



Repositioning Tourism Industry for Socio-economic Development in the Contemporary Era: The Case of African Shrines and Sacred Places

Chikaodili Nwachukwu

Department of Religion & Human Relations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

There is no doubt that there is abundant literature on tourism and its impact on development especially for the developing countries. Scholars have also written reasonably on the need to improve the status of tourism in Nigeria due to the acknowledgement of its potency for socio-economic development. Yet, there is insufficient scholarly works on the religious shrines as veritable tools for improving tourism and recreation in Nigeria as a whole, and Igbo land in particular. However, there is extant evidence that many African shrines and sacred places have been neglected and abandoned and often times, misrepresented. The observed situation raises some questions which include; what are the potentials of religious shrines and sacred places for the enhancement of tourism in Nigeria? What can be done to our local shrines to be attractive for tourism? These questions call for study and hence, the need for this study. The main thrust of this paper is therefore; to highlight the great potentials the religious shrines and sacred place have for the enhancement of the tourism industry in Nigeria, Igbo land in particular. It will also make suggestions on how to improve our local shrines for tourism purposes.

Keywords: Tourism, Development, Shrines and Sacred Places

Introduction

The business of tourism has been widely discussed. This is because of its position in the modern day business. It has been widely acclaimed as the key driver in socio-economic development of many countries especially, the developing countries. Even in Nigeria, its impacts to development have been acknowledged. Many scholars have written on the need to improve the status of tourism in Nigeria due to the acknowledgement of its potency for socio-economic development. Yet, there is insufficient scholarly works on the religious shrines as veritable tools for improving tourism and recreation in Nigeria as a whole, and

Igbo land in particular.

In Africa, the place of shrines and sacred places cannot be overemphasized. There is no doubt that Africans are notoriously religious and that religion colours all aspect of their lives. (Mbiti 1970). The socio-religious values of shrines and sacred places are amongst the make ups of the historical identity of the African people. Africans belief in deities, spirits and ancestors and their abodes are shrines and sacred places. These deities are worshipped or venerated by African, they offer sacrifices to them through their priests in their shrines. Shrines and other sacred places are treated with fear, awe and respect and are not open for all. Shrines and sacred places apart from religious purposes served other purpose such as tourism and recreation, pilgrimage, economic and also educational purposes. However, all these started dwindling with the advent of Christianity and western civilization. It is surprising that many Africans are still perpetuating the prejudice with which the early missionaries that came to African painted Africans and all their rich values and culture. This is shown by the extent many Nigerians for instance spend fortunes to visit some religious sites and shrines in the west while the one at home are suffering neglect.

The resultant effect is that many people see shrines and sacred places as homes of demons, evil dwelling and archaic. Most shrines and sacred places have been destroyed neglected and abandoned yet, they have great potentials for tourism and socio-economic development.

In the light of the above, in many parts of Africa, Nigeria in particular, tourism and recreational industry have not fully appreciated the potentials of shrines and sacred places for tourism business and the need to improve the standard and state of shrines and sacred places so as to meet the modern time tourism.

The purpose of this paper is therefore, to highlight the great potentials the religious shrines and sacred place have for the enhancement of the tourism industry in Nigeria, Igbo land in particular. It will also make suggestions on how to improve our local shrines for tourism purposes. This study will hopefully inspire the spirit of African people to better understand and appreciate shrines and sacred places as veritable tools for tourism and development.

The methodology employed for the investigation is historical method. Shrines and sacred places are important aspects in African traditional religion. Africans belief in myriad of deities and their abodes are Shrines. The study will be limited to Nigeria, Igbo land in particular while Africa remains the population of the study. For clarity, the remaining part of this paper will be discussed under the following sub-headings;

- Tourism defined
- Tourism and development
- Shrines and sacred places explained.
- Some potential shrines and sacred places in Igbo land

- the potentials of African shrines and sacred places for tourism.
- Recommendations
- Conclusion

Tourism Defined

The term tourism has been widely defined and it is one of those words that have multiple meanings. Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in a place outside their usual environment for leisure and business purposes. Tourism is different from travel. In order for tourism to happen, there must be a displacement, an individual has to travel using a means of transportation and it concerns pilgrims but all travel is not tourism. It can also be defined as the practice of travelling for recreation. Tourism can also be referred to as the business of attracting, accommodating and entertaining tourist and the business of operating tours. Tourism may be international or within the travelers country.

