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## BUILDING LOCAL ECONOMY THROUGH CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE NSUKKA EXPOSITION IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*Traditional communities in most African States and in some other developing nations have been deprived of meaningful basic amenities by the successive governments owing to their perceived lack of contribution to national development. This has always resulted to rural-urban migration among others, due to poor economic state of the rural life. However, this study looked inward to suggest that the local economy can be developed through the harnessing of their heritage resources opportunities for tourism development in the area. The focus of the study is Nsukka in Enugu State Nigeria. Literature analysis and observation were the research approach and the result of the study revealed that Nsukka has scintillating cultural heritage resources that have the opportunities to revitalize the local economy of the people with less emphasis on external support. The study further suggested sustainable tourism, responsive tourism, regenerative tourism, and tourism safety and security as the necessary considerations for the actualizing of this economic feat in Nsukka area of Nigeria.*

**Keywords: Local economy; Cultural tourism; Heritage tourism; Rural communities; Nsukka.**

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### **Introduction**

Tourism has transformational tendencies in the economic fortunes of places. This has attracted responsive commitments to tourism practice and investments since the turn of the new millennium (Nwankwo, 2017; Duxbury, Bakas, Castro, & Silva, 2021). Many economies across the globe have explored tourism development options for economic revival and recovery to improve their standard of living. Evidence from recent researches has shown that economies from the developing nations of Asia and Africa have leveraged more on these opportunities

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(Negrusa, Cosma, & Bota, 2007; Su, 2011; Okech, Haghri, & George, 2012; Hasan, Ismail, & Islam, 2017; Tao, Huabg, & Ran, 2018). Some of these economies have harnessed those tourism resources where they have a comparative advantage, for economic growth and livelihood. For instance, while African nations like South Africa, Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, among others, have leveraged more on ecotourism resources, some other nations like Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Gambia, Zimbabwe etc, have explored the opportunities of their cultural tourism resources due to their scintillating cultural traits. These cultural traits include traditional festivals, local dance, traditional dishes, cultural centers, traditional architecture, traditional songs, folklores, myths, historical places, traditional ceremonies, masquerading, traditional attire, belief system, linguistics system, among others (Dashper, 2014; Ezeuduji, 2015; Juan-Jose, Jose, & Francisco-Jose, 2017). Many traditional communities in Nigeria have harnessed these aspects of cultural heritage resources within their space for economic recovery through cultural tourism development. For example, some traditional communities like Argungu in Kebbi State, Arondizuogu in Imo State, Oron in Akwa-Ibom state, Oshogbo in Osun State, Ogbunike in Anambra State, among many others, have leveraged on cultural tourism development for local economic growth. They have developed their cultural tourism resources to popular festivals and carnivals that attract huge global audience during celebrations.

Having considered a brief background to this study, it will be pertinent at this juncture to consider clarifications of some of the key concepts used in the study. To this end, local economy can be succinctly defined as the resultant economic and social systems of a given space. It has to do with the livelihood and socioeconomic opportunities of a place that are available to the residents (hosts and visitors) (Ling-en, Sheng-kui, Lin-sheng, Song-lin, Bijaya, & Guo-zhu, 2013; Giray, Kadakoglu, Cetin, Bamoi, 2019). On the other hand, cultural resources are the total make up of cultural attributes of a place. They include traditional dishes, masquerading, festivals, traditional ceremonies, myths, folklores, historical places, traditional healthcare system, value system, architectural pattern, unique outfit, belief system, traditional songs and dance, among others. While some of them may

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be developed to serve both the hosts and visitors, some are yet to be developed; hence, they serve only the hosts.

More so, tourism development has to do with the harnessing of the tourism opportunities of a place to create avenue for tourism experience (Nwankwo, 2017). These opportunities are translated to economic fortunes through reasonable transformations. Such transformations are expected to have responsiveness to socioeconomic aspects of a place (Matic, Djordjevic, & Vujic, 2019). In recent times, this kind of development has been perceived as another socioeconomic development option for places, more especially, rural and semi-urban places with less public and private investments and amenities. Despite the opportunities of natural heritage resources (i.e. caves, hills, mountains, water bodies, rock shelters, wildlife, etc) for tourism development, many African communities have leveraged more on their unique cultural resources for tourism development in their areas, for socioeconomic survival through tourism development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Nwankwo, 2022).

