

STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
TOURISM AND THEATRE INDUSTRIES IN NIGERIA:

Rivers State Perspective

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Abstract

Tourism and Theatre practice are compatible business. They do not only attract and appeal to people but also contribute immensely to the national economy. Although the two industries can exist and function independently, a combination of their functions does appeal more meaningfully to most people.

A well-developed tourism industry can house a theatre to enhance the beauty of tourism. In like manner, theatre productions are the springboards on which effective tourism can strive.

The two industries seem to be facing a common problem especially in Rivers State of Nigeria. First, is their condemnation by some members of the new generation churches who see tourism and other cultural activities including the theatre as devilish. Secondly, tourism is viewed negatively as avenues for the practices of immorality. These attitudes are seriously affecting the development of tourism and the theatre hence, the author advocates for sustenance of the two industries.

Introduction

Tourism, as a concept of travelling from one destination to another by a person or group of persons for the purpose of leisure, social interaction and trade is not alien to Nigerians especially the Rivers man. According to Karibo Elekima (15):

“Nigerians have been good travellers within and outside their traditional homes, and even outside

Henry Leopold Bell-Gam, PhD

the country in pursuit of leisure and trade as well as for purposes of cultural obligations and ceremonies. This could be said to have dated back to the early empires of West Africa”.

Derefaka (72) supports the above postulation by tracing the origin of tourism. He quotes Gumel (1988:6) as saying:

“The basic feature of tourism is leisure activity, which includes among other things, merry making, festivals, cultural visitation and exchange, travelling for commerce and health purpose were, until historical (colonial) period almost an exclusive African tradition”.

History recalls that during the period in question, Nigerians especially the Rivers man found time to travel. He visited his distant neighbourhood to participate in events such as festivals; traditional sports such as wrestling; funeral ceremonies, traditional marriages, religious worships and ritual ceremonies, meeting for the preparation of wars, community development and trade. He also extended very warm reception to those who visited him. In narrating the experience of his encounter with a typical black African environment, Pierre (65) adjudged that

“African culture emphasizes hospitality, for example, it is natural for an African to drop everything he is doing to welcome a guest. It will cause them to stay up a good part of the night to dance in celebration of the arrival of an honoured guest”.

This observation by Pierre is a common occurrence in every African local environment including all communities in Rivers State of Nigeria. In the early 18th century, the trade in palm oil, which was controlled by King Jaja of Opobo domestically and internationally, attracted people from different clans and countries

to Opobo Town. The Ndokis exchanged their famous Akwete cloth for oil; the Ibibio, the Ogonis and the Andoni developed trade and cultural relationships with Opobo people and of course, this promoted inter-marriages. A king of Igala visited Kalabari Kingdom and the visit resulted to the introduction of a Royal dress "Atigara" worn by the king of Igala to the Amanyano of Kalabari who admired it. The dress, which is of Yoruba origin, is now part of the most famous royal regalia for Kalabari Kings (Orubite 26).

Karibo (2) reveals that a particular traditional cloth referred to as Popo Ikpo or Kano cloth were purchased in Kano by the people of Okrika and used for traditional marriage ceremonies "Iyaa/yaa". This cultural history is in line with Chief Orubite's postulations that within the same period, that is, by the 18th century, Kano in Northern Nigeria had a very famous textile industry.

Apart from these domestic trade and cultural relationships, which one may rightly refer to as "cultural and economic tourism", the local trade in palm oil attracted the Portuguese, the French and the British. These foreign merchants visited Nigeria and the coastal areas now designated Rivers State, the Niger Delta for exchange of goods and culture. One significant cultural exchange is the introduction of the famous traditional dresses called etibo and woko, which are the refined versions of Portuguese dresses. Other activities of great cultural and touristic values included, new yam festivals, corn harvest festivals, chieftaincy installation ceremonies, initiation into womanhood, blood oath ceremonies and so on. These ceremonies united the people internally and externally and can comfortably be regarded, as the traditional hospitality of the ancient Nigerian people. Elekima Karibo (15) insists that: "All remind us of the bastion of cultural tourism in Nigeria".

