

ONUNU NSUKKA CULTURAL FESTIVAL AND ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN NSUKKA AREA

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ABSTRACT

Primarily, festivals are event celebrated by a community which centers on some characteristic aspect of that community, its religion or tradition often marked as a local holiday. Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world today which promotes the economy of many communities across the globe. On the other hand, festival is a propeller for tourism development in the area of study. The main focus of this paper centered on Onunu Nsukka cultural festival and its contribution to tourism development. Nsukka is located on the Anambra River Basin of the defunct Eastern Nigeria and lies between latitude 6°18 and 7°54 East. The area is rich in cultural festivals of different kind which have been neglected over the years; this informed the reason for this work. The importance of festivals in Igboland at large cannot be over stressed. Based on this, this research work becomes crucial in order to harness and document the history and tourism potentials of the festival. Research results revealed that festivals have a lot of potentials to boost the economy of the area if the tourism value is harnessed. Considering the nature of this research, the researcher adopted a qualitative method. This is pertinent because qualitative research is more significant to the research of this nature in which detailed analysis of the subject matter is defined. The instruments used in collecting data for this study includes interview, focus group discussion and direct observation. The purpose was to examine the people's view of their culture in the context of heritage

resources in the area.

Keywords: Cultural festival; Tourism; Development.

Introduction

Onunu Nska festival is a period Nsukka people give respect and pay homage to NKWO Nsukka which is believed to be the ancestral mother of the town. This is one of the festivals in Nsukka town that enjoys immense popularity and attention from the public. It is an annual event that takes place at Nkwo square around Enugu road Nsukka about three kilometers from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The Onunu festival was instituted in honour of a female deity known as Nkwo Nsukka as she is popularly called is known as the spiritual mother of the town. She lived a righteous and extra ordinary life on earth which gave her recognition in the area during her life time, after her death, she was raised to the position of a deity by the people of the area. Based on this, Onunu cultural festival was instituted in her honour.

The festival plays a significant role on the peoples' lives; it is ritualistic in nature and regarded as holy period among the indigenes of Nsukka. Based on this, everything bad is forbidden including death. This explains why a person who died within this period of purification is not given a befitting burial rite hence such person lacks holiness. This period of purification ushers in the beginning of planting season in the area. Onunu is more outstanding among the people more than every other festival

in the area because it is the only festival celebrated the same day by the three sons of Nsukka, Nkpunano, Nru, and Ihe/Owerre. The festival is celebrated on the tenth month of the traditional year (Onwa iri). The Onunu period is so holy that Twenty eight (28) days to the celebration is regarded as being sacrosanct which is traditionally known as Ngburu ahua (Lenten period).

The Study Area

Nsukka is an ancient town that has great historic attributes. The town is located in the northern part of the present Enugu State, South eastern Nigeria. It is situated about sixty five kilometers to the north of Enugu, the state capital. The town is located approximately on latitude 70 north and longitude 71 east. It shares common border with Edem, Ibagwa Ani, Alor Uno, Ede Oballa Obimo, Lejja, Eha-Alumona, Obukpa and Orba.

The name Nsukka identifies the descendant of Nsukka Asadu Ideke Alumona; they are Nkpunano, Nru and Ihe/Owerre Communities in the order of seniority. These three communities are sub divided into nine principal communities – Nguru, Isiakpu, Echara, Umakashi, Iheagu, Ezema/Edem, Umuoyo, Owerre and Ihe which represent the nine war heads of the town.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive design. This is pertinent because qualitative research is more significant to the research of this nature in which detailed analysis of the subject matter is defined.

One of the instruments employed in gathering data from respondents was interview which is a process of engaging the respondents in a conversation so as to collect information. The researcher used purposive sampling in selecting my respondents which began with familiarization visits to obtain permission from the village heads, chief priests and heritage gate keepers involved. As I progressed, other respondents were selected using snowball sampling method which enabled me to identify members of each group of interest in the target population who have vital information on my research interest. Among this group are six, elders, eight local traders, three civil servants, two chief priests' twelve youth leaders between the ages of 35

– 90 years. Their selection was based on their involvement in heritage preservation and maintenance in the area. (See table 1)

Table 1

| Group Information | Number | Age Range |
|--------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Elders | 6 | 60 – 90 |
| Local Traders | 8 | 40 – 65 |
| Civil Servants | 3 | 40 – 60 |
| Chief Priests | 2 | 55 – 80 |
| Youth Leaders | 12 | 30 – 55 |

Finding and Discussion Ngburu ahua (Lenten period)

This period in Nsukka is regarded as sacred and as such anything bad or evil is prohibited. It is a preparatory period for Onunu Nsukka and a period of cleansing. The period is marked with a lot of restrictions in certain activities in certain activities which involves engaging in hard labour, hosting of any ceremony that could attract noise, crying and mourning of the dead, firing gun shots, playing loud music, marriage ceremony and any kind of social gathering. Above all any person that dies within this period is not given a befitting burial rites and such death is regarded as a bad one. The person in question is regarded as unclean notwithstanding the person's personality or status. This period lasts for twenty eight days after which the Onunu festival takes place.