### **Local Economy and Cultural Tourism Development in Nsukka**

Nsukka culture area is comprised of seven local governments in the northern part of Enugu State. They include Nsukka, Igboeze North, Igboeze South, Udenu, Uzo-Uwani, Isi-Uzo and Igbo-Etiti Local government Areas. Nsukka is the nucleus of this set that is found in the northern Igbo plateau, hence they are referred to as “*Nsukka Asadu Ideke Alumona*”. Apart from other Igbo communities within Southeast Nigeria, they also have culture and political boundaries with the Idah people in Kogi State and Igala people in Benue State. However, the geographical boundary that is referred to as Nsukka has so many opportunities for cultural tourism development awaiting strategic and sustainable development. They include the numerous natural and cultural heritage resources that abound within the Nsukka space. For natural heritage resources, there are caves, waterfalls, spring waters, mountains, hills, rock overhangs, rock shelters, lakes, forests, etc, while for cultural heritage resources they have rich traditional festivals, masquerade traditions, unique traditional dishes, traditional ceremonies, unique traditional

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political system and other interesting cultural expositions. The people of Nsukka are endowed with these cultural heritage resources that have the potentialities of transforming the Nsukka space into an enviable tourist destination. Many studies have been conducted in Nsukka on these heritage resources to document them, appraise them, ascertain their current state and challenges, determine their host perception for imminent development, conduct their in-situ mapping using GIS, etc. Many other studies are ongoing to further launch the rich cultural heritage resources of Nsukka people on the global space.

Although, efforts are being made to expose the opportunities of these rich heritage resources for a stable local economy with responsiveness to quality standard of living, the systematic means of achieving this is now the question. Tourism development for cultural heritage resources is fragile in the sense that it could be counter-productive and impose unnecessary threats to the material and non-material values of the cultural heritage resources. However, developing these heritage resources for tourism will require the following key steps:

- ✓ Documentation of these heritage resources through quality ethnographic and observational studies
- ✓ Consultations with the traditional leaderships of these communities, socio cultural groups and other stakeholders for consent and support.
- ✓ Massive orientation programmes for the members of the host communities and other key stakeholders.
- ✓ Involvement of the hosts in the consultations, implementations, executions and management of tourism development initiatives within Nsukka space.
- ✓ Organization of rallies, cultural carnivals, symposia, cultural awareness programmes on both print and electronic media and other marketing mix, to properly brand the Nsukka area as a responsive tourist destination in Africa.

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- ✓ Improvement on infrastructural and superstructural base of Nsukka, including other tourism infrastructures, to be able to accommodate tourist traffic and reduce unnecessary threats on the carrying capacity.
  - ✓ Collaborative engagements with relevant government agencies like the Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC), State Tourism Board (STB) and Local Government Tourism Committees (LGTCs), private sectors, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), local and international funding bodies, security agencies, transport companies, hospitality sector investors, etc, is very necessary.

When this is achieved, tourism will be able to transform the local economy in Nsukka, hence there will be increased patronage on goods and services within the Nsukka space because of the huge influx of tourists and visitors. Masquerading and festival celebrations will become more interesting with resultant increase in the number of tourists and other visitors travelling down to these communities for tourism experience and other relaxations. At the end the overall tourism receipt will trickle down to the small scale businesses including the itinerant traders in those remote areas in Nsukka.

Furthermore, it will contribute to high income generation and distribution within the Nsukka space. This explains why many national governments around the globe are investing hugely on the tourism sector so as to transform the economic fortunes of the rural and semi-urban areas, including the cities, to have favourable balance of payment and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) after a given financial year. Interestingly most of the African communities like Nsukka, have rich cultural heritage resources with less cost implications to develop unlike those in the west. Despite the availability of cultural heritage resources, some impediments may hinder their smooth development for greater impact on the local economy of a place.

However, at this juncture, it will be pertinent to consider these possible impediments to the development of cultural tourism in Nsukka communities. Tourism development initiatives are sustainable when possible challenges are

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conceived, considered and mitigated during pre-project, project and post-project stages of the tourism initiatives. These challenges are highlighted below:

- Insufficient local/host support can hamper the progress of tourism initiatives in Nsukka
- Despite the opening of major road networks in Nsukka by the Enugu State government, poor road networks to most of the rural areas with astonishing cultural heritage resources will hamper their accessibility for tourism development and resultant visits by tourists and visitors.
- Misrepresentation of facts and narratives on Nsukka value system needs valuable attention. False facts will destabilize tourism initiatives within a given space. The information on these heritage resources should be authentic and a true representation of the ideal.