It is essential at this juncture to observe that the two prominent industries even at the traditional level had commendable structures and prominence before their influence by modern cultures. Let us therefore see how each of them coped with the influence.

The Influence of Modern Tourism.

In the definition of tourism, emphases were mostly on travelling and trade. The modern concept seems to have revolutionised it to include proper and systematic organization. To actualise this dream in Nigeria, a formal Tourist Association was established in 1962, the Nigerian Tourist Board in 1976, the Nigerian Trade and Tourism Policy in 1992. The Federal Government of Nigerian established Decree 81 which gave modern tourism its prestigious position in the country. Tourism has now become an organised event, which boosts of land transport, airlines and other means of transportation; also hotel business, the development of museums, parks, gardens, natural sites of specific types were subsequently identified. These include domestic tourism and international tourism.

The author shall investigate and analyse the values of these types of tourism and their compatibility with the theatre industry, and propose viable strategies for their sustenance in Rivers State of Nigeria.

Domestic and International Tourism.

Peter Hayward (2002) describes domestic tourism as tours involving travelers who do so within the boundaries of their country and spend money there. He also describes international tourism as associated with those who leave their country and travel to other countries to spend more than one year. Peter Murphy (1) gives yet another definition. According to him:

Tourism is a natural renewable resource industry, with visitors portrayed as coming only to admire, not to consume, the landscape, costume and monuments of destination areas.

Another definition accepted by the Swiss Professors Hunziker and Krapf, which has been adopted by the International Association

of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AIEST), maintains that:

“Tourism is the sum total of the phenomenon and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity”.

Peter Hayward (2002) identifies international as associated with those who leave their country and travel to other countries to spend more than one year. The investment potentials in Rivers State encourage the two types of tourism.

Rivers State.

By decree 19 of May 2007 and during the tenure of General Yakubu Gowon-as Nigeria’s Head of state, Rivers State was created. The State is made up of various ethnic groups amongst which are: Okirika, Ikwerre, Ogoni, Kalabari, Ogbia, Ekpeye, Engenni, Ibani, Andoni and Etche.

Sotonye submits that, “The people are known to be hospitable, generous, and warm hearted” while Bell-Gam (3) relates the “people’s physical, social and moral dispositions as handsome men, beautiful women who are kind and lovable” The major occupation of the people is fishing.

With twenty three local government areas, the state has recorded excellence in several areas that affect human conditions, exhibited interesting history with admirable heritage, governance, economic policies education, health, industrial activities, transport, culture and tourism- the reasons for the influx of visitors in the State. Most of those displaced in various hostile areas in Nigeria, find succor in Rivers State and Port Harcourt, where according to them “it is happening”. Non-indigenes who graduate from the various tertiary institutions in Rivers State indicate interest in working in Port Harcourt. Retired civil servants of the State’s origin

find it more convenient to live in Rivers State. What is responsible for their choice of the environment? one may ask. Few reasons are easily identified. These include government policies, which encourage cohabitation among diverse ethnic groups; the friendly and accommodating attitude of Rivers people; availability of jobs and investment opportunities and industrial development in the state; the tourism potentials in the State; the cultural heritage of the people, and finally the peaceful nature of the State. The most crucial among these qualities and which falls within the scope of this paper, is the tourism potentials of the State and the theatre.

Tourism Attraction in Rivers State.

In 1987, the Rivers State Ministry of information after a thorough study of the tourism potentials in Rivers State came up with a blueprint detailing the need

1. for the expansion of the State social responsibilities in the provision of out-door recreation and tourism opportunities.
2. to preserve and protect our culture, natural and historical endowments.
3. for the development of tourism potentials with inherent foreign exchange capabilities, which falls in line with the new directive or the recently formulated national cultural policy.
4. to facilitate promotion of the numerous and unique cultural attributes of the State and the magnificent waterways, forests, beaches and lakes for recreational opportunities.
5. to provide for development and use of outdoor recreation resources in a manner to maximise preservation of natural quality of the environment.
6. to assist local government and the private sector in providing the type of facilities, which will best serve the State’s need for recreational activities.
7. to provide a system of public and recreational facilities and opportunities for National, State and Local Government

residents as well as international tourists.

