

Authenticity, Revitalisation and Heritage Tourism: An Interrogation

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Abstract

This study draws from documented evidence to interrogate the concept of 'authenticity' in the mix of revitalization of cultural heritage for tourism development. We are now witnessing how cultural heritage is being revived in different societies, one purpose of which is to benefit from the positive economic impact of the tourism industry. While reviving and opening up heritage products to tourists, the concept of 'authenticity' is still used to promote and market cultural heritage products. We apply a qualitative research approach using a documentary research design to examine this phenomenon. We descriptively presented and analyzed the information gathered. The study found that revitalization greatly impacts the authenticity of cultural heritage in tourism development. The implication is that many cultural heritage tourists have been motivated by the perceived 'authenticity' of the revived sites, events or products they experience. Situating our arguments around Nigeria, we suggest that stakeholders should consider the implications of the impacts of revitalization when developing and marketing a cultural heritage destination.

Keywords: *Cultural heritage, Authenticity, Heritage tourism, Revitalization, Commoditization*

Introduction

It is believed that every society has, at one point or another, had a link or relationship with its past (Harvey, 2001). This link or quest for a relationship/experience of the past results in heritage tourism. Heritage tourism results from most movements or travelling to gain experience from various parts of the world (Harvey, 2001). Tourism connotes the mobilization of people's cultural and natural resources, especially those aspects which make a person unique. Nuryanti (1996, p. 250) argues that "tourism's fundamental nature is dynamic, and its interaction with heritage often results in a reinterpretation of heritage". Nuryanti further explained that the relationship between heritage and tourism parallels the debate between a society's culture and between tradition and modernity.

During the past three decades, heritage and tourism have become inextricably linked throughout the world. Tourism is used as an economic justification for heritage preservation. Tourism also serves to preserve artefacts in many parts of the world;

historical artefacts and their associations have always been one of the tourism industry's most marketable commodities (Timothy, 1997). Because of people's inclination to seek out novelty, including that of traditional cultures, heritage tourism has become a new area of tourism demand, which policy-makers are now aware of and anxious to develop to gain from the floating income. Heritage tourism, as a part of the broader cultural tourism category, is now a pillar of the nascent tourism strategy of many countries (Richards, 1996). Prentice (1993) suggested that heritage sites should be differentiated into three types of heritage: built, natural and cultural heritage. Others classified heritage tourism based on places, events, and artefacts observed or visited and the motives and activities undertaken by the tourists who consume them (Confer and Kerstetter, 2000; Krakover and Cohen, 2001; Poria, Butler and Airey, 2004; Prentice, Davies and Beeho, 1997; Timothy, 1997; Timothy and Boyd, 2003). Research suggests that in most cases, people visit heritage places to enhance learning, satisfy curiosity and feelings of nostalgia, grow spiritually, relax, get away from home, spend time with loved ones, or discover themselves.

According to Stewart, Hayward and Devlin (1998), heritage tourism refers to historic sites and buildings and the experiences which people seek to have in them. It is considered experiential tourism because visitors often wish to immerse themselves in the historical environment and experience. In this context, the quality of the interpretative experience, the site's collection of antiquities, the environment surrounding the site and the site facilities are all part of the 'heritage tourism' experience. In studying the connection between heritage and tourism, Peterson (1994) reveals three significant reasons for visiting historic sites: to experience a different time or place, to learn to enjoy a cerebral experience and to share with others or teach children the site's history. Heritage tourism is also described as a segment of travelers' highly motivated by performing and visual arts, cultural exhibitions, and other related attractions.

Again, we now return to the two characteristics of cultural heritage, integrity and authenticity (Doganer and Dupont, 2013). Integrity in historic preservation is the ability of a historic property to convey its historical significance. At the same time, authenticity represents the degree to which a historic site and its surrounding context convey information about the past honestly and accurately. The concept of authenticity originated from the word authentic. It is a concept in heritage tourism that explains that heritage tourists are more likely to visit places considered unique, real, and/or authentic (Lynn, 2010). It is all about telling or presenting the true story of a given cultural/historic site/resource. Authenticity deals with the value and significance of tourism and the tourist experience (Lengkeek, 2008). It is believed that authentic stories about the present and past generations are the ones that are capable of appealing to heritage tourists because this is what distinguishes the destination from the one they are coming from (Lynn, 2010). It was MacCannell that helped in pioneering the field of sociological tourism studies. He believes "modern travellers seek authenticity and the wholeness that is missing in their fractured lives" (Cohen 2008, p. 189). The perspective of authenticity as a field of study has been enriched, contested and expanded by scholars who have differentiated various types of tourists, streams of tourism and outcomes of the tourist experience (Cohen, 2008, p. 189).

