

Evaluating Contemporary Curatorial Practices and the Roles of Curators in Cultural Tourism

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It is also agreed that tourism “appears to breach a single disciplinary boundary that requires a specific methodology framework” and it is on this bases that this discussion stands.

Curation is an act of preservation, presentation, interpretation and care of art collection in a gallery or museum. To curate in either museum or gallery is also the caring of collection in them either as works of art or artefacts by curator. The art and business of curating has become versatile, diversified and increasingly professional. Curating or curatorial practices involves exhibition management which is the initiation, presentation, interpretation and planning of works of arts in exhibition settings. Emphasis is also placed on the administrative skills necessary to mount exhibitions, the production of visual and written documentation and functions of a curator both in the gallery and exhibition.

Though it is not within the purview of this text to delve into some trending theoretical issues/perspectives in contemporary curatorial practices, but in recent time the role of the contemporary curator has displaced artists and art historians from participating or involve in the process of constituting meaning in artwork curation (Von Bismarck, 2007 in Ogbechie, 2010). This looks like an in-house fight as Ogbechie (2010) further observed that artists in this era of modernism claimed an avant-garde status and possess the authority to define the horizon of meanings of their work. But contemporary curators have mostly usurped this role and curatorial practice according to Ogbechie is increasingly assuming “a form of installation art in which curators aggregate artworks and objects to construct a structure of interpretation for contemporary practice” (Ogbechie, 2010).

Von Bismarck (2007) in Ogbechie (2010) defined curatorial practices as the “process of establishing connections for objects from a wide variety of sources.” Thus according to Ogbechie this definition lends credence to the assumptions or what he called the “ensuing installations created by the contemporary curators” that they possess a new position of authority which lays claims to “special powers to interpret the processes of connection.” In other words it means that the curator's work as a creator of connections and narratives between different forms of art and cultural objects is quickly replacing the work of the artist they are suppose to curate (Ogbechie, 2010). The above theoretical digression precipitated this discussion in the sense that while the curator is gradually assuming more roles in the visual culture industry, it is has become necessary to articulate his importance also in cultural tourism industry.

Research Method

This paper relied on in-depth analysis of literature as the method of data-gathering. Secondary sources of data such as unpublished theses, academic journals, books and public library (the Internet) were perused for the study. Thematic analytical procedure was used to analyze and interpret findings. Thematic analysis is concerned with examining texts for themes that cut across datasets.

A Curator, his Gallery, Exhibition and Tourism

What is the relationship between a curator, his gallery, exhibition and tourism? Without the presence of an art exhibition curator, it will be difficult or impossible to appreciate art exhibitions in galleries which are also veritable tools of cultural tourism. It is important to note that major art festival such as biennials, triennials and quadrennials and their success anchors on professional curation under the direction of an experienced curator.

One cannot agree less that museum and gallery are bound by a common history and objective which is the retrieval of relevant objects of culture especially works of art which are conserved not only for education of humanity according to Ugiomoh (n.d) but for tourism purposes. The curator of such tourist centers (museums and galleries) are “seen as medium through which the value content especially the way knowledge of the past, which resides in the work can be transmitted to allow the diversity of interests always gained” and tourism contents generated with the curator as the “conductor.”

In another forum the writer identified what takes place within the exhibition arena. He noted that within these arenas, the exhibiting artist is an intellectual who is not just showcasing his creations but intends to make people see it and react to it. This they can do by criticizing his works in form of discourse, writing and talks/dialogue. This is the point where the curator has a role to play. He is the one to stir up the art appreciation, criticism and educational 'ingredients' in the works of art on display. Of course the curator also through his/her skills stirs the 'appetite' for art consumption among the tourists through information and interpretation. This is imperative because the artist does not necessarily involve his audience (or tourists) while producing his work but he tries to carry his audience/viewers along by sharing their experience through his works, thus the curator becomes the meeting point (Nnadozie, 2018).