8. to encourage programmes, which will promote tourism, outdoor education, good health, skill development in terms of employment opportunities, participation and proper husbandry of State and recreational resources and services.
9. to create a favourable investment climate for foreign and indigenous investors in tourism allied industries in the State and thereby encourage economic development generally.
10. to optimise revenue returns on recreational investments and generally encourage State, National and International tourism.
11. to encourage mobility of people from the crowded metropolis to the rural areas in terms of employment and improved human activities in the areas.

One commendably observes that the blue print is in line with the Nigerian cultural policy, which encourages the establishment of theatres and cultural centres in the State. Before we delve into the state of theatre in the State, let us observe the tourist sites.

Karibo (93) maintains that, tourism potentials in State are divided into six categories namely:

- (i) Ancient historical sites.
- (ii) Game reserve.
- (iii) Festival /carnivals
- (iv) Holiday resort with natural sceneries
- (v) Modern parks and recreation centre s.
- (vi) Holicruise

Historical Sites in Rivers State

These include ancient geographical areas that had direct impact on the lives of the people. History upholds that the name Rivers State was predominantly obtained from "Oil Rivers". It was a fertile ground for slave trade and its abolition. As slave centres, powerful baracoons were built by influential chiefs who later challenged the British traders and stopped them from entering the

interior oil palm markets after the abolition of slave trade. Some of these areas have remained veritable artefacts.

These chiefs and some of the sites include: King Dappa Pepple, Ebi Nungo Bonny, Chief Waribo Pepple, Ikuba-Nungo, Bonny, Chief Daniel Oju Kalio in Okrika, Abi Amachree IV in Buguma, King Jaja of Opobo historical monument , Bonny Royal throne, Monuments and artefacts of earliest colonial rule and trade in Degema, Bakana, Elem Kalabari, Site of the first successful oil well in Nigeria, Oloibiri, Biafra civil war relics at Dawase Island in Okirika, and Bakana.

Game Reserve

The potentiality of the Andoni elephant forest is not in doubt. There is need to ensure that the reserve functions.

Festival/Carnivals

Several festivals and carnivals do exist in the state. They include:

Odum Festival: This is a colourful costumed performance of Boa Constrictor performed every twenty years in Okrika and Ogu.

Owu Festival: Masquerade displays found in almost all the ethnic clans in the State. Performance takes place annually between the month of December and February.

Iria Festival: This is a ceremonial event on initiation into womanhood. It is performed by all clans in the State.

Holiday Resorts with Natural Sceneries and Beaches

Rivers State is endowed with beautiful, natural and appealing sceneries and beaches. They include: The Andoni: Port Harcourt Tourist Beach; Agaja Holiday Resort, Isaka Holiday Resort, Bonny Bar Beach and Coconut Estate, Dawase Island, Kono Beach, Ifoko beach, Queens Town Beach, Angalabo Beach, Opobo Waterfront and Beach, Ogbegene Waterfront, Ellah Lakes, etc.

Botanical Gardens and Recreation Centres include: Port Harcourt Zoo and Isaac Boro Park.

Holicruise

There are places of interest for both short and long holicruise. Some of them are: Dawase Island (short cruise), Bonny (short cruise), Buguma (short cruise), Abonema (short cruise), Abonema (short cruise), and Bakana (short cruise).

Recreational Activities

At the moment, recreational facilities are not adequate except for a few well to do's who patronise clubs such as Polo Gulf, etc. The Port Harcourt Tourist Beach runs skeletal recreational activities such as boat cruise, horse riding, wrestling and occasional boat race and inadequate regatta. Plans are being made by government to organise periodic boat rides, surfing, fishing, games motorbike rides and others.

Development Potentials of Tourism.

