

Natural Heritage: A Tool for Rural Tourism Development at Unadu, Enugu State

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Abstract

Heritage encompasses entities such as monuments, objects and cultures. Most importantly, it is the range of contemporary activities, meanings, and behaviours that we draw from them. Unadu, a community in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria, is blessed with natural resources such as lake, streams, cave, hills, mountains etc. The community has interesting natural heritage places to visit if properly documented and developed for rural tourism purposes, such as the Ayokpa cave, Ayokpa stream, Ulashi and Okotoko stream as well as "Onuanu" prayer spot. It was therefore, the objective of this study using ethnographic survey to study the rich natural heritage of Unadu and explore ways of using them for rural tourism.

Keywords: Natural heritage, rural tourism, development, Unadu

INTRODUCTION

In a broad sense, natural heritage consist of man's landscape and other nature based resources which have both intrinsic and extrinsic values. According to World Heritage (1972) natural resources include areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation and natural beauty. Therefore, natural heritage are those nature given resources which are utilized for the sustenance of humanity. Among these are the various landscapes formations such as hills, water bodies, valleys, caves and they include; Ayokpa cave, Ayokpa stream, Ulashi and Okotoko streams as well as "Onuanu" prayer spot. Though studies have been conducted in Unadu by different people whose studies focused on aspect of marriage, power dialectics in rural development, art and craft, history, land disputes however, not much research have been carried out in the aspect of using natural heritage for rural tourism development. Idoko, (1981) studied Unadu and focused on "Power Dialectics in Rural Development", Omeke's, (2016) study focused on "Traditional Marriage and Issues of Infidelity in Unadu" Eze (2014), studied the "Traditional Craft and Indigenous Technology in Unadu". However, this research work looked at the natural heritage in Unadu, their various traditional roles in the community and their impact in rural tourism development.

Tourism is principally the activities of persons travelling outside their residence and staying for a period not less than twenty hours for purposes related to leisure, business and other social issues. Rural tourism as a concept has diverse definitions depending on the field of research. From an agriculturist's

view, te Kloeze, (1994:2) assert that rural tourism “include a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their business”. From a naturalist's view, Jiang and Ping (2012) defined rural tourism as activities concerning natural and cultural landscape that have tourism value and are located in rural areas. Generally, rural tourism refers to tourism activities associated with natural and cultural features which take place within the rural communities and are largely patronized by the locals. In Unadu, rural tourism is not structured because the features such as the natural and cultural heritage which drive the industry are not develop and utilized for that purpose. Therefore, this work is focussed on the documentation of natural heritage for rural tourism development in Unadu.

Research Objective: The purpose of this study is to study the natural heritage in the study area while the specific objectives are:

1. To document the natural heritage in the study area
2. To examine ways of using the natural heritage for rural tourism development in the study area.

Research method: Ethnographic research method was employed in the study. In-depth interview provided the primary data for the work. This was to enable those who are knowledgeable about the history and culture of the area to talk freely and give all the information they had on the subject matter. Based on this, the researchers selected the key informants to include the Chief Priest of the shrine at Ayokpa cave, community elders, custodians and keepers of the people's tradition. Data collected were analyzed descriptively. The researchers also referred to the secondary sources where published materials were used. Photographs were also taken for pictorial representation of the features.

