

Pathways For Harnessing The Tourism Potential Of Natural And Cultural Sites And Features On The Nsukka Okigwe Cuesta

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Abstract

Natural and cultural sites and features, in different parts of the world, are important tourist attractions today which have helped immensely in increasing wealth and in raising the standard of living of the various communities around which they are located. Unfortunately, this has not been the case with Nigeria whose landscape is replete with natural and cultural sites such as archaeological sites of various types and dimension. Rather than harness their potential for tourism development and promotion in Nigeria, they have been sacrificed to other land use activities such as farming, road and house construction, dam and pipe-line construction without mitigating the adverse impact of these activities on the natural and cultural heritage. The Nsukka –Okigwe Cuesta in south-eastern Nigeria, the focus of this paper, is one of such areas of the country with a significant spread of this natural and cultural sites and features. These sites and features have been identified and surveyed and pathways have also been suggested for their development and promotion as tourist attractions. It is the intention of this paper therefore, to highlight these suggested pathways that could be followed to enable these sites, with emphasis on archaeological sites, to be properly harnessed for the benefits of tourism and its development and promotion in these areas.

Introduction

Many natural and cultural sites and features have been located in several parts of Igboland, in South-Eastern Nigeria and they include the stone axe factory site, iron- working sites, caves and rock- shelters, abandoned

habitations, groves and shrine sites. Others are historic buildings, some of which have been declared national monuments, museums, blacksmithing workshops, pottery, cloth and mat weaving centers. The distribution, however, shows that a larger concentration of these sites and features is located on the Nsukka- Okigwe cuesta, a prominent land- form feature in the northern part of Igboland. The nature of the spatial aggregation of these sites and features suggest that, give the present states of knowledge, we have a higher degree of clustering of these sites and features on the cuesta than in other parts of Igboland. This is particularly so with archaeological sites.

In an attempt to gather data that could help in achieving the objective of inventorying, documenting and harnessing the tourism potential of the sites and features on the cuesta, a number of data collection strategies were adopted. Consequently, archaeological, geographical and ethnographic methods were adopted, given the interdisciplinary orientation of the study. The archaeological method adopted was direct observation involving mainly systematic archaeological reconnaissance to inventorize and map all the located sites and features on the cuesta. For site mapping, the rapid survey methods were used.

The geographical method involved the production of a distribution map of all the sites and features in the study area using the map- based approach.

In this map, individual sites and features were plotted and treated as points in order to highlight the nature of their distribution in space while information on all the site and features in the study area was collated and presented in a table as database for all the sites and features.

The ethnographic method involved surveys of the areas around which the sites and features are located in order to gather relevant ethnographic data. To achieve this objective, oral interviews were held with the local residents and various social groups sometimes using the focus group interview method. Another reason for the oral interviews was to find out the people's perception of these sites and features and to create awareness among them about the importance of these sites and features as tourist attractions.

In order to harness the tourism potential of these sites and features therefore, a number of pathways have been suggested. These include the developing of tourist circuits around the located sites, developing visitor facilities within designated sites and the involvement of the various states-holders through a participatory approach and the use of adequate publicity. These sites when properly harnessed can be used to promote tourism in these areas, as has been achieved with similar natural and cultural sites and features

in other parts of the world such as Egypt, Turkey, Zimbabwe and the United State of America.

Definition Of Concepts

Tourism:

The word Tourism Organization (WTO) at an International Government Conference held in Ottawa, Canada in 1991, defined Tourism as “Comprising the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes” (Holloway, J.C.2006)

A common definition that has been accepted for decades sees tourism as “the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs (Hunt, J.D and Layne, D. 1991).

Tourist Circuit

A circuit is described as a journey or trip round a place such as sites or monuments. The journey or tour begins from an origin to destination (s) and ends at the origin. “Tourist circuits must be planned, mapped and tested to give satisfaction to the visitors, economic viability to operators at modest prices to the tourists and for optimum conservation of luring attraction”(Okpoko, P.U. 1990).

Brief Description of the Cuesta Land Scope (see fig1)

Structurally, the Nsukka – Okigwe cuesta is a range of hills which stand as a distinctive mark on the landscape of south- eastern Nigeria with a spectacular combination of highlands and valleys an a symphonic diversity of saddles and convex summits (Ezeadichie, 200:4 in Ekechukwu, 2002: 2). It is referred to as a cuesta because of the monoclonal structure of its component morphology (Iloeje, 1961:21; Ofomata, 1970:20). The cuesta could conveniently be divided into three sections, namely:- the Nsukka plateau; the Udi- Awgu Highlands and the Okigwe Scarplands.