Getz (3) defines tourism planning as: A process based on research and evaluation, which seeks to optimise the potential contribution of tourism to human welfare and environmental quality. He insists that in planning for tourism, national or state development plans should be made with tourism in mind. In other words, industrial and economic planning should be done with tourism in mind. In other words, "industrial and economic planning should integrate facilities that will ensure sustainability of the human industry". On the economic effects of tourism, John Lea (50) opines that:

The primary economic benefits of tourism are generally regarded as contributions of foreign exchange earnings and the balance of payments, the generation of employment and of income, the improvement of economic structure and the encouragement of entrepreneurial activity.

Braddon (2) also agrees that:

Tourism planning is very closely linked with development planning in most parts of the world. The planning process needs to take account of very many factors ranging from topography to economy and tourist needs to presidents-needs.

He further maintains that:

Tourism is a social, economic and environmental activity, and that its planning has to operate at various levels, nationally, regionally and locally.

Following Getz's, Lea's and Braddon's suggestions, the following tourism potentials are obvious:

- Tourism expands the intellectual horizon of the individual and brings him closer to nature through his participation in beach, parks activities and eco-tourism.
- Tourism helps in the discovery of other people's existence, their norm, values, tradition and other cultural and technological interest.
- It encourages economic and political co-operation between states and nations through trade fairs, importation and exportation of goods and services.
- Tourism influences human attitude and social behaviour. By creating avenues such as designation areas, parks, hotels, beaches and other tourism facilities, people interact and learn from each other.
- It encourages state and national planning on infrastructural development.
- Tourism creates credible avenues for employment. The developed infrastructures need sustainable maintenance and services, which result to employment.
- Through visits to designated areas, the market values of the destination improve, and the economy also improves.

Development Potentials of the Theatre

Like tourism, theatre has admirable potentials for the development of a nation or a state. In the first instance, it possesses pedagogic qualities, which project teaching and learning as well as entertainment, and enlightens the society and also affords entertainment. Theatre reforms the society and creates an ideal environment for the benefit of mankind. It is an agent of political agitation, social and economic reformation. The role of theatre in dislodging apartheid in South Africa through the performances of Ipitombi Theatre Company is still very fresh in people's memories. In Nigeria, Hubert Ogunde effectively used theatre to fight the British colonisation. Essentially, the two industries-Tourism and Theatre are compatible avenues for artistic expression with great potentials for the development of Rivers State of Nigeria. Let us therefore, examine the place of theatre in the State.

The Place of Theatre in Rivers State.

Rivers State of Nigeria has an exciting cultural tradition with theatre performances as major events. Two types of theatres exist in the State. They are the traditional/indigenous theatre and the modern traditional theatre.

The Nature of Traditional/Indigenous Theatre.

Traditional/indigenous theatre includes performances that have mimetic characteristic, some elements of conflict, which are derived from the people's cultural heritage. The cultures of the people are the major instruments with which communication is effected, be it dance, masquerade display, acrobatics, wrestling or music and songs.

A culture is a certain way of relating to time, objects, money, history and environment. It is the quality of the relationships that the people develop among themselves and with themselves (Pradervand 64). Considering this definition of culture, the validity of the use of stories derived from myth and legend of the people to

achieve theatrical objectives is not in doubt. Colourful, prestigious, religious and entertaining, the traditional forms of theatre are unique in form and presentation. The artists consist of the drummers, masked performers representing species derived from the ecosystem, natural scenery of the aquatic environment. The performance is purely aquatic. Aquatic performance includes any performance that is structured and designed, to be performed on water. The Nji-owu (fish) masquerade in Bonny and Opobo and the Odum (Boa constrictor) in Okrika are good examples. The most prestigious among the indigenous performances is the Regatta, a dramatic display of the strength and wealth of a typical River's King. For the convenience of the audience, some aquatic performances are done in four types of stages namely: the fluid stage, the floating stage, the shoreline stage and the arena stage.

The Fluid Stage: The fluid stage is basically the natural environment. In this type of stage, the performer is sub-merged in water from where he displays the frontal view of the mask, which he carries on his head and performs according to the image of the mask. For example, he imitates the behavior in water of a crocodile if he is carrying a crocodile mask.