Study area: Unadu is a community in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. It lays North West of Nsukka, Akpanya in Kogi State to the North, Enugu Ezike, in Igbo-Eze North, Itchi and Alor-Agu in Igbo-Eze South. It has an area of 158km² and a population of about 147,428 at 2006 census, Eze (2014). Eight towns make up Igbo-Eze South; they include the following Unadu, Alor-Agu, Nkalagu-Obukpa, Itchi, Ibagwa Aka, Ovoko, Iheaka And Iheakpu. More so, this Local Government run a rational four market day according to the Igbo local calendar as stated in Nwachukwu (2007). Unadu environment is a unique community with a blessed environment lined with undulating hills which surrounds the greater part of the town and within which the town's residents inhabit. The community is subdivided into two communities; Obaka and Ohom, made up of thirteen villages. The vegetation of area is described as “derived savannah” which is attributed to human and natural influences. Ifemesie (1979:21) note that the apparent conversion of the natural vegetation of a great part of Northern Igbo plateau from rainforest into derived Savannah would also suggest relatively early settlement and protracted utilization. The area is characterized by sparse forest with plenty of short trees and grasses of economic importance as they are used for roofing traditional houses and as fodder for livestock. Agriculture remains the major occupation of the people. The spring has thick vegetation comprising of tress like kola nut-(Oji Igbo)-*Cola acuminata*, oil bean tree –Ukpaka (*Pentaclethra aesculetum*), banana (unere)-*Musca sapientum*, oil tree (Nkwu)-*Elaeisguinensis*, bitter kola (akuilu)-*Garcinia kola*, cashew-*Anacardium occidentale*, mango (mangoro)-*Magnifera indica*.

The men tap palm-wine while the women specialized in the production of woven cotton cloths. The people of the area are highly religious as they believe in the existence of a supreme God- *Ezechitoke* or *Chukwu-Abiama* and Obayi. They engage in a lot of socio-cultural activities like masquerading, festival and ceremonies.

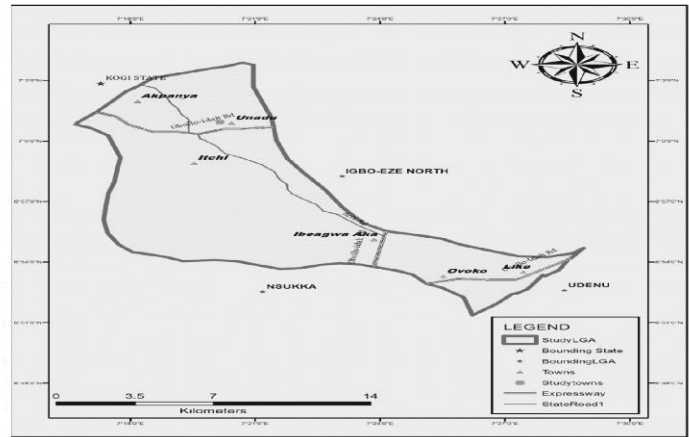


Fig 1: Map of Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area showing Unadu community.

In the study area, the natural heritage includes water bodies, hills and a cave. The heritage is documented by identifying their locations, functions and uses, associated taboos and pictorial documentation. The water bodies and springs are commonly found along the hill sides and they provide the community with drinking water and for other domestic uses. Thus, at *Ulashi*, *Okotokoto*, *Udeze*, *Ajafu*, *Ogene* and *Ayokpa* streams, the same water flow patterns are visualized. It is interesting to note that these springs are sparsely and geographically distributed to different locations of the community. They are spatially located in a way that every sphere of the community has easy accessibility of water. Some of the springs are documented below;

Ishiyi Ulashi spring: Ishiyi Ulashi is located at Obaka-Ege village Unadu. The spring flows from Ulashi hill down to several points where water is fetched. One of such points is at the middle of stone through a pipe-like structure and fetched with mud pot (*Ebu-iyi*) and plastic containers. Majority of the locals believe that water from Ulashi spring is pure and taste better than the pipe bore water. At another point, the locals fetch water to wash cloth and have their bath. There is evidence of potash *Ngwaka* dotting sections of the hill. The spring does not dry up no matter the level of the dry season as the people believe that *Ugokwa Odara* a spirit that carries light at the night stays there and also baby bush carries at night.



Plate 1: Ulashi stream

Okotokoto spring: The spring is located at Umunwata village in Unadu. There are noticeable deposits of coal embedded in the large rock deposit at the foot of Okotokoto hill. Water flows out of these stones and has two noticeable parts namely, Onuiyi and Ochenje. Onuiyi water is usually meant for drinking and it flows out of the stone which have been modified by the people with an iron pipe to direct water into containers. Water from Ochenje also comes out from a dip hole in the ground and it is fetched with plate (Aria). Aquatic animals like large alligator, crocodile and snakes were spotted at the stream. Water from Ochenje is mainly used for processing agricultural products like oil, cassava, melon and washing of cloths.