The artwork bridges the artist and his/her viewers/tourists thus the artist needs an effective and efficient communication between himself, his expression (artwork) and the consumers (audience/viewers or tourists) and who is better to handle this if not the curator. Therefore the curator builds the bridge or is the bridge and creates the much needed communication or he is the communication between the artist, the exhibition and the tourist. The method he applies affects the success of the exhibition in this context.

Cultural Tourism and Cultural Tourist

Cultural tourism is the subset of tourism concerned with a traveler's engagement with a particular country or region's culture, specifically the lifestyle of the people in those geographical areas, the history of those people, their art, architecture, religion(s), and

other elements that helped shape their way of life (Richards, 1996). Richards (1996) define cultural tourism as “the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs.” Some of these cultural needs may include the “solidification of one's own cultural identity,” by observing and appreciating the exotic “others” (cultures). Finally Demonja (n.d) opinion will suffice; he referred to cultural tourism as “journeys that include visits to cultural resources, regardless of whether it is tangible or intangible cultural resources and regardless of the primary motivation.”

Contents of Cultural Tourism: The contents or what make up cultural tourism include tourism in urban areas with emphasis to historic or large cities and their cultural facilities such as museums and theatres. The next content is tourism in rural areas showcasing the traditions of indigenous cultural communities such as festivals, rituals and their values and lifestyle, as well as niches like industrial tourism and creative tourism (OECD, 2009).

Cultural Tourism Destination: Cultural tourism destination is regarded as living tourism areas, this is in line with the definition, thus locating cultural tourism destination is literally “visiting any culture other than one's own,” which involves travelling to a foreign country or another nation so to say.

Apart from visiting other countries as destination, domestic cultural tourism include historical sites, modern urban districts or “ethnic pockets” of town, theme parks, natural ecosystems, fairs/festivals. The one related to this discuss is art festivals/events such as exhibitions (biennials). Borowiecki and Castiglione (2014) noticed that “cultural attractions and events are particularly strong magnets for tourism.”

Profile of a Cultural Tourist: Johnson (2020) defines those tourists who travel mainly for cultural reasons as cultural tourist. The primary impact of a cultural tourist is travelling to experience and learn from different cultures, thereby generating increasing interest and demand for cultural products. According to Johnson (2020), cultural tourists can be grouped into 4 cohorts or categories which depend on the primary motivation for travel. They are; Heritage Enthusiasts, Visual Arts Enthusiasts, Wine and Culinary Enthusiasts and Performing Arts Enthusiasts. In this context, our interest is that aspect of cultural tourism that deals with the visual arts (contemporary Nigeria visual arts) as the demanding cultural product. While the curator is the “culture broker” or vendor of these cultural productions, he redefines the economic value of these contemporary works of art through his exhibitionary practice/prowess which is expected to emit the touristic viability/attraction in the art exposition or festival (i.e. biennials) as the case may be.

Johnson (2020) described the demographic profile of an average cultural tourist especially in North America (USA and Canada) as a well-educated person, well-to-do and specifically interested in cultural experiences. Another typical demographic description is that an average cultural tourist is matured, either retired, have higher education, have managerial or professional occupations, take longer trips, tend to shop more, spend more per trip and spend more in the destination they visit. Not only is the cultural tourist the

largest and fastest growing branch of the tourism market, but cultural tourists tend to stay longer and spend more money in their chosen destination (Johnson, 2020).

Museums/galleries and living history sites (such as theatre and monuments) are the highest visited tourist attractions because cultural tourists are keenly interested in authentic and quality learning experience. They seek these experiences because knowledge of other places and society/culture helps them develop and refine who they are. Museums and galleries of art as a tourist destination provide windows to the past as well as opportunities for tourists to encounter the creative spirit in their respective locations; visitors seek these experiences to help them understand themselves and the culture they are visiting.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this text, we will anchor the study on Stakeholders' Theory. Popa, Blidisel and Bogdan (2009) in Adediran (2018) refer to