This work draws from the existing work of authors to reemphasise the place of authenticity in heritage tourism development, which results in economic, socio-cultural,

environmental and political benefits as well as the revitalisation of the dying aspects of the places visited. Given the above, the research is qualitative, adopting a documentary research design. In contrast, the descriptive research approach was used in presenting and analyzing the information/data gathered and used for the research. The study shows a link between authenticity as a concept and heritage tourism. This implies that many heritage tourists have been primarily motivated by the perceived authenticity of the heritage site or product being experienced. However, as scholars have argued, it has been challenging to determine what is authentic and what is not. It is suggested that since Nigeria is blessed with numerous heritage resources that have the potential for sustainable tourism development and revitalization of the nation's economy, it should tap into the vision as many countries in the world have done and utilize it to contribute to solving the prevailing economic challenges facing the nation.

Conceptual Clarification

Cultural Heritage and Heritage Tourism: Graham *et al* (2000) in Loulanski (2006, p. 56) see cultural heritage as "the contemporary purposes of the past" or "that part of the past which we select in the present for contemporary purposes, be they economic, cultural, political or social". They are those things of the past that were created by humankind as part of culture. They refer to the material aspects of culture such as sites, group or individual buildings of historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological and anthropological value, monuments, and objects. They also include the non-material/intangible aspects embodied in social practices, community life, values, beliefs and expressive forms such as language, arts, handicrafts, music and dance (see Loulanski, 2006).

Cultural heritage includes or comprises both the tangible and non/intangible material aspects of culture—sites, buildings, landscapes, monuments and objects, as well as the non-material aspects which are embodied in social practices, community life, values, beliefs, and expressive forms such as language, arts, handicrafts, music and dance, aspects of people's culture handed down from generation to generation (Loulanski, 2006; Harvey, 2001). Concerning tourism, the word heritage has been used in cultural and natural situations. In the cultural aspects, heritage has been used to describe the material forms of cultural resources such as monuments, historical and architectural remains, and artefacts, as well as the immaterial forms such as philosophy, traditions and arts in all their manifestations, celebrations of events (festivals) or personalities in history, distinct ways of life; and education as expressed through literature and folklore. In the natural aspect, on the other hand, heritage has been used to describe gardens, landscapes, national parks, wilderness, mountains, rivers, islands and components thereof such as flora and fauna, most of which in reality have cultural components for it is humans that label and ascribe values to them (Nuryanti, 1996). Therefore, heritage includes the natural as well as the cultural environment (landscapes, historic places, sites and built environment as well as biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and living experiences).

Authenticity: Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of English language defined authenticity as "the quality of being genuine or true", while authentic means "known to be real and genuine and not a copy: true and accurate". Authenticity relates to "authoritative", "fact or reality", "trustworthy" and "original" (Zhu, 2017). The term

“authenticity” comes from Greek and Latin meaning “authoritative” and “original”, and has largely been used in ethics, linguistics, culture, and arts (Zhu, 2017). Songlin (2005), Jie (2007) and Chengyu (2010) see authenticity as "original" and "real" while Qing (2009) and Wang (2009) emphasize "real", "true" and "verifiable" as the core of authenticity (Zhu, 2017). The National Trust for Historic Preservation (in Green, 1993), defines authenticity as "a way to promote the "true story" of an area by giving the destination "real value" and "appeal". While the Nara Document on Authenticity (1995) defined authenticity as "original" (Article 9, xxii in Zhu, 2017), Hargrove (1999, 2002) described authenticity as the objective truth, "a significant or distinctive asset, something real and tangible that visitors can experience and is supported by a historical fact" (see Wiles and Vander-Stoep, 2007).