At Okotokoto hill, there are traces of dark shale exposed by natural element like rainfall and human actions. Onah, (2008) note that the dark shale is overlaid by the Nsukka formations which is the dark colour of the shale unit and indicative of the high carbon content. Thus, in hydrocarbon prospecting this dark shale contains high contents of organic matter which is a source material for petroleum, and coal generation. Although no oil has presently been found at the study area, nevertheless, with the material available at this area, oil may be discovered under an intensive exploration (Onah, 2008).



Plate 2: Onuiyi Okotokoto stream

Ajafu spring: Ajafu is located at Okpachi- Egu. It is a ground water which flows to join the Ayokpa stream. Before the fest of Abayida, sacrifices are made to the stream and people will not be allowed to go to stream for four days before the fest. Initially, woman who put to bed and menstruating women are not allowed to fetch water from the stream but this practice has been abolished by the people as a result of the influence of Christianity and western education.

Udeze spring: It is a spring that comes out from a dip hole from the ground and is fetched with calabash (Ari) and small plastic containers. Water from the spring is used by people for various domestic, socio-cultural, religious and economic activities which range from washing of clothes, cooking, drinking, bathing, for farming purposes, for washing and processing of breadfruit (Ukwa) etc. As early as 4am, villagers come to fetch drinking water from the spring.



Plate 3: Ajafu spring



Plate 4: Udeze spring

Ayokpa rock shelter: The rock shelter is located at Ayokpa village in Unadu. There is a spring which flow out of the shelter. According to our informant Mr. Ajogu Omeje (Per. Com. 2020), the cave is mysterious as sacrifice is performed annually to appease the god of the rock shelter (*Oshinaka*). Items like use ram, yam, white cock, cooked food are used for the sacrifice. The shrine situated at the entrance of the rock shelter. People from different communities come there for spiritual deliverance like (*Ike Ogbanje*), *Ike Ezenwayi*, *Ichi Ezenwayi*. At the entrance of the cave is littered with items of sacrifice such as baby dolls, slippers, biscuit, plate, cloths, and brooms. Cloths of different colours are hung at the entrance of the rock shelter. A spring water flows out of the rock shelter and the locals believe that it is effective for curing ailments like fever, stomach ache and that it is efficacious in fighting strange diseases and sickness. **Taboos are associated with Ayokpa rock shelter and spring. They are:**

1. Women are not allowed to go inside the rock shelter
2. People are not permitted to greet anybody before entering, (*ole, ole, onyeno*)
3. A nursing mother is not allowed to fetch water from the spring
4. A menstruating woman is not also allowed to fetch water from the spring.



Plate 5: Shrine at Ayokpa rockshelter

Discussion: Active participation and involvement of local people is required in developing the natural heritage for tourism. This will create a healthy atmosphere for the stakeholders to accept responsibilities and their contributions seen to be appreciated (Srinivas, 2020). Local groups like youth clubs, age grades, women associations, the town union, vigilante groups and individuals are essential contributors to the success developing rural tourism using natural heritage. Particularly, the youth groups should take the responsibility of making sure that the streams and springs are accessible by periodic clearing of the walk ways, cutting and trimming of trees branches and grasses. Occasional dredging of the streams and spring by young boys should be encouraged so as to make it flow effortlessly. The same way, the vigilante groups must provide security for people against kidnapers as they access the natural heritage. Mangut and Mangut (2013) opined that the local communities are encouraged to be participants and beneficiaries in developing rural tourism. Therefore, the active local participation of groups in Unadu will be the catalyst that will stir the development of rural tourism in Unadu