The Nsukka Plateau which forms the northern aspect of the cuesta is said to exhibit a distinct upland topography consisting of a summit of between 360 and 480 meters above sea- level. The dominant physiographic features of the Nsukka plateau land mass are the fork-like ridges trending in the NW-SE direction from Amufi and fork-Ezike in the north toward Okpuje

Pathways Suggested

In order to harness the tourism potential of the identified sites and features on the Nsukka – Okigwe cuesta, a number of pathways have been suggested. These pathways when followed could lead to the development of a viable and sustainable tourism capable of generating a high domestic tourism traffic in these areas and could also serve as a catalyst for domestic tourism development in other parts of south- eastern Nigeria. Since domestic tourism has always accounted for a greater percentage of world total tourists movement and given the fact that the bulk of Nigeria’s tourists would usually come from within (Okpoko, P.U.128), the need to harness the rich culture resources of the country, such as located on the cuesta, for domestic tourism promotion cannot be over –emphasized.

Tourist Circuits

One of the pathways suggested for harnessing the potential of these sites and features on the cuesta is by developing tourist circuits around the identified sites (Ekechukwu,2002: 181).

Such tourist circuits will cover important cultural & natural sites identified on the cuesta and will incorporate important traditional institutions, monuments and other places of historic interest. The three tourist delimited on the cuesta are the Nsukka plateau, the Udi- Awgu highlands and the Okigwe Scarp lands tourist circuits, respectively. These tourist circuits follow the three geographical/ geomorphological zones earlier delimited. For each circuit, attempt was made to identify important natural and cultural resources that could attract the attention of tourists when harnessed and presented. Each circuit when fully developed and properly administered will have a take –off point and a terminus and trips could be arranged much more regularly especially during the dry season.

The Nsukka Plateau Tourist Circuit

This circuit will incorporate important natural and cultural sites and features on the plateau as well as craft centers, monuments and other places of historic interest. Important archaeological sites in this circuit include the iron-smelling sites at Lejja, Umundu, Opi, Owere-Elu, Ukehe, Idoha and Aku, the Ogbodo –Aba catacombs (burial chambers), the Obukpa rock shelter, Nguru Obimo cave site, the Okpe Igara and the University of Nigeria farm site. Important craft centres identified include those of pottery, cloth and grass weaving as well as blacksmithing centres at Umundu and Eha-Alumona. Notable monuments identified include Chief Odo Nwokolo’s

Palace at Ukehe (this building was declared a national monument in 1964); the Nsukka residence of Late Chief Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (the Onuiyi Haven), which is a personal memorial or biographical museum in its own right, Chief Atama Nwamba's old palace at Eha-Alumona, (see fig 2). Traditional institutions and other places of historic interest also identified in this circuit include the various shrines and groves associated with certain deities such as the Adoro at Aro-Uno, the Museum village at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and the Institute of African Studies museum also located at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Also included is the University campus itself which could serve as the take-off or starting point of the circuit.

The Udi-Awgu Highlands Tourist Circuit

This circuit includes important archaeological sites, monuments , traditional institutions and places of historic interest. Notable archaeological sites in this circuit include the iron-smelting sites at Obeagu, Uyukwe, Okwe, Achi, Obeleagu Umuana and Umuaga: the cave sites at Obeagu which number more than ten. Monuments and other places of historic and cultural interest are the National Museum of Unity, Enugu; Chief Onyeama's Old palace at Fke, near Enugu, blacksmithing centers at Agulu-Umana, Oghe and Umuaga; pottery, cloth and mat weaving and other craft centers at Inyi, Obeagu, Awkananaw, Ekulu and Achi. Also included in this circuit is the Onyeama Coal mines on the Udi highlands which is a cultural attractoin by virtue of it's affective value to man.