Tourism is defined as the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). It is also defined as the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction of tourists, business suppliers, host governments and host communities in the process of attracting and hosting these tourists and other visitors (McIntosh & Goelden, 1986).

The World Tourism Organization defines tourism in terms which go beyond the common perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only as people travelling to and staying in places outside the usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes (UNWTO, Online).

Tourism and Development

For sometimes now, tourism has become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world that it is often linked to development and the key driver for socio-economic progress. It has been noted that the business volume of tourism is favourably competing with that of oil exports, food products or automobiles and therefore, represents one of the main income sources for many developing countries (UNTO, online).

Today, tourism is a major source of income for many countries and affects the economy of both the source and host countries. Tourism is an important and vital source of income to many regions and countries. It has significant potential as a driver for growth for the world economy. It is the main source of foreign exchange for one-third of the developing countries. The development of tourism is accompanied by significant challenges. The rapid growth in both international and domestic travel, the trends to travel farther and over shorter periods of time, and the preference given to energy-intensive

transportation are increasing the non-renewable energy dependency of tourism, resulting in the sector's contribution of 5 percent of the global GHG emissions.

Its importance was recognized in the Manila declaration on world tourism of 1980 as an activity essential to the life of nations because of its direct educational and economic sector of national societies and on their international relations. Tourism brings in large amount of income into a local economy in the form of payment for goods and services needed by tourists. Tourism also creates opportunities for employment in the service sector of the economy. The service industries which benefit from tourism include, transportation services, hospitality services.

Tourism development can be designed to support the local economy and poverty reduction. Local economic effects of tourism are determined by the share of tourism spending in the local economy as well as the amount of the resulting other economic activities. In greening the tourism sector, therefore, increasing the involvement of local economy and poverty reduction. Yet, much is still to be done towards productive tourism in Nigeria.

The first tourism board in Nigeria known as the Nigeria Tourism Board (NTB) was established by Obasanjo's regime in 1976 which is now known as the Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) via Decrees No Decree No. 54 of 1976 reviewed to Decree No. 86 of 1991 and giving it a 'preferred sector' status respectively. The Government of Nigerian further took some measures towards promoting the travel and tourism sectors which includes, the establishment of the Presidential Council on Tourism, Federal Ministry of Tourism and its Departments and Agencies with same at the States' level and Local Tourism Committees which falls in line with the provisions of the National Tourism Policy (NTP) of 2005, the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) of 1992 and the Nigeria Tourism Development Master Plan of 2006 (Dantata, 2011).

However, It has been observed that tourism in Nigeria is still in its formative stage. This is evident on the large accumulation of untapped resources and the institutional structure which is yet to be regulated to compete favorably with other fast growing tourism destinations (Dantata, 2011). One of these untapped resources for tourism is religious shrines and sacred places.

Shrines and Sacred Places Explained

Arinze (1970) defined shrines as the abode of spirits. Ojiekwe (2014) defined shrines as places of consultation with esteemed extra-human forces to answer unanswerable questions in order to allay fear and provide a way out to resolve problems. Shrines therefore, remain one of the important sacred places which are significant in promoting social and religious activities in various communities. They serve many purposes for traditional Africans, specifically, for religious worship. Iroegbu (2009) referred to a shrine

as a sacred place, it inspires awe and elicit reverence because of what they stand for. A shrine is a holy or sacred place which is dedicated to a specific deity, ancestor, hero, martyr, saint or similar figure. Shrines often contain idols, relics or other such objects associated with the figure being venerated. Shrines are found in many of the world's religions, including Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Shrines can be found in various settings such as churches, temples, cemeteries or at homes. Bruce (2011), identified different types of shrines allocated within buildings and in the temples designed specifically for worship. A shrine is usually the centre of attraction in the building or place and it is given a place of prominence. Household shrines can be found in homes. Small household shrines are very common among the Igbo where they keep their Chi. This shrine is usually a small structure or a setup of pictures and figures dedicated to a deity that is part of the official religion, to ancestors or to localized household deity. There are also yard shrines; shrines that are found in people's compound. Religious shrines are found in most religions. According to Nwankwo and Agboeze (2016), shrine, from the secular point of view, can be categorized into typologies according to their ownership and functions. This includes family shrines, community shrines, religious shrine, individual shrines, village shrines, state or national shrines, festival shrines, etc.

