



Assessment of Nupe Cultural Features towards Establishment of Tourism Destination at Nupeko, Niger State

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Abstract

The success of tourism in a community depends largely on the ability of the community to develop, create, manage and market tourist facilities within. It has been established that the need to harness tourism potential in Nigeria as a whole is of enormous concern. There is therefore need to showcase tourism through architecture in the country. The Nupe ethnic group, native in the Middle Belt of Nigeria is identified to be culturally rich in arts and crafts. However, previous studies have revealed that in spite of the natural human and physical resources available, tourism within the area is still at an appalling level, as these resources are left to lie fallow without any form of development. Tourism on the other hand requires that the residents of such communities are carried along towards showcasing their unique cultural attributes. To achieve this, questionnaires were distributed to selected family heads to generate information on key attributes of the people, as well as focus group discussions carried out with elderly members of the community in order to obtain data on historical cultural values and perception, spatial and cultural attributes of the people, in order to obtain unique characteristics. Also the findings showcased unique cultural attributes of the Nupe community. The data obtained was analysed using content analysis for the qualitative data on spatial analysis. The study conclusively identified the possibility of integrating cultural features, values and perceptions in the design of tourism destination at the historic town of Nupeko in Niger State, Nigeria.

Keywords: - Community, Cultural features, Destination, Nupe, Tourism

Introduction

The architecture of a place has been identified as one of the major attributes that pull crowd, while tourism has been known

to have helped sustain architecture through time. It would be therefore be rather unusual to mention tourism without

architecture (Najafi and Shariff, 2011). Similarly, it has been known from time immemorial, till the present day that the awareness of any culture is made possible as tourism and architecture work in a mutually beneficial manner, by providing the quality that identifies the place, its civilization and its progression through a sequential approach (Ribera *et al.*, 2020). Architecture is a means of expression for the cultural diversity and innovative potential of a region, and tourism, as an industry, directly helps to preserve architecture (Jokilehto, 2017).

Tourism has played a major role in the advancement of several destinations around the world. To this end, Udoh (2019) defines a tourist destination as a geographic place that meets the needs of the tourist and has the basic factors of tourism. A destination is a place to which one is journeying or to which something is sent (Jones, 2011). This word is usually used in travel and tourism. Likewise, (Buultjens & Cairncross, 2015) defines a destination as a country, state, region, city or town which is marketed or markets itself as a place for tourists to visit. A tourist destination is an area that mostly depends on the revenues accruing from tourism.

It is worthy of note, that All popular tourist destinations in the world are characterized by three main features: attractions, amenities, and accessibility. A tourist destination often has more than one attractions; in order for such a place with attractions to be popular, it must also be accessible to tourists and provide various amenities. Popular tourist destinations in the world include Rome, Paris, Fiji, London, New York, Prague, Hanoi, Barcelona, Dubai, Bangkok and Lisbon (Derudder & Pain. 2018).

Tourism is one of the most rapidly growing sectors in the world with regard to economical, technological and social transformations (Baum, 2015). The mutual relationship between architecture and tourism is obvious since ancient times where architecture, as a tourist attraction, had a very important role. Temples have been built in honour of the gods, grand theatres, stadiums, the Colosseum and other monumental public buildings that attracted large crowds as they represented the culture and society. Tourism as a whole is very broad and as such can be subdivided into a number of components which include attraction tourism, conference tourism, event tourism, travel tourism and cultural tourism (Camilleri, 2018). For this study, cultural tourism is of utmost importance. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) refers cultural tourism to a place or destination that offers tourism activity for visitors to explore, experience and absorb the tangible and intangible cultural assets (UNWTO, 2017). Cultural tourism is a synthesis of two phenomenon which include culture and tourism.