Stakeholders' Theory as those relationships between the company and all the various groups inside and outside the organization who have interest in Contemporary art galleries either big or small have department of curatorial services whose main objective is to organize exhibitions among other functions and the staff of the curatorial service are designated curators especially in government culture institutions for example the National Gallery of Art, Nigeria (NGA). In larger galleries like NGA, the designated curator's primary functions are to conduct original research on art objects and guide the organization in their collecting. Of course these should involve multiple curators each assigned to specific collecting area either as a curator of sculpture, prints and drawings, paintings, textile, ceramics etc and often operating under the direction of a head curator or head/director of department. In NGA there is a body of curators reporting to a director of curatorial services who in turn report to the Director-General who is the head of National Gallery of Art, Nigeria.

Role of Curators in Cultural Tourism

Kelly (n.d) observed that in recent years the definition of the role of the curator has undergone both a dramatic change, and continues still to be refined and challenged. Michael Brenson in Kelly (n.d) best reflects these changes through the potential key characteristic of contemporary curators such as an aesthician, diplomat, economist, critic, historian, politician, audience developer and promoter. We will emphasis at this juncture that the last two characteristic are in tandem with this discourse which are **audience developer** and **promoter of cultural tourism**.

Promoter of Cultural Tourism: The key aspects of the curatorial role in this context include: to arrange/organize exhibitions; curators choose which objects to display and organize the loan of exhibits from other collections if they need to. They also organize the transportation, insurance and storage of objects. Curators make sure that objects are displayed in a clear and attractive way; they also co-ordinate and in many cases, write and compile exhibition catalogues and the texts that accompany exhibits and all these are tourism items which originate with the activities of curators.

Large museums or galleries often employ education officers to involve schools or promote tourism in their organizations. Curators may liaise with them to produce slides,

work sheets and demonstrations which are tourism products too. From these roles of a curator, we can deduce that curators are the main organizers of cultural tourism especially in cultural institutions such as museums and galleries.

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Audience Developer through Mega-exhibitions: Exhibition is the most important consideration for the museum/gallery curator. Biennial is bi-annual art exhibition festival which according to Thea (2009) is a form of artistic/creative laboratory for experimentation, investigation and aesthetic liberation where the curator's experience and knowledge are tested. Thea also observed that curators negotiate venues for artistic expression, intellectual critiques and humanistic concerns in their own societies and others and that is why we agree with Kelly (n.d) that curators are audience developers which is a veritable tool for tourism. Curators through innovation and spectacle could contribute to a biennial's host city's transformation into a transnational marketplace for not only elite consumers but tourists of all class. Some major biennial cities with such transnational marketplace and tourist potentials include Venice, Vienna, Las Vegas, Berlin, Sao Paulo, Dakar and Cairo to mention but few.

There are several international/independent curators who have successfully curate international and reputable biennials, thus contributing to the development of tourism worldwide. They include: Rirkir Tiravanija; Mary Jane Jacob; Charles Esche; Massimiliano Gioni; Ali Subotnick; Maurizio Cattelan and Nigeria's late Okwui Enwezor and late Bisi Silver, just to mention but few (Thea, 2009). These international curators have transformed exhibitions from private collections to public museums and galleries and now biennials. These achievements were as a result of increase in globalization and internationalization of creativity, thus bringing exotic arts and visual

culture to the limelight.

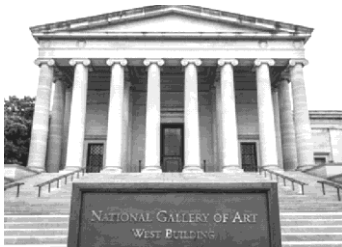
Museums and Galleries as tourist edifice: As administrators of these cultural institutions as well as tourist attractions, curators have the responsibility of making their museums/galleries touristically viable. For instance Diepeveen and Van Laar (2001) observed that what people see when they visit an art museum is strikingly consistent. They see buildings in a neoclassical style, buildings made of stone, with a rigorous symmetry regulating their appearance, and these architectural elements have a clear historical reference. The messages this kind of architecture conveys are prestige, stability and grandeur. In Nigeria, some ancient architectural relics are accommodating our National Museums. A typical example is the “Gidan Makama” which is the present site of National Museum Kano. GidanMakama was the architectural splendor of the 14th and 15th century Habe Dynasty in Kano. At the National Museum, Jos is also situated a museum specially dedicated to Traditional Nigerian Architecture (MOTNA). It is the only of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa. This Museum of Traditional Nigerian Architecture (MOTNA) includes: Bight of Benin; Katsina palace; Kano City wall; Mbari house (Owerri); Tiv and Rukuba compound and Ilorin central mosque among other architectural design of native buildings among the numerous ethnic nations in the country which are touristically viable too.

