outlined above do not in any way fall within the competence of specialists in agriculture. Therefore, to domicile tourism solely in the faculties of agriculture, is not only seen as an aberration, but will end up defeating the purpose for which this ministry and its adjoining parastatals were created. This is because the study of culture including cultural tourism, in all its ramifications, does not in any way belong to agriculture, but to the Humanities and Social Sciences. Simply put, cultural tourism entails experiencing a cultural activity or activities while away from home, including visitations to art gallery, museums, festivals, ceremonies, monuments, archaeological sites etc (Glover, 1998). Scholars in agriculture do not even have the skills and competence to study/teach this aspect of tourism. It suffices to say here also that tourism falls largely within the behavioural sciences of which the social sciences, humanities and management are integral parts. Nevertheless, other disciplines may play some roles depending on local needs and circumstances, but should not appropriate or hijack the process.

Lessons from Nigeria and Elsewhere

There is the need to stress here that the urge to introduce tourism by some disciplines/universities in this country was borne by their individual desires/zeal to contribute to the development of this new industry, and not

to create an empire. It would appear that this urge is more manifest in those disciplines in management, humanities and social sciences. This is a statement of fact which should not be wished away. Of the 16 universities that offer tourism and related subjects in this country today, only one was initiated by the faculty of agriculture. Majority of them are either in management (seven), the humanities (four), social sciences (three) and applied sciences (one). You may also wish to know that a close examination of the profiles of lecturers that teach tourism in the college of applied sciences reveals that none of them specializes in agriculture. In actual fact, 75% of them come from management, while the remaining 25% come from the humanities and physical education. The implication of this is that scholars in agriculture do not have keen interest and/knowledge of the subject matter, and this accounts for their low patronage of the subject. Consequently, to domicile tourism in a faculty that is apathetic to it would definitely stifle the growth of this industry. It would only be wise to encourage those that know what tourism is, and have interest in its development, to contribute to the process.

It is also sad to note that the few universities that reverted from the minimum entry requirements of the management sciences to those of agriculture, following NUC's directive, witnessed an astronomical decline in students' enrollment figures in subsequent years, with some attracting less that 10% of their previous figures, which ultimately fall short of nationally approved figures. This was the case even in universities where tourism was previously over-subscribed. It does appear that NUC and the initiators of the benchmark see tourism as being synonymous with hotel/food and or wildlife. As we have stated earlier, tourism is a pervasive subject and therefore too broad for all its solutions to be found within the narrow confines of a single academic discipline.

Furthermore, a survey of various universities globally reveals that tourism is mainly domiciled in the faculties of management, social sciences and the humanities. A study conducted by Sussane Flohr (2001) in the UK titled: An Analysis of British Postgraduate Courses in Tourism…, reveals that about 60% of all postgraduate degree courses on offer nation-wide, are domiciled in the faculty of management sciences. The remaining 40% is shared by the humanities, social and environmental sciences. A similar pattern is seen in their undergraduate tourism courses. In the United States of America, it would appear that the strength of its tourism also lies in its diversity. A cursory look at all tourism courses on offer shows that it is located in diverse schools, faculties and colleges including management, social sciences, arts, health education and agriculture etc each of which contributes to move her tourism industry forward (see www.search-tourismschools.com). Search results also reveal a similar trend in Australia and South Africa (see tables 1 and 2). For instance, Table 1 below reveals that the tourism courses in Australia are majorly located in business/commerce faculties, followed by arts and the humanities. Nine out of the 14 tourism

courses are offered in the faculties of business/management/commerce; while the remaining five courses are shared by the arts/humanities, education and social sciences, with the arts/humanities dominating the rest. Indeed, business/commerce faculties take the lead among tourism providers, followed by arts/humanities in Australia. In South Africa, tourism is domiciled mainly in the management sciences/commerce, with the arts and humanities taking a distant second (see table 2). The table shows that 11 out of the 17 tourism courses offered are domiciled in management/commerce/business faculties, followed by arts/humanities with four faculties.