The culture of each society is identified through its manifestations such as language, art, and architecture (Pathak, 2019). This simply implies that these are the key ways by which a particular culture can be known and identified amongst others, and as such, analysis in the field of culture is related to the study of cultural manifestations. Unfortunately however, the culture and identities of cities have gradually been overthrown by urbanization (Qian, 2014). Tourists are then welcomed with several versions of the city's

identity thereby having a clouded image of the place and its origin. Architecture relating to human life reflects the culture in every society interacting closely with structural, historical, political, economic and social features of society (Lahdesmaki, 2012). People in every country try to follow their norms and maintain their values in making of architecture by applying the material things common to their culture. This therefore means that changing the cultural and social attitudes in communities has the greatest impact on the architecture. Therefore, the role of culture in promoting architectural identity is outstandingly essential (Ettehad *et al.*, 2015).

The Nigerian economy is lacking in some key areas, of which eco-cultural tourism is of great interest to this study. Adora (2010) reiterates that tourism in Nigeria is still in its infancy considering the large accumulation of resources which are yet untapped and the institutional structure which is yet to be regulated to compete favourably with other fast growing tourism destinations. Tourism, which has been recognized as one of the fastest growing sectors of the world (Firima *et al.*, 2018) is therefore a necessity for the economic prosperity of the Nation Nigeria.

Additionally, tourism in the Niger state of Nigeria has been identified as being at an appalling level, considering the natural tourist attractions available within the state, which are left fallow and unattended to (Shaibu *et al.*, 2018). This study therefore is focused on the characteristics which are essential for the existence of a Nupe inspired tourist facility which will assist in the provision of revenue for the immediate community, state and the country Nigeria as a whole.

In general, tourism potential can be defined as the natural, man-made, cultural, historical, economic, and social components which represent the potential tourist supply of a given territory. These factors, together with technical facilities and basic and tourism infrastructure, constitute the foundation of a tourist attraction for a given territory and help to deem the destination as either suitable or unsuitable for visiting and receiving visitors (Barbu, 2014; Dincu, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism and Culture

As stated by United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), cultural tourism could be described as a place or destination that provides tourism activity for visitors to explore (UNWTO, 2017). Additionally, Richards (2018) defines cultural tourism as a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/ products in a tourism destination. These attractions/ productions relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions.

Destinations provide a combination of products and services. Using these resources, tourists create their own experiences. Providing a pleasing tourist experience is crucial for destinations' long term success. (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016). Destinations aim at capturing the interest of leisure and business global nomads, and as tourism has grown, the world has entered a period of über-competitiveness, in which every serious destination – urban and rural, countryside and coastal, mountain and desert – is working hard to create destinations that people want to visit (Kannisto, 2017). In the ruthless business environment of the world, the role of architecture has emerged as a major factor in creating appealing, sustainable and successful destinations, but architecture and fine buildings have always been at the heart of international travel (Crimson, 2013).

According to (Udoh, 2019), the four key segments that make up a tourist destination which are referred to as the 4A's are: Attractions which consist of the artificial as well as natural features or events; Amenities which include accommodation, food, entertainment and recreation; Access in terms of development and maintenance of transport which provides the link to the tourist destination and the tourist attractions at the destination; and Ancillary services which are provided to customers and industry by the destination through a local tourist board.

Cultural Features of the Nupe Community

Adora (2010) states that tourism in Nigeria is still in its infancy, considering the large accumulation of resources which are yet untapped and the institutional structure which is yet to be regulated to compete favourably with other fast growing tourism destinations. Tourism, which has been recognized as one of the fastest growing sectors of the world (Salihu, 2018) is therefore a necessity for the economic prosperity of the Nation Nigeria. Tourism which is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon involves active tourism, sports and recreation.

From the middle belt of Nigeria hails Nupe tribe, often situated around mostly in Niger state and also in Ilorin and parts of Kogi states. The Nupe ethnic group, native in the Middle Belt of Nigeria is identified to be culturally rich in arts and crafts. The Nupe land has been identified as a low, open, fertile community, covering roughly 7,000 square meters, inhabited by a population who were known from the ancient days, and all over Nigeria, as an industrious and able people (Nadel, 1935). The upland and riverine landscape type shapes the lifestyle of the Nupe community (Adinuba, 2017).