Upon the declaration of the chief priest of Ezeoguda deity (Attama ezeoguda) with the consent of the elders (Akpuru arua) the mgburu ahua (cleansing period) is formally announced. Once this is done, the messengers of ezeoguda will sing joyfully around the villages with a popular music known as egwu oka-

ma that informs the general public that Onunu is around the corner. On hearing this music, the people will know that the solemn period has come (Ngburu ahua) and they should adjust to its conditions and observe the period as it should be. During this period, sacrifices are made at various ancestral shrines otherwise known as onu ndishi or onu nna. This period will last for twenty eight days.

The onunu festival is celebrated after the twenty eight days of the solemnity (Ngburu ahua). On the eve of that day is a wrestling competition (ote nkwo), the wrestling bouts, were organized to usher in the great festival. Young men from the three quarters of the Nsukka town take part to show their masculinity and strength. This event is strictly for fun and never to settle scores. The spectators form a circle round the nkwo square while only two competitors wrestle at a time. The person who forces his opponent to nestle his back on the ground emerges the winner. The bouts were always gracious, fascinating and sensational. They were delightful to the young as they are to the old.

For clarity sake, Onunu festival is celebrated for Nsukka women at large, they appear in their best attire and make sure their children looks good too. Based on the fact that it is women affair, the umuada (elderly women) are the first to arrive the square. They come with kola nuts, palm wine and okpa a local food made from the floor of Bambara groundnuts. They offers prayers using these items at the onu nkwo Nsukka after which the left over is shared to the people around who wishes to eat. Those who are willing to eat are permitted to eat but it must not be taken away for any reason. The ones offered to the shrine are left there for some spiritual reasons and for the ancestors to eat. One thing worth noticing is that women perform these rituals of offering okpa to nkwo which is regarded as egba omabe. The climax of the festival is

The Orome

The orome is very outstanding during Onunu festival. This is the process whereby girls between the age of twelve and eighteen years are carried shoulder high by some selected older women for every body's full amusement. Those to be carried up were not notified before the event instead there will be a chase. Once a young girl is caught it she is deemed to be chosen by the ancestors and she must be an Nsukka indigene. When being carried by the elderly women, the maiden will twist and dance to the rhythm of the rolling of "igede nkwo" and the songs of the women. This is done in belief that "nkwo" is the giver of children. These young girls wrap their breast with a piece of clothing to hold them firm in place. Pendulous ones would regain elasticity and dangle invitingly. They wear "jigida" (waist beads) over the rapper and some only more jigida alone round their waste to expose their tower belly and translucent skin. The style of dressing they adopted was to attract young men and move them into asking their hand in marriage. The sight of them on display carried a fringe of coquettishness.

As men entice women with their masculinity in wrestling bouts, so do women with their beauty. After being decorated with the relics, they will wait for the drum to roll. It comes and break out in song which goes thus; "orome o! ne taa nkwo o! aee aee aee o! The girls are carried shoulder high and presented to nkwo shrine and the girls' plucks a leaf from the mango tree and fixed it in her mouth. The leaf is to prevent her from talking to anyone till she gets home. Once they are carried shoulder high, they will twist and dance to the tune of the drum. On their faces perched flashes of smile that carried a hint of seductive pose. The sight of these young and succulent girls always make the old women to agree that women could be likened to a flower which blossoms in the morning to fade before dusk. They grow nostalgic of their own days. Afterwards, women will provide drinks for their friends and relatives that came around and sing praises to the "nkwo" deity asking the deity to alleviate their sufferings while thanking it for the goodies of yesteryears.

Apart from the fact that death is absolutely a taboo in the town during this period, the festival also marks the beginning of a new planting season in the area since the deity is believed to work hand in hand with the god of farming and bumper harvest. Every farmer in the area strives to do his farming of

the year immediately after the festival.