Sacred places on the other hand, are found in different cultures all over the world. Such places are frequently marked or embellished in architectural structures and art. The sacredness of a place is linked in some way to natural objects and features such as trees, stones, water, mountains, caves and forms in the landscape. These natural objects and forms lie at the root of the forms and shapes employed to mark or embellish a sacred site. These same sacred forms and shapes derived from natural objects and features become symbolic or emblematic of the sacred or divine. Sacred places are not only the abode of the divine but also serve as a means to entice the divine to continue to reside at a given place or to take up residence at a new site. Sacred places are often rich in aesthetic experience. Sacred places are important places for religious groups. In Judaism, Mount Sinai is a sacred place because of what Moses encountered with God in the place. Places are referred to as sacred places because of remarkable events that took place in the place or because of its formation or because it is an abode of the gods. Sacred places can be mountains or groves, forests, trees, stones, rivers, streams or lakes. For all these to be taken as sacred, they must be some specific indicator outside what is normal or unique to that natural place or object. For example, the arranging of massive stones into a building or the movement of a stream of water in a particular order outside what is normal. For example, the Zuma rock in Abuja and the hot and cold stream in Enugu State. The sacred places according to Foley (2010), are considered to be beneficial to healing and well-being. Sacred places rekindle reverence for land and cultural diversity and connect nature and culture.

Every civilization has its share of sacred places, that is, geographical locations

buildings, monuments or environmental features, such as mountains, lakes, rocks, waterfalls and so on that are believed to be endowed with intense spiritual qualities. Indeed, such places are frequently thought to possess a variety of supernatural power that can heal, rejuvenate, or otherwise affect the human beings who visit them often as devout pilgrims. They are also, sometimes thought to be the focal points of creation, the places where deities first manifested themselves or performed some fundamental actions, and are thus typically steeped in mythology and theological dogmas.

Traditionally, regardless of the varying topologies of shrines, they still serve unique functions and purposes in the traditional African society which include protection, provision, guidance, revelations, etc. These unique functions have attracted much audience and veneration to these shrines as found in the traditional African society.

Moreover, sacred places are forest fragments of varying sizes, which are communally protected, and have significant religious connotation for protecting the community. Hunting and logging are usually strictly prohibited within these patches. (Gadgil and Vertak, 1975). Such forests are left untouched with huge religious significance attached to their meaning and existence. Most of the sacred groves have strict restrictions, hence it was noted that “traditionally, and in some cases even today, members of the community take turns to protect the place. This is aimed at ensuring maximum compliance to the restrictions guiding the shrine. In Nigeria today, one of the notable sacred places is the Osun-Oshogbo sacred grove which is enlisted in the world's heritage list by the UNESCO. Other notable sacred places include Ubinukpabi sacred grove that is associated with Chukwu shrine at Arochukwu, Abia state, Ohia-Udowerre sacred grove at Ndiowu and Okija shrine at Ihiala, Anambra State, etc. Majority of the sacred groves within the area of study, the eastern region in Nigeria, have close attachment to shrine and in most cases, referred to as shrines hence they are inseparable from shrines.

Some Potential Shrines and Sacred Places in Igbo Land

Shrine is a physical feature within sacred space depicting the abode of divinities. It originated from man's religious quest of unseen powers controlling the universe. Based on this impulse he marked out certain spots as more significant than others with regard to this religious inclination. The marked spots were symbolized with natural objects like rock, trees, lake, streams, etc. Later little buildings were used to replace the natural objects. These little buildings are known as shrine set apart to house the sacred emblem of the divinity and other objects of worship. However, shrines and sacred places discussed in the pages of this work are mostly from the eastern part of Nigeria in West Africa.

Ogbunike Cave

The Ogbunike Cave is a major tourist site in Eastern Nigeria situated in a valley behind the