It is universal, that certain architecture is identified with certain group of people either as a state or nation. For example, there is the Chinese architecture, the American, the early Egyptian, the Greek, the Roman and so on (Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). In Nigeria, the Yoruba architecture consists of hollow squares or circles of huts arranged to surround an open courtyard (Arenibafo, 2017), the Hausa architecture consists of sun-dried brick huts with small doors and windows, with the hut of the head of the house and the hut for receiving visitors at the forecourt (Umar *et al.*, 2019), lastly. The typical Igbo architecture consists

of round wall mud houses (with artworks drawn and painted on them) and thatched roofs, with kitchens and conveniences on the outside (Chukwu, 2015). Similar to the Hausa traditional architecture, a typical Nupe community consists of many round huts built of clay and thatch (Muhammad, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

According to Shoval (2018), visitors are drawn to tourist destinations by qualities of place and culture. These include the architecture, people, food, culture and diversity. The architecture of a people operates within the space of cultural production and consumption (Grodach *et al.*, 2017). Architects present ideas, drawings, new works and exhibitions and increasingly create cultural events within architectural spaces that generate economic activity, while also making a broad cultural contribution (Franklin, 2018). Thus, architecture must be assessed not only in terms of what is built but also how these constructions are used to spur sociocultural activity and generate economic benefit in return. Additionally, Muhammad (2019) reinstates that cultural assets hold both tangible and intangible value. The intangible values of buildings exist in a variety of forms including aesthetic or image value and cultural value (Csurgo & Smith, 2021). Aesthetic value is achieved through the mutual contributions of identity, vision and reputation and in the ways groups, institutions and cities express ideas, ambitions and intentions that are captured in the distinctive designs of their buildings (Gordon, 2018). Cultural value creates a sense of place by connecting location, context and patterns of historical development incorporating cultural symbolism and social meaning (Abdul Rahman *et al.*, 2021).

This study therefore identified the architectural and cultural tangible and intangible aspects of the typical Nupe community towards obtaining the spatial, physical and cultural features and values, towards the establishment of a Nupe inspired tourist facility for the enjoyment of natives and visitor alike. To this end, questionnaire were administered to fifty (50) family heads within the Nupeko community. The questionnaire was subdivided into parts A, B and C. Part A included the biodata of respondents, B the lifestyle and cultural transactions of the people, and C the architecture of the Nupe settlement. However, these values are not mutually exclusive, as a building can have multiple types of values.

Additionally, focus group discussions were held by the author, with various age grades in the communities. The discussions were centred on the history of the community, major festivals, rituals, daily activities and general lifestyles. Secondary data was as well obtained from previous research by thematic author, who have earlier on researched on the lifestyle, culture and architecture of the Nupe people of Niger state.

RESULTS

The results of the first part of the questionnaire which was centred on the bio data of the respondents revealed that the over 80% of the respondents were male. It was worthy of

note that the respondents were selected using the random sampling method, and as such, every member of the community had an equal chance to be selected. Secondly, the occupation of the members of the Nupeko community included fishing, commerce, building construction and transportation with 72% of respondents involved in fishing. Some other residents expressed that they engage in multiple occupations according to the season of the year. The following data can be seen in Table 1.1

Table 1.1 Biodata of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	44	88
Female	6	12
Occupation		
Fishing	29	58
Farming	8	16
Commerce	2	4
Transport	6	12
Others	5	10
Educational qualification		
Primary	31	4.3
Secondary	9	18
Tertiary	10	20

Source:- Author's Compilation (2022)

The part B of the questionnaire identified that Nupe people's life style and cultural transactions which are shaped by two prominent landscape types, the upland and the riverine. The riverine Nupes are called *Kydya* while the upland Nupes are called *Kintsozhi*. (Muhammad, 2015).