## **Conclusion**

Evidence from some other parts of the globe has shown that cultural tourism development has the potentialities of impacting hugely on the local economy (Aref & Gill, 2009; Hussain, 2021). Ethnographic and observational studies has revealed that Nsukka area has scintillating cultural heritage resources in the various nooks and crannies that have the potentialities of making significant impacts on the Nsukka local economy through cultural tourism development. It contributes to income generation and distribution in rural and semi-urban places in Nsukka, and repositions their economy for better living standard, even with less public basic amenities. With the harnessing of these cultural heritage resources for tourism development, these rural areas will drive meaningful infrastructural and superstructural facilities to boost their respective local economies (Lo, Mohamad, Songan, & Yeo, 2012; Ayazlar, G. and Ayazlar, 2015; Bradley, 2021). If this is achieved it will discourage rural-urban migration, boost investments in the rural areas, launch the rural areas in global tourism map, encourage self-help efforts among the rural dwellers, attract meaningful development, and reposition the local

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economies for responsive standard of living (Park, & Yoon, 2009; Tsephe, & Obono, 2013; Tang, 2017).

However, a poorly developed tourism has some irretrievable consequences that may lead to overtourism and monumental regrets on the parts of the host communities and developers (Bramwell, & Lane, 1994; Dougstad, 2007 ). Most of these cultural heritage resources have great value systems attached to them hence their decimation is highly discouraged even with tourism activities. Hence a systematic approach and practical recommendations are sacrosanct in any attempt to develop cultural heritage resources for cultural tourism development in Nsukka. These recommendations will be anchored on some of the principal tourism concepts in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as stated below:

- ✓ *Sustainable tourism*: for cultural heritage resources to make useful impact on the local economy through tourism development, tourism sustainability or sustainable tourism should be taken into consideration (Bramwell & Lane, 1994). Succinctly, this principle states that tourism initiatives should be planned and executed to accommodate the needs and aspirations of the present and future members of the host communities, preserve the resources for future use, protect the hosts' value systems and the values of their tourists and visitors. Hence, until it is sustainable, the gains and expectations of cultural tourism development to the local economy will not be actualized.
- ✓ *Responsible tourism*: this is another tourism concept that was developed to support the actualization of tourism sustainability. This concept states that in planning, consulting, executing and managing tourism projects in a given space, the relevant stakeholders including the resources should be involved and take responsibility of the project (Mihalic, 2016). Making these stakeholders responsive to these tourism initiatives will be translated to sustainable growth of the rural economy through cultural tourism development.
- ✓ *Regenerative tourism*: Regenerative tourism is among the trending concepts in tourism discourse in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The concept argues that

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exploitation of tourism resources for tourism development will terminate the lives of these resources sometime in the future; hence efforts should be made to regenerate these resources even while they are exploited for tourism development (Bradley, 2021). The concept de-emphasizes concentration on ‘profit-making’ from tourism development and emphasizes on the constant regeneration for these resources to guarantee their future use and maintain balance with the value systems of the host community.

- ✓ *Tourism safety and security*: this is one of the concepts that permeate various facets of tourism development and investment. The propositions of the concept are that safety and security are vital instruments in achieving sustainable tourism development within a space. While tourism safety focuses on the safety of lives and properties of tourists, visitors, hosts, developers and volunteers during tourism activities within a space, tourism security emphasizes on the availability, preservation, conservation and protection of tourism resources for tourism activities within a space (Nwankwo, 2022). This concept forms part of major considerations for tourism development, hence the failure from any of the two arms of the concept will greatly affect tourism development. Tourism safety and security should be one of the determining factors in actualizing a sustainable cultural tourism development that will reposition the Nsukka local economy for better living standard for the hosts and their visitors.

In conclusion, cultural tourism development is one of the key factors that drive the local economy of the rural and semi-urban areas (Lane, 2009). Nsukka has numerous cultural heritage resources that have the opportunities to drive the local economy through responsive income generation and distribution. These resources await imminent development through collaborative efforts from the relevant stakeholders (host communities, researchers, government agencies, security agencies, sociocultural groups, NGOs, public and private investors, funding



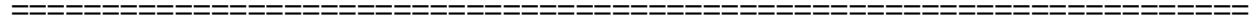
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institutions, among others) to rebuild the Nsukka local economy through cultural tourism development.

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