Ogba Hills, Anambra State. A UNESCO Heritage Site, the cave consists of a network of sandstone chambers and tunnels, and is regarded as one of Nigeria's greatest geographical masterpiece. Cocooned in a valley with tropical rain forest and buffered by 20 hectares of lush vegetation, the caves are occupied by colonies of bats while the surrounding rainforest is home to antelopes, deers, alligators, porcupines and snakes. The collection of caves has been in use over centuries by local people for whom it has particular spiritual significance. Descending into the valley where the caves are located is a lengthy walkway made up of about 317 steps. The caves consist of 10 tunnels and a main chamber which snake their way underneath the hillside. The tunnels are filled with streams and small pools, and within the tunnels are big chambers as well as other tunnels of varying lengths, some of which are inter connected. A stream flows out from one of the tunnels into a rapid flowing river (River Nkissa). At the meeting point of the river and the stream, one can feel the warm water from the caves and the cold river water. The Ogbe celebration is undertaken every year to commemorate the discovery of the caves. Local history records that Ogbunike's ancestors hid from raiding slave traders in the caves. There are so many other interesting tales told about the cave and the locals are always willing to share these stories. The site has sufficient boundaries to protect its values from direct effects of human encroachment. The Ogbunike Cave is certainly a place anyone would want to visit and explore. Tradition demands that visitors remove their shoes before entering the caves, and women who are having their monthly circle cannot go in. It is however advisable that visitors bring a torch and light water proof covering.

Awhum Waterfall & Cave

Awhum Waterfall & Cave Located at Amaugwe village of Awhum town in Udi Local Government Area, the Awhum waterfall and Cave is as a popular tourist site in Enugu, Nigeria. A result of a titanic outcrop of granite rock with water tumbling from the top to form a stream, the waterfall is beautiful at any time of the year. While a section of the waterfall is always warm through the season, the water is said to be therapeutic (have healing power) and capable of vanquishing evil or satanic forces if and wherever sprinkled. Awhum waterfall is 30 metres high and is located close to Awhum Monastery. It takes about 45 minutes' walk from the parking spot to the fall, but it is worth the trek.

Ofia Nri

Ofia nri is a sacred place in Ora eri town in Anambra State which if properly harnessed will be a great tourist centre. it is a sacred place which houses the palace and installation ground where all the Eze nri both past and present were installed. There are also a lot of amazing scenes that will attract visitors to visit again.

Ngwo Cave and Waterfall

The Ngwo Cave and Waterfall are located at the Ngwo Pine Forest where a heavy waterfall descends from overhead limestone rocks. The waterfall forms a shallow pool at the cave floor before flowing out as a stream into the wild. Apart from the waterfall, there are several caves that are tucked away into the rock, and you can access some of them by climbing while some are easily within reach.

Ani Ozalla Lake

There is the Ani Ozalla Lake and the Ani Ozalla Shrine, both located close to Ozalla in Nkanu West LGA. The Ani Ozalla Lake is a natural body of water with numerous number of crocodiles which are regarded as sacred – incarnations of the river goddess who at the promptings of the chief priest come to accept offerings from supplicants.

Ezeagu Tourist Complex

Set in the most natural terrains, the Ezeagu tourist complex comprises of a body of water, a lake, a natural spring, and a cave that stretches for three kilometers on end. This venue attracts various visitors and tourists from across Enugu State and beyond, and it is a place to spend some vacations or stay throughout the cultural festivities.

Traditional shrines and sacred places act as a hook to attract tourists. In other words, it is a great anchor for attracting tourism. Thus, exploring the traditional shrines and sacred places as a path for the promotion of tourism in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. This can be appreciated by analyzing its impact in various areas of life. Notably is its influence in the economic well-being of the community. Traditional shrines and sacred places if well preserved can attract visitors to a destination who spends money within the community, enhancing the local economy and supporting the local economy through restaurants, hotels, and other tourism selected businesses. The high inflow of tourist and day visitors into the community during such occasions contributes immensely to economic empowerment of people through the injection of tourist expenditure into the community. Tourist expenditure is felt in the community from the boarding of taxis to lounging in hotels to visiting tourist sites.

Tourism is an industry that relies heavily on the environment both physically and socially. In other words, tourism activities cannot do without the environment. It aids the development of the physical environment by attracting the expansion of infrastructural facility in the community. Though it does deface the community with pollution and dirt if not adequately managed, yet its ability to protect the flora and fauna adds glamour to the community. Thus it is not surprising that traditional heritages provide the stimulus for additional infrastructural development in the local area which will go a long way in promoting tourism.