The third and final part of the questionnaire identified that the typical Nupe community consists of many round huts built of clay (*Eggun*) and vegetable or mineral fibre called *Dongoh* (*Thatch*) and surrounded by a high mud wall in most cases or vegetable basket weaved pattern of vegetable *Tsara* fence. However, new building materials such as galvanised iron roofing sheet could be seen to have replaced the use of thatch in roof covering. Nonetheless, a prominent character of the Nupe compound is that it is comprised of several blood related nucleus families living together into form a large compound. Each of these compounds are headed by the eldest male family member called *Emitso* (owner of the house). Each of these small family units are identified through several rooms facing a courtyard.

Secondary data from previous literature however identified that The Nupe and their settlement are regarded to have been in existence since the early 13th and 14th century with a define and unique cultural characteristics (Muhammad, 2015). The communities are in the central part of Nigeria notably along the lower basin of River Niger and Kaduna (Muhammad, 2017). The Nupes settle in large villages called (*Ezhi*) and a small settlement known as (*Kangi*) the settlement pattern of Nupe communities are characterized with cluster compounds consisting of members and series of un-walled compound, (*Gwalazhi*) entrance halls (*Katamba*) forming a home stead (*Emi*). The collection of houses (*Emizhi*) to form a ward or (*Efu*) as in the case of big settlement the wards are separated by stretches of open spaces, land or farms which come together to form a village, the collection of two or more neighbouring villages is known as (*Ekkah*) (Muhammad, 2015).

RECOMMENDATIONS

A central part of the tourism industry hinges on the built environment and the quality of touristic places – from heritage buildings and precincts to iconic modern buildings (Scerri *et al.*, 2019). According to Muratovski (2012), architecture is in a sense a promotional medium and an identity definer. It is a medium that promotes social relationships and individual enterprises, and can be used as a symbol of territorial identity'. The value of built-environment heritage for tourism cannot, therefore, be ignored.

Cultural events that engage with or are focused on architecture are becoming more common and attracting increasing numbers of tourists (Carey *et al.*, 2014; Bersin & Deloitte, 2013). It is therefore recommended that cultural activities which showcase tourism, such as the Nupeko fishing festival be revived in the state. This will ensure that persons from all around the world have an opportunity of experiencing the rich culture of the Nupe people of Niger state Nigeria.

Secondly, it is recommended that a tourist camp be erected in the community, which will give tourists and visitors the opportunity to dwell in the community for a period of time, while enjoying the event to the fullest. It will as well create job opportunities for natives of the community and ensure the comfort of tourists.

Thirdly, ancient architectural pieces within the communities be preserved by polishing of brick walls, constant renovation and cleaning, to ensure that these buildings are preserved for generations to come in order to ensure continuity of the Nupe architecture. Residents are encouraged to stop pulling down old buildings, but preserve them for the sake of posterity.

CONCLUSION

Researchers accept that heritage is linked to the past, that it represents some sort of inheritance to be passed down to current and future generation, both in terms of cultural traditions and physical artefacts (Timothy & Boyd, 2014). Similarly, Trotter (2011) indicated that heritage can be divided into natural and cultural, as well as tangible and

intangible resources such as building, natural areas, objects in museums, ceremonies, and people's lifestyles. The culture of a people include the people and their lifestyles and beliefs, numerous festivals throughout the year, traditional arts and crafts, performing arts and cuisine. It is this living heritage that has the ability to make a place a unique destination for tourists.

This study indicates that the Nupeko community has the capacity of being a choice destination in the middle belt of Nigeria, if all potentials are harnessed to design, construct and build a camp for tourists. It will ensure also that all festivals are well attended by natives and visitors alike, thereby drawing the attention of the world to the beauty of the Nupe community.

The natural resources of the community form the foundation on which the cultural heritage of the area is based. As a result, the waterways that pass through the community is expected to bring trade, and increasingly visitors. The heritage value of the Nupeko community should be derived largely from its rich architectural endowment, such as the individual buildings, their elaborate embellishments and their activities. The distinctive natural, built and cultural heritage discussed in this section is the basis for tourism in the Nupe community

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