Cultural heritage tourism is “travelling to experience the places and activities that ‘authentically’ represent the stories and peoples of the past and present’. Its development is based on unique aspects of the locality’s history, landscape and culture (Doganer and Dupont, 2013). When a historic place (i.e. heritage resource) has a unique identity and is designated a cultural heritage attraction, people tend to visit there as tourists. All tourists tend to demand authenticity, although some identifiable groups of tourists find the real more important than others (MacCannell, 1976). Tourists, in their yearnings, have a sense of true or false representations of the past (Dallen, 2011). The concept of authenticity has been used to suggest that members of modern societies feel alienated and cut off from their genuine sources, resulting in the search for what is real/authentic outside their social context (the gap which is perfectly filled through heritage tourism). Authenticity has also been used to indicate the need for something real and valuable within a predominantly vulgar tourist world (Dallen, 2011). Authenticity links a site's genuine characteristics to heritage tourists' longing for the real past (Lengkeek, 2008). It deals with the value and significance of tourism and the tourist experience.

Scholars like Waller and Lea (1998, in Lengkeek, 2008) have argued positively that most tourist attractions made purposefully for tourists are considered not authentic but staged, newly created, and not genuine. Authenticity proposes that the past should be presented as it were (is) to the tourist; only then can it be seen as being real. This poses a challenge between tourism production and heritage conservation. In the words of Halewood and Hannam (2001, in Lengkeek, 2008), creators of heritage tourism are "very much concerned with the degree of authenticity they are putting forward". It is not easy to define or determine what is authentic regarding heritage tourism, as genuineness can never be easily attained. Heritage tourists are interested in visiting unique places and acquiring experiences that can broaden or deepen their understanding of other places, peoples and cultures (Lynn, 2010).

Revitalization: Defining revitalization in the context of heritage tourism involves trying to revive or bring back to life an area that is already dying. Heritage is used as a means for reviving a dying culture or economy. Historic preservation, an aspect of heritage, has been seen by many authors and agencies/organizations, especially in developed worlds, as one of the significant ways or critical factors for revitalizing urban cities and declining economies (Ryberg-Webster and Kinahan, 2014). Heritage tourism using the historic resources of a given area/community can bring about the revitalization of the

neighbourhood, increased and sustainable tourism, and economic development through private investment in hotels, accommodation, souvenir shops and other businesses (Lynn, 2010). Cultural heritage has been included in many areas as a central feature for community and economic revitalization (Loulanski, 2006). It is believed that history has always been to national identity, so heritage is now to renew economic vitality (Osborne and Kovacs, 2008). Revitalization is most important in planning built heritage tourism. As approaches and methods in planning-built heritage commonly employ various degrees of revitalization or strive to achieve a balance between preservation and development. These approaches in revitalization include conservation, gentrification, rehabilitation, renovation, restoration and reconstruction (Nuryanti, 1996).

Historical Development of Authenticity in Heritage Tourism

Humans, from time immemorial, have always travelled from place to place. This travel may have been short-term or long-term to obtain food, security, trade, and satisfy their curiosity, among other reasons/purposes. But, as we know it today, tourism is believed to have started in the Ancient Greek world because it was in Ancient Greece that the history of tourism was officially recorded (Okpoko *et al*, 2008). It is believed, as noted earlier, that every society has had a link or relationship with its past at one point in time (Harvey, 2001). The term "authenticity" originated in Europe and was gradually recognized, introduced, translated and accepted by other countries, especially after joining the convention concerning the protection of world cultural and natural heritage in 1985 (Zhu, 2017). "Authenticity today refers to the truthfulness of origins, attributions, commitments, sincerity, devotion and intentions, not copy or forgery" (Zhang, 2001, in Zhu, 2017).

The origins of modern tourism are to be sought in the pursuit of authentic cultural origins, milestones and cultural differences (Osborne and Kovacs, 2008). Scholars like MacCannell (1976) and Horne (1984) have demonstrated in their work that Western tourism emerged as a result of the quest or pursuit for cultural roots. This emphasis was based on the grand tour, which focused on a visit to places and sites that were landmarks in the political, theological and philosophical evolution of Western civilization. It was an elitist endeavour targeting the cultural patrimony of Egypt, Greece, and Rome. It gradually expanded to the museums and cultural edifices of Europe's major capitals and metropolises. By the late Eighteenth century, others were attracted to a new destination; at this point, attention was shifted to the "natural wonders" of the new world (Mulvey, 1983 in Osborne and Kovacs, 2008).