Floating Stage: A floating stage is a platform designed to float in water and with spaces to accommodate the artists during the performance. This is typical of the Eguien masquerade in Okrika.

The Shoreline Stage: The term shoreline stage is used to describe the area between the water and the beach.

The Arena Stage: This is the final destination of the aquatic performer. It is usually up-land and constitutes the general assembly area for members of the community who constitute the audience.

The Audience: The audience is not collectively assembled. Each person makes his choice of performance. Audiences may assemble at the shore or on the bridge to watch the performance on fluid

stage and floating stage with others assembling at the shoreline, and the rest at the arena.

Modern Traditional Theatre.

Modern traditional theatre can conveniently be defined as any performance in which elements of traditional values are incorporated in those of the Europeans to create a combined aesthetics, which reflects the new values of the Rivers man in modern environment. Ogunbiyi (17:19) records the historical trend in the evolution of modern drama and modern traditional theatre and drama in Nigeria. Following his findings, one may postulate that the impact of modern drama and theatre began to be felt in Nigeria between 1863 and 1981, following the influx of freed slaves and immigrants to Lagos. The activities of these people who had acquired some education as Christian missionaries, social activists, amateur and trained theatre practitioners and literary giants like Wole Soyinka championed the production of drama in schools using the dramatic societies, clubs such as those founded by J. Otumba-Payne and several others.

I am constrained by the obvious reason that this paper is not strictly on theatre history, to proceed to a detailed history of the evolution and trend of modern traditional drama and theatre in Nigeria. However, it is essential to note that the influence of the Europeans and their dramatic activities spread to all parts of Nigeria including Rivers State. Again, what is predominantly necessary to observe at this stage, is its characteristics as an agent of tourism.

Contrary to the characteristics of traditional theatre, the modern theatre utilises the services of a playwright and other conventionally and intellectually trained professionals to manage and handle productions. The playwright, the artistic director, the costumier, the technical designer, the stage manager, the business manager, the make-up artist, all harness the social conditions of the people and the environment to create drama and performances,

which take place indoors and on a proscenium, thrust, or arena stage.

It is not difficult to see that the influence of the European colonisation had artistic impact on Nigeria in general; however, the impact is less felt in Rivers State. The earliest dramatists in the State include J. P. Clark, famous for his *Ozidi*, the *Masquerade* and several other plays, and Elechi Amadi, known for his *Isiburu*. The most recent dramatists and theatre practitioners in the State include Uriel Paul Worika, Barklacy Ayakoroma, Arthur-Willie Pepple, and Henry Bell-Gam. Various amateur theatres do exist in schools and in some communities.

Having discussed the two types of theatre dominant in Rivers State, let us observe the influence of these theatres on tourism.

Influence of Theatre on Tourism.

Theatre has several influences on tourism. In the instance, theatre sustains tourism through its entertainment and leisure qualities. Secondly, theatre educates the tourists about the culture of the people. Ohiri explains that:

Instead of people explaining the culture of Rivers community to tourists, the tourists can through costumes, songs, acting style, music, dance, stage properties, scenery and language understand the people's culture.

Finally, tourism has political relevance. Through the theatre, political statements can be made. As can be observed, political issues are the subject of most historical plays like Ola Rotimi's *Akasa Yomi*, Henry Bell-Gam's *Orukoro*, king *Jaja*, and *Minimah's Odum-Egege*. In addition, theatre provides research materials, which in turn exposes the knowledge of the environment, tradition and cultures of the people to tourists. Again theatre enhances interaction between the tourists, the artists and the audience. This also enhances the international image of the State. Finally, the box office

returns including sponsorship fees enhance the economy of the State.

The Role of Hotels.

Hotels are essential arm of the tourism industry. In fact without hotels, tourism may not flourish in a state. Generally referred to as the hospitality industry and due to the numerous visitors to Port Harcourt daily, several hotels exist in the city. Some of them are Hotel Presidential, International Airport Hotel Omagwa, Catering Rest House Port Harcourt, Mina Hotel Port Harcourt, Brooklyn White House Port Harcourt, and many others. Their major functions are to provide accommodation for tourists.