In its religious capacity, traditional shrines serve as locations for traditional festivals which attract both adherents and visitors from all across the nation and beyond. Participation in these events is not restricted to traditional adherents only as non-adherents also share in certain momentary occasions of ritual. The rituals are occasions in season when a community commemorates certain events which enhances their identity. As an entity, such include traditional festival, coronation of rulers and elders initiation rites, myths of migration and so on. These events illuminate the touristic attribute of the shrines. As Nolan and Nolan (1992) rightly observed, religious festivals are the principal attractions for non-followers and the secular tourists. At present these activities invariably portray the shrine a tourist centre where religion is the nucleus of the attraction. In view of this, Awolalu (1979) stated that the Osun shrine in Osogbo is rapidly becoming a tourist centre. Therefore, shrines are always considered as a source of recreation not only for the followers but also those who casually visit there. Shrines attract the secular tourists and others for the sake of enjoying social gathering and recreation.

However, the opening of sacred ground to tourists or to people with no feeling for the religious essence of these sites, without observance of the traditional respects, is often criticized (Ceesay and Ceesay, 2009). The argument was that the commercialization of religion will lead to the loss of its essence. Nonetheless, this commercialization of religious activities further strengthens its survival as a location of both for cultural and religious activities. The shrines with their sacred groves and festivals are sources of tourism attraction as long as the visitors do not infringe on the norms of the shrines. Therefore, it is imperative to note that without these shrines, traditional festivals and rituals will have no place in the cultural life of the people. However, despite these factors, many of the shrines and sacred places in Igbo land are still neglected and abandoned.

Recommendations

Having seen the seemingly extinction of African shrines and sacred places and the need to reposition them for tourism and cultural revival, what are the ways to achieve the desired status?

Firstly, there is need for mass reorientation at various levels starting from the grass root on the appreciation of the rich African heritage. This is so, because, many Africans, Igbo people in particular are still suffering from the erosion of African pride initiated by the early Europeans that came to Africa. In other words, many Africans do not appreciate what is in Africa but can pay a fortune for the same thing if it is in the West. Therefore, Seminars, workshops should be conducted in schools and offices to make people especially the young ones to appreciate their culture and to also make them know what means to be an African is really.

Secondly, government should involve the private sector with the requisite competence to enhanced tourism development of abandoned shrines and sacred places and also in the maintenance as is the case in South Africa. This was the strategy adopted in the rehabilitation and preservation of the Obudu Cattle Ranch, as a tourist- destination, by Protean Hotel, a South African Consortium. In addition, modern environmental initiatives were also put in place to ensure the flora and fauna, which add to the beauty and tranquillity of the ranch, which are well-preserved and protected.

Thirdly, members of communities where these shrines and sacred places are located should be involved in the heritage management process. When the people are enjoined to make an input in the guarding and protection of their heritage, this in turn might evoke in them a sense of pride and place as well as enable them assist in the promotion of an appropriate tourist strategy.

Fourthly, while we acknowledge the importance of modern practices in the preservation of heritage sites, we espouse that such practices be combined with the traditional methods of the people for their conservation. Most of the ancient sites go back some centuries ago and are still steeped in tradition; hence, some preservation methods might be prohibited under the locality's custom or might incur the wrath of the deities existing within these sites. More so, there are usually traditional methods handed down from generation to generation for their conservation. Therefore, to ensure sustainable conservation and tourism development there is need to integrate both the traditional and modern methods.

Finally, African tradition and culture should be incorporated school curriculum and must be made compulsory from primary to tertiary level and also African histories should also be part of the curriculum and should replace history of foreign heroes and places.

Conclusion

Throughout Africa, shrines and sacred places have always been a focal point in religious worship but with the advent of civilization and modernization, they were relegated to the background. Shrines/sacred places are amongst the heritage resources of a people and hence can be sustainably packaged for heritage tourism promotion and community development. In a traditional African society, heritage resources are inclusive of a people's belief system and other socio-religious values. Shrines/sacred groves have been posed with series of threats to their existence and heritage tourism potentialities in communities.

Tourism business is flourishing and there is the need to direct efforts towards the modernization of African shrines and sacred places to suit the present day tourism. Since tourism is all about site seeing and visiting ancient places, the updating of these shrines and sacred places to meet the standard required becomes very crucial.

There is also the need to preserve and bring back to frontline our lost cultural heritage and legacies. Through tourism, shrines, sacred places, and cultural practices can be revived. Though Africans have started the journey of reclaiming and repositioning their lost heritage, this can be witnessed through the efforts of prominent Africans like Sengho and Nyerere. The reclaiming and reconstruction of the well-known shrines and sacred places in various parts of Africa, Nigeria in particular, will not only enhance tourism in Nigeria, which will invariably lead to socio-economic development but will also, help to uphold the pride and dignity of Africa.

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