To MacCannell (1973), modern religious pilgrim arises as a result of tourists' quest for authentic experiences. To him, tourism appears to become a modern surrogate for religion. The more tourism flourishes, the more it becomes a colossal deception. So, for MacCannell (1973, 1976), a quest for authenticity has become the prominent motif of modern tourism, whereas Comet (1975) and McLeod (1976) are of the view that an object or a product can only be accepted as "authentic" if it is not produced specifically for the market, that is, not commoditized for tourism consumption (Cohen, 1988). Nuryanti (1996) noted that following the industrial revolution, the 19th century can be portrayed as the destruction of the past and its replacement with the new and the 20th century is characterized by a new awareness that seeks to find novel ways to communicate with the Past. This is reflected in recent trends among travellers who, by

seeking new and exciting experiences, return to places with traditional social values and whose tastes and styles refer back to the past. This type of phenomenon often indicates a search for "authenticity" and "real identity."

Discourse/debate about the authenticity of heritage tourism products, places and experiences started in the sixties (Dallen, 2011). Boorstin started it and later MacCannell in the sixties and seventies (Lengkeek, 2008). It was introduced to sociological studies by MacCannell in the 1970s (1974 to be précised) (Harvey, 2001) and still appears to be a highly problematic concept after almost fifty years of its introduction (Lengkeek, 2013). In this case, scholars have seen the concept of authenticity as a problematic concept whose definitions or questions are not easily answered. It is challenging to determine what authentic or not about tourism is because; we are in the era of virtual reality and the spread of global consumer culture. So, authenticity in this era may be unimportant to post-modern travellers (Cohen, 2008).

Authenticity and Commoditization of Heritage for Tourism

Many developers consider cultural heritage tourism attractive because of several benefits derivable from it, especially for the local communities (OECD, 2009). But, tourism destinations, especially those of underdeveloped and developing countries, tend to "dilute" the facets of culture or, in a subtle manner, go for a cultural mutation to satisfy some segment of tourists, especially those from the West, thus resulting in cultural degradation (OECD, 2009). It is believed by some authors like Butler (2008) that successive tourism growth is destructive to both the "quality of life of live-in places" and ultimately to the attraction resource base itself (Osborne and Kovacs, 2008) and that the "use" of heritage poses a great threat as it leads to commercialization, exploitation, devaluation and destruction (Loulanski, 2006). Tourism, in general, has been recognized as one of the largest industries in the world, with the capacity to revitalize the community's economy, where it is well established. In some places like Georgia, England, Canada, Japan, Europe, China, Morocco, and Australia, heritage has been used to establish a better understanding of society and its development; enhanced cultural continuity, familiarity and beauty of the local environment; attracting people and investments; improving urban amenity and livability; tourism development; proportionate growth of jobs; better local expenditure-retention in regional areas; economic diversification; and cost and energy efficiency in building practices (Sustainable Strategy of Western Australia, 2003 in Loulanski, 2006; Lynn, 2010). Developing a relationship between tourism and culture brings an enhanced image of the local community, social cohesion, support for the cultural sector, and increased innovation and creativity (OECD, 2009).

Many scholars believe that tourism leads to the commoditization of an area, especially some aspects of its unique culture, which now serves as a tourist product. Such commoditization in tourism is most evident in local cultures and sexual services in the form of tourist-oriented prostitution (Greenwood, 1977, in Cohen, 1988). It is also believed that commoditization destroys the authenticity of local cultural products and human relations; instead, a surrogate, covert "staged authenticity" emerges (MacCannell, 1973 in Cohen, 1988, pg.372).

At this juncture, we must understand the meaning of commoditization in tourism. Tourism is believed to have led to the commoditization of many things and activities, many of which have been kept out of the market domain before the penetration

of tourism by vigorous normative prohibitions and taboos. Cohen (1983) defined commoditization as a process by which things (and activities) come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange values in a context of trade, thereby becoming goods (and services); developed exchange systems in which the exchange value of things (and activities) is stated in terms of prices form a market. The commoditized cultural products or activities lose their intrinsic meaning and significance for the local people, who, in turn, lose their enthusiasm for producing them (Greenwood, 1977). He further asserted that once a cultural object is commoditized, "its meaning is gone". It is therefore believed that the commoditization of heritage products has a destructive impact on the authenticity and meaning of cultural products.

This commoditization of cultural heritage products is believed to have usually been initiated or championed by culture brokers and tourist entrepreneurs outside the community. As a result, it may lead to the exploitation of locals and their cultural resources by "outsiders". In turn, the cultural products are themselves affected negatively. But, it is equally important to state that commoditization does not necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural products, neither for the locals nor the tourists. However, it may do so under certain conditions and would have important implications for tourism's social and cultural impacts. In other words, the negative impact of commoditization of cultural heritage products for tourism can be mostly felt in social and cultural impacts. Some scholars believe that by using history to create experiences for tourists, the history of a site can be altered, and in some cases, recreated into something completely false (Cohen, 1988; Herbert, 1995 in Wiles and Vander-Stoep, 2007).