The current state of these natural heritage shows that they are not developed to be able to attract tourists even within and outside the host community except for the locals who fetch water daily for domestic use and some people from other communities who patronizes the *Oshinaka* shrine for spiritual challenge. Therefore, the developing of natural heritage Unadu will be a boost for rural tourism. Supporting the view that developing natural heritage will help in rural tourism, Odum and Oguamanam (2020) assert that the development of these heritage resources will boost Geo-tourism, which Newsome and Dowling, (2010:4) describes as a form of natural area tourism that specifically focuses on geology and landscape. Similarly, all over the world, people have visited land formations for recreations and other social activities thereby increasing the capacity of the local communities to develop infrastructure to help maximize economic potentials. Specifically, Itanyi, *et al* (2013) and Kim, *et al* (2008) observed that there is increase in cave and rock shelter visits especially among the young people particularly for socialization and self discovery. At Ayoka rock shelter, people visit the site either for spiritual purpose and to fetch water for domestic uses. The rock shelter has not been able to attract tourists for pleasure and recreation partly because of it has not been positioned for that purpose. The taboos which restrain certain people from visiting the rock shelter and the Ayokpa spring should be amended by the local communities in order to attract tourists for outside

Unadu. Though taboos are used as agents for conservation, certain aspects of it should be amended to accommodate the interest of all thereby encouraging rural tourism.

More importantly, rural tourism helps in local economy by providing opportunities for direct and indirect jobs. Affirming the importance of rural tourism in economic development, Onuonye, (2013) and Swarbrooke, (1996) averred rural tourism has the potentials of encouraging positive economic advancement through job creation, increased business activities, collection of taxes and the maintenance of natural heritage. Local economic activities in Unadu such as farming, palm wine tapping, basket weaving, trading in domestic items will be encouraged when the natural heritage of the people are positioned for tourism as more people will visit the sites, buy local items as souvenirs, the same way that hospitality and transport industry will increase.

General enlightenment and creation of awareness about the values and essence of the heritage should be pursued vigorously by the stakeholders as a tool to make the people appreciate the heritage. Informal socialization and learning of traditional values of the heritage within the families, villages, and town union must be strengthened and sustained. As was observed by Uzuegbu (2021) the local population need to be enlightened and guided for sustaining the sanctity of existing heritage. Therefore, awareness creation should be pursued through mass media and formal government agencies like local town criers, discussions at meetings, schools, markets and churches. The importance of awareness creation is to bring the attention of people to the use of the heritage. Thus, Aremu, (2001:82) enthused that awareness creation through education is a long-range and indirect means of influencing behaviour. With adequate awareness created about the usefulness of natural heritage in rural tourism development in Unadu, the locals will be in a better position to utilize the resources and protect them.

Unadu people have customary taboos and sanctions which have helped in the conservation of their natural heritage. This is an indigenous conservation practices used for the continued sustenance of the heritage. Gadgil and Vartak, (1975) averred that customary belief, folklores and taboos are imperative for the conservation of sacred groves and other natural heritage in India. In Unadu community, the taboos associated with Ayokpa rock shelter and spring are made known to the indigenes through internal socialization while visitors to the rock shelter are furnished with the taboos by the chief priest at the point of entrance. Over the years, these regulations have become sacrosanct with the people as the rock shelter is held sacred. Contravention of any of these taboos is believed to attract the wrath of the deity of the shelter (*Oshinaka*). In such cases, deity must be appeased to assuage its wrath on the defaulters and their families. The taboos which is part of the indigenous knowledge of the people constitute one of the methods which are used in managing natural heritage with which their continued existence is sustained (Oyelaran, 2001:88). However, the strict application of the taboo is partly the reason for the lack of development of rural tourism in Unadu. According to Mr. Ajogu Omeje (Per. Com. 2020) most visitors to the shrine are scared of exploring the beauty of the area because of the fear of contravening the taboos associated with the rock shelter.

Conclusion: From the data presented, it is evident that Unadu community has rich natural heritage resources which can be used to achieve sustainable tourism development. They include springs and rock shelter which have served the people as source of water and spiritual purpose. What remains is how to preserve and harness these resources to achieve tourism development objectives. It is the opinion of this paper that the involvement of various groups in the community will go a long way in harnessing the potentials inherent in the heritage for rural tourism development.

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