Thus museums in their architecture, presentation, staff and statement about themselves are places that assert values which are also suppose to emit tourist attractions, of course under the watchful eyes or supervision of a curator. See fig. 1-6. Different museums and their architectural styles in the United States of America and Nigeria:

Fig. 1: Institute of Art, Chicago Fig. 2: National Museum, Jos

Fig. 3: Museum of Modern Art, New York Fig. 4: National Museum, Katsina

Fig. 5: National Gallery of Art, Washington Fig. 6: National Museum Kano
(GidanMakama)



Museums/Galleries Tourism Contents and Services: What other impacts of the curator to tourism attraction is felt in an art museum or gallery? Of course it is the curatorial arrangements/administration put in place to enhance and control the environment within the gallery. Diepeveen and Van Laar (2001) observe that the walls are usually freshly painted, often white with the lighting system subtle and computerized. Tourists feel the air conditioning and see the vibration and humidity recorders and controls in their neat Plexiglas boxes. The artworks themselves are accompanied by signs that forbid flash

photography with tiny descriptive labels that tourists have to stoop to read.

Works of art are set in expensive and ornate frames all positioned to aid tourist viewing pleasure. These are accompanied by discreetly placed security, such as alarms, cameras, vitrines (sealed displayed cases), ropes, warning plaques, and stoic, unsmiling guards with very good posture (Diepeveen and Van Laar, 2001). All these are curator's efforts in service to tourism. Fig.7-8. some exhibition officers articulating display pattern in preparation for an exhibition and a curator conducting visitors/tourists round an exhibition:



Fig. 7: some exhibitions officers

Fig. 8: A curator with Gallery visitors

Recommendations and Conclusion

Recently with the dynamic changes and innovations taking place in visual culture in particular and cultural resources in general and the increased complexity of numerous museums and cultural institutions, more professional fields are emerging in the business of curation. Such include public history, art management/administration and curating/curatorial practice and exhibition management. This text also suggests that there should be a professional program in the area of curation/curatorial practice that will deal extensively with tourism management/studies. The purpose of this program shall be to postulate how curators can be able to organize exhibitions in such ways that it will be 'touristically' attractive and relevant especially in art biennials and other large scale international exhibitions. It will serve as new curatorial vision and this program shall connect and initiate the much needed synergy between the visual culture and tourism as well as stir critical thoughts on "tourism and gallery studies."

Tourism is a versatile study and this text tried to locate a place for art and museum/gallery curator within the purview of tourism. Curators through curatorial practice are projecting and extending the frontiers and boundaries of knowledge in various visual cultures imbibed in their arts. It is the job of the curator to continue

heralding the aesthetics of creative differentness in various cultures as well as the 'aestheticization' of these various arts for tourism purpose at the same time expanding the barriers of culture and tourism studies.

This is where art biennials become very important; Nigeria which is one of the cultural superpowers in the world is overdue for an art biennial. The cultural resources management authorities should wake up to this call, the era of “statement of intent, public lecture or beautifully crafted and well-rehearsed interviews by officialdom” according to Jegede (2020) should cease. It is time for action, in this time of recession and the search for diversification, Nigeria needs the biennial to boost our cultural tourism. Of course, we have enough human resources in the caliber of domestic and international curators at the nation's disposal.

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