Instances of Revitalization Using Historical Heritage Resources

Many authors and agencies/organizations concerned with historic preservation have considered it a critical factor for urban revitalization. This phenomenon (i.e. historic preservation) in the United States is believed to have evolved into an urban profession by the start of the twenty-first century (Ryberg-Webster and Kinahan, 2014). Research has shown that historical presentation in heritage tourism brings about neighbourhood redevelopment and downtown revitalization (Sohmer and Lang, 1998, in Ryberg-Webster and Kinahan, 2014). Stanziola (1999), while giving instances of revitalization using Art, Culture and heritage, has equally demonstrated that in eighteenth-century Spain, Charles III used the Museum of Science... to improve the dilapidated image of the area surrounding the south entrance of Madrid (Rico, 1997, in Stannziola, 1999). But this is not without challenges to the authenticity of the historic properties, as there has been the problem of preservation of "cultural integrity" while promoting a historical monument or district as a tourist attraction.

Conclusion

Heritage can increase tourism flow to an area with positive and negative impacts. It brings many benefits to a local economy but can also disturb the residents' quality of life. Suppose during the development process, the heritage attraction is not properly managed. In that case, this may lead to a loss of authenticity of that attraction in the long run, which is the major factor pulling tourists to the destination/attraction (Doganer and Dupont, 2013). The concept of authenticity suggests that the representation of the past has to be done in a certain way, doing justice to the original or real. Heritage

sites must have characteristics of history and tradition capable of motivating tourists to visit these places. While packaging a site or event for heritage tourism, it is advised that developers should focus on authenticity and quality. This will impact value and appeal to the heritage tourist (Lynn, 2010).

In general, cultural heritage tourism development is faced with the problems of morphed cultural forms, lack of deliverance of authentic experiences and financial depravity (OECD, 2009), and in practice, only relatively few tourism professionals and entrepreneurs all over the world try to turn the cumulative effect of culture-based tourism or cultural heritage tourism towards positive consequences by paying attention to the issues like authenticity and experiencing live realities (Ray 2008, p.26).

It is important to note that in this present-century tourism marketplace, only those destinations with a clear-cut or clearly defined market position and appealing attractions remain at the top of the consumer's (tourists') mind when booking or choosing their choice destinations. Therefore, there is a need to develop a clear identity or "brand" based on reality while reflecting its products' core strengths and personality, especially in this highly competitive and dynamic global tourism environment (Heritage Tourism Note). The increasing number of tourist visits to cultural attractions has triggered the consciousness or conscious efforts for the preservation and management of cultural heritage in rural/local communities in many parts of the world. In developed areas, cultural attractions include museums, plays and orchestral and other musical performances. In less developed areas, they might include traditional religious practices, handicrafts or cultural performances (WTO in Heritage Tourism Note). Nuryanti (1996), while trying to show some of the challenges of cultural heritage tourism, noted that, in marketing heritage, concerns are often expressed when heritage preservation appears to clash with private enterprise in delivering the experience to tourists. The issues are often related to perceiving "authenticity and falsification" involved in the production and reproduction of culture (Corner and Harvey, 1991; MacCannell, 1992 in Nuryanti, 1996).

Heritage tourism is a big business; when handled correctly, it has the potential or capacity to transform a region (Doganer and Dupont, 2013). The main allure of tourism as an industry lies in the authentic experience of derivable from it. Bound up in representations of reality and truth, notions of authenticity are preferred by the actuality of the tourist settings and the tourists' actions. The authentic experience of an area includes the non-material intangible attributes that come from the people of a place because, without the people, there is no living culture to experience (Doganer and Dupont, 2013). ICOMOS (1965) identified the historical and physical context of a site or a building as the primary markers of authenticity (Zhu, 2017). Wiles and Vander-Stoep (2007), using the case of Manistee and Ludington Michigan, have demonstrated that heritage tourism stakeholders consider historic preservation and historical authenticity essential to heritage tourism development. However, other factors, such as providing tourists with an engaging and entertaining experience, have created inauthentic contexts, stories and experiences at some sites. People tend to bring in replicas and counterfeit and non-original heritage resources, but visitors want to appreciate the real/original culture being packaged.

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