Role of the Airlines.

Airlines are sub-sectors of the aviation industry and their role in the tourism industry cannot be underestimated. As a vibrant transport sector, they are faced with the responsibility of lifting tourists to their destinations. A survey carried out by Ibhagbe informs us that:

The Civil Aviation industry in Nigeria has been a dynamic and fast growing sector of the global economy.

There are twenty civil airports and four airstrips among others operating in Nigeria. They are Chanchangi, Belview, Sosoliso, Easy Link, IRS, EAS, Space World and Dassab. In addition to air transport, numerous land and sea transports exist and serve the same functions as the airlines. Rivers State of Nigerian is one of the destinations that benefit from the venture through tourism.

Strategies for the Sustenance of Tourism and Theatre Industries.

Since it is very clear from our resume that tourism and theatre are vital tools for the economic, social and cultural growth of a nation, there is absolute need to devise profitable strategies for their

sustenance. The following options are essential for the achievement of the goals.

- There is need for the Rivers man to maintain and preserve his traditional cultural tourism with slight adjustment to incorporate the realities of modern tourism.
- The acceptance of leisure as the main focus in tourism should be emphasised by every Rivers man.
- Relaxation should be encouraged, holidays should be planned to coincide with the cultural calendar.
- Civil servants and workers in the private sector should be empowered through sustainable wages commensurate to the present economic realities of Nigeria.
- Employment benefits for the unemployed should be created to enable the jobless enjoy holidays.
- The Rivers State Government is requested to empower the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to organise annual Regatta festivals to showcase the tourism potentials of the State, attract visitors and encourage grassroots participation.
- Transportation by sea, land and air should be made safer, comfortable, and cheaper for tourist.
- The job of policing the State should be made exciting by empowering the Nigerian Police through wages and allowances commensurate with the profession. This will create harmonious and friendly relationship between the police and the general public thereby eliminating crime to a reasonable extent and ensuring the safety of tourists in the State.
- The environmental sanitation in the State should be taken more seriously to ensure a clean and attractive environment. Tourism cannot be effective in a gabbage filled environment. Above all, government and the private sector are encouraged to fund tourism adequately.
- The hospitality industries (hotels) should improve their services and operate at affordable charges for tourists.

- Government and the private sector should encourage the building and development of a functional theatre in the State, separate from the Arts Council's troupe, to accommodate the entertainment needs of the public.
- A cultural village showcasing all aspects of the Rivers cultural heritage is envisaged and highly recommended.

Conclusion.

Tourism and theatre industries can be developed and sustained to boost the image of the State and project the people's cultural heritage nationally and internationally. The two industries should complement each other. These can only be achieved through adequate and efficient strategic planning.

Productive sectors of the economy with adequate facilities and achievements that are worth viewing and remarkable should be designated special tourism sites e.g. Shell, Agip, Breweries, and West African Glass Industry.

The church's criticism of culture (Theatre and Tourism) is a misnomer. The church should be culturally relative, and must of necessity embrace the culture of its host community. This will produce rapport between the church and the society. The church must encourage growth and development. Criticism will only alienate and isolate the church from the society. Therefore, the church should be functionally relative in adopting the culture of the society to be able to assimilate the society as well as induce the necessary balance in the society. For example, the dance, language, dressing, music of the host community must of necessity be the driving force for the growth of the church. The church is a vital aspect of the society and must aid the building of the society it finds itself.

Those who see theatre and tourism as avenues for the promotion of immorality are requested to change their minds and appreciate the diversities of interests in a society. They should

appreciate the financial social, cultural, political, and educational benefits of the two industries. Perhaps the opinion of Lea (50) who suggests that: "Tourism results in a complex series of economic, environmental, and social impacts on societies" will help in reconditioning people's minds. In like manner, the role of theatre as a viable and consistent developer of a nation's economic and cultural diversities is indisputable.

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