Table 1: Universities in Australia Offering Tourism and their Faculties

S/N	UNIVERSITY	FACULTY/SCHOOL
1	University of Canberra	Business, Government and Law
2	University of Southern Queensland	Business and Law
3	University of Newcastle, Australia	Business and Law
4	University of South Australia	Business
5	La Trobe University	Business
6	Griffith University	Business
7	University of Tasmania	Arts
8	Monash University	Arts
9	University of Wollongong	Commerce
10	University of Otago	Commerce
11	Southern Cross university	Hospitality and Management
12	Flinders University	Education, Humanities and Law
13	University of Western Sydney	Social Sciences and Psychology
14	University of Queensland	Tourism

Table 2: Universities in South Africa Offering Tourism and their Faculties

S/N	UNIVERSITY	FACULTY/SCHOOL/DIVISION
1	University of Cape Town	Commerce
2	Stenden University	Commerce
3	University of Johannesburg	Management
4	University of Venda	Management
5	Tshwane University	Management
6	Mangosuthu University	Management
7	Durban University of Technology	Management
8	University of Pretoria	Tourism Management Division
9	University of Witwatersrand	Humanities
10	University of Zululand	Arts
11	KwaZulu Natal	Humanities
12	Livingstone International University of Tourism Excellence and Business Management	Arts
13	Nelson Mandela University	Business and Economics

14	William Blue University	Business and Hospitality
15	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Business
16	University of Walter Sisulu	Business, Management Sciences and Law
17	Vaal University of Technology	Human Resource

An analysis of the unit titles also indicates that management/business themes dominate the landscape. This means that faculties of management rank higher than other faculties in so far as tourism courses on offer and their location are concerned. But what is observable in the various countries examined is that tourism is located in a multiplicity of faculties. The point being made here is that tourism is domiciled in different faculties and none of these is even in agriculture. Even the theoretical underpinnings for tourism teaching and research - interpretive social sciences paradigm, critical theory, participatory paradigm and feminist perspectives paradigm etc. - are mainly rooted in the social sciences (Jenning, 2010).

Therefore, it stands to reason that NUC should abide by the rules of the game as played globally so as to make our tourism programmes/industry internationally competitive, while upholding global best practices.

Conclusion

Given the above scenario, we wish to recommend as follows:

1. That tourism be domiciled in different faculties, with the BMAS reflecting the perspectives and competencies of the concerned faculties.
2. That the BMAS for tourism be revised to reflect the current international standard and/or reality.
3. That tourism programmes be made to reflect the vision and mission of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation and its adjoining institutions.

This is the only way to move the industry forward by creating an enabling environment for teachers of this subject to give in their best. It is hoped that this approach will help to address the problem often encountered by NUC accreditation teams in their effort to force the BMAS on agriculture down the throat of faculties that offer tourism. The NUC may wish to create a forum for debate on this issue. Here scholars with expertise in tourism from the humanities, social sciences, management and agriculture etc could be invited to make presentations. I wish to call on the NUC Executive Secretary to use his good offices to redress this anomaly and ultimately write his name in gold in so far as this issue is concerned.

References

Cohen, E. (1984): The Sociology of Tourism- Issues and Findings, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 10.

Coles, T., Hall, C.M. and Duval, D.T. (2006): Tourism and post-disciplinary enquiry, *Current Issues in Tourism* 9 (4-5).

Cooper, C., Fletcher, J., Fyall, A., Gilbert, D. and Wanhill, S. (2008): Tourism Principles and Practice. FT Prentice Hall, England.

Dwyer, L., Forsyth, P. and Dwyer, W. (2010): Tourism Economics and Policy – *Aspects of Tourism Texts.* Channelview Publications, Bristol, Buffalo and Toronto. 21

Flohr, S. (2001) : An Analysis of British Postgraduate Courses in Tourism : What Role does Sustainability Play within High Education? In: *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, volume 9.No. 6.

Gray, H.P. (1982): The Contributions of Economics to Tourism, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 991.

Jennings, G. (2010): Tourism Research, Second Edition. John Wiley and Sons Limited, Australia.

Okpoko, A.I. & Okpoko, P.U. (2002): *Tourism in Nigeria*. Afro-Orbis Publications Ltd., Nsukka.

Okpoko, P.U., Okonkwo E., Diminyi C. (2008) *Understanding Tourism*. University of Nigeria Press Limited, Nsukka.

Pearce, D. (1979): Towards a Geography of Tourism, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 6 (3).