Igba echi (traditional anklet)

Echi (anklet) is remarkable because it draws attention of most people attended the festival. It is believed that anyone who did not catch a glimpse of the “echi” person did not enjoy the festival. Igba echi is a way of showing off one's opulence in Nsukka area. This entails wearing metal stirrings, which were used as money in Nsukka in the olden days on both legs of a young girl who have reached the age of puberty.

After fixing the anklet at home, the person in question moves in company of her friend and relatives to “nkwo” square for presentation. The relatives and local gun men keeps the atmosphere gay and the whole situation interesting as they follows the girl round the “nkwo” square with gunshot and praises. The girl is adorned with other things like “aka and jigida and on arrival, she pays homage to “nkwo” deity before her rhythmic acrobatic show known as “Omaganga”. At this juncture, the audience applauds her artful display with money as a token of appreciation at the dancing show. The “echi” is so lucrative that the man who sponsors his daughter to Igba ehcci ukwu” will double and redouble in gain the expenses made. It is believed that any girl who performs the “Igba echi” must be a very good house wife, be faithful to her husband and bear children as well.

Ogonna Ancestral Worship

This ancestral worship is the last stage of onunu festival and it is performed a five days after nkwo onunu festival. It is the act of paying homage to the ancestors to mark the end of onunu. Based on this, women usually go home, to their parents houses to pay homage to their ancestors. On their way home, they usually accompany themselves with goat, fowls, tubers of yam and other food items depending on the financial muscle of the woman in question. The animals provided are usually killed by the eldest man in the clan (okpara) and the meat shared according to the tradition.

Ogonna is a time of reunion and assessment of how the sisters live with their husband. It is also a way of settling misunderstanding and disputes if any. Once the assessment and settling of conflicts are over, her relations usually supply the women with gifts like food items and money to take home.

Impact on Tourism Development

According to Okpoko and Okpoko (2002), in discussing the impact of tourism, it is to point out that varying emphasis have been given to its environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects. Given the fact that economic growth has featured prominently in the overall schemes of most nations there has been the tendency for a large number of these writers to emphasize or assess the economic potentials of tourist development (Butler, 1975). However, as of late, some writers have begun to focus attention on the socio-cultural significance of this industry.

Tourists that visit countries are looked down closely because many people always attach importance to economic benefits of tourism, other impacts of tourism are been neglected such as the social, cultural, ecological, environmental and political impact of tourism. Apart from the impact of tourists on the environment, as more tourists move into a destination and come out of it, they are also impacting on it.

Economic Impact of Tourism

The development of tourism potentials both natural and cultural will attract a thriving flow of tourist to the country and these will bring about a beneficial impact on the economy and its balance of payment position. Tourism unlike other industrial project has the capacity to trickle down (slow down) and benefit a large sector of the grass root population who can profitably share in the proceeds of the vacation and travel industry through income multiplier effect. By these, we mean the increase in income resulting from each dollar or money injected into the economy of a region.

In tourism, a tourist leaves his place i.e. his home to his destination point for leisure and recreation. His aim therefore is satisfaction and not profit making. He therefore spends his money in his country of destination thereby improving the wealth of that nation. This is exactly what happens during the time of the festival; people come from far and near and by end of the day, boost the local economy by patronizing the local traders. According to Okpoko and Okpoko (2002), the top priorities of those who profess the economic benefits of tourism, is the foreign exchange receipts that accrue from tourist ventures. They also argue that such earnings will stimulate the overall development of the host economy by improving the levels of national income.

There is no doubt that an effective implementation of tourism programme will directly be on unique occasion to celebrate their local culture and interact within the community. People of the area are being flattered by visitors' interest in their culture. This increases the pride of the people and encourages the preservation of their heritage resources. The tourists improve the local economy of the people through the money they spend during the Onunu festival by supporting their local businesses and other tourism related activities.

Conclusion

Onunu Nsukka cultural festival contributes greatly in projecting the image of the people and boosting their local economy. It serves as source of national reputation. The festival influences the mind and being of the people to appreciable extent as a vital aspect of their culture. The festival has been known to unleash such potent forces that can produce tangible effects. To this end enlightenment campaign, public lectures and other means should be employed in educating the people on the importance of preserving this festival for posterity sake. Results of the findings made it clear that onunu festival is a significant force in tourism development in the area and should be given attention. Those factors that can facilitate the contribution of major stakeholders should also be taking into consideration. Onunu Nsukka cultural festival creates new channels for social interactions, providing opportunities to enrich cultural identity and build social ties among the people. From the tourism perspective, Onunu festival is significant because they attract tourists as an important tourist asset of the area. As a tourist product, it satisfies tourism needs.

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