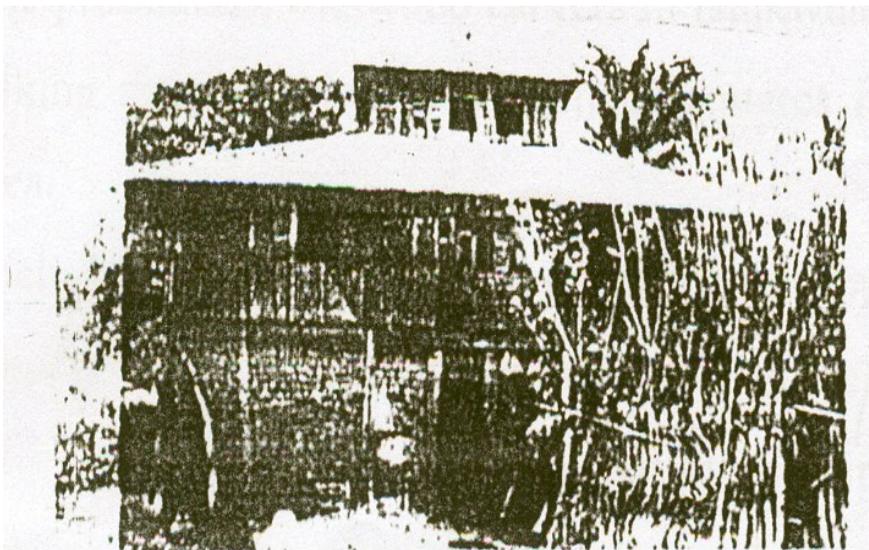


FIG 2

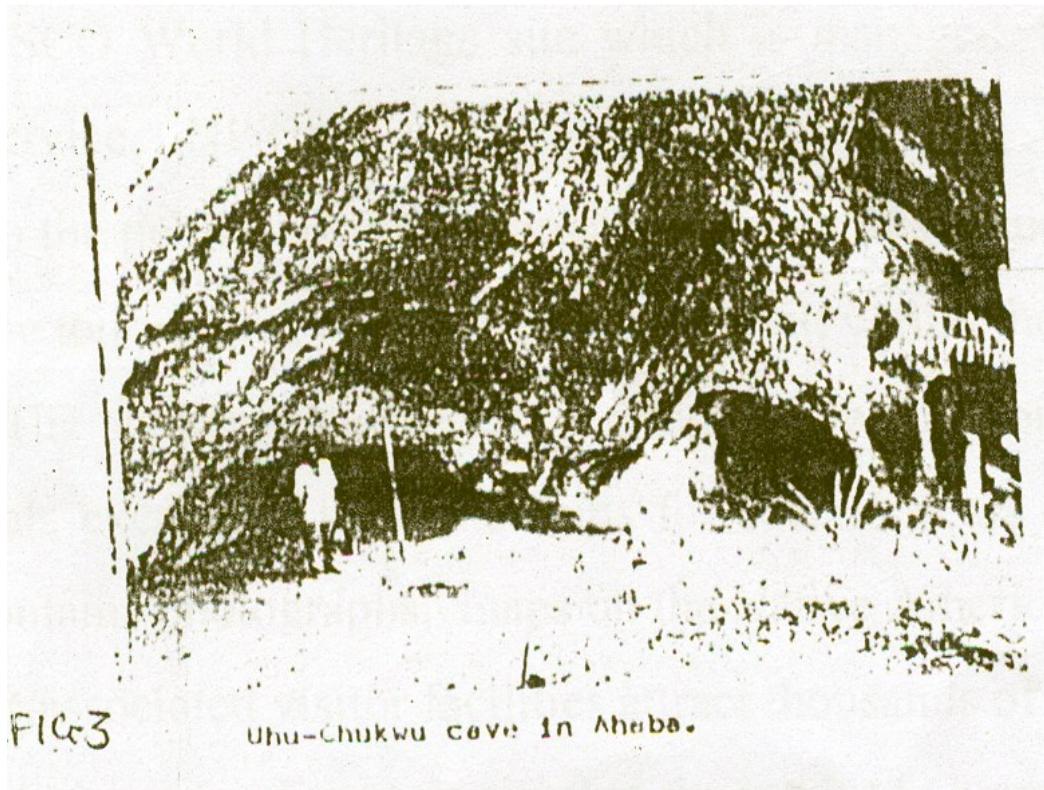
Chief Nwamba's House at Ehalumona.

The Okigwe Scarplands Tourist Circuit

Like the other tourist circuits described above, the Okigwe, Scarplands circuit includes important archeological sites, monuments and places of historic interest and traditional institutions. The archaeological sites include the stone-axe factory site at Ugwuele, Uturu, iron-smelting sites at Ihube and Isu-ikwuato, the Nkoto caves at Ihube, the Uhuchkwu cave at Ahaba Imemyi; the Omu cave at Otampkpa, the Oguagbor and Isiume (Ngodo) at Uturu and the Uhu-Nnem Chukwu rock shelter at Ovim, the Ulonna (Obi-nna) abandoned habitation sites at Ahaba Imenyi. Important monuments identified in this circuit are the Ngidi mound at Ovim, Mgbe Aja Amaeke Ovim figurines, the Amuta sacred groves and shrine, Agballa-Aku Amuzu memorial figurines and the Obi Ahu monument in Obiaguta, Uturu, Also included are blacksmithing workshops located at Ihube, Ugwuogu in Uturu, Umuokogbue, Umuobiala and Amiyi Obiloaha communities of Isuikwuato. Weaving and other craft centers in Ihube and Uturu also come under this circuit. It is important to note that both Uturu and Ihube are famous for mat weaving in Igboland using the mid-rib of the Pandanus Palm as their raw materials.

The products of the wood carvers in Isuikwuato include the “Ikoro” wooden talking drums which adorn village squares in various communities of the area.

Each delimited circuit, when operational, should be provided with a tourists guide/brochure for the benefit of tourists. The guide/brochure should contain a background information about the area covered by the circuit such as the geography of the area and the people and culture of the area. The guide/brochure should also embody other important information such as the description of each site within the circuit in terms of accessibility, tourist features and other facilities available at each site. A road map of the circuit should be included in the guide/brochure.



Developing Visitor Facilities within the Sites

Another avenue identified for harnessing the potential of the abundant, archaeological and other cultural resources located on the Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta, for the promotion of cultural tourism is by developing visitor facilities within designated sites. The facility complex, often known as the visitor centre usually include the reception/lounge area, an information centre, a shop selling books and other items such as souvenirs related to the site, snack bar or restaurant, an exhibit area or small museum about the site and other facilities like toilets, parking space for cars and tour buses (Inskeep, 1991 in Ekechukwu, 2009). Well-presented information at the information centre and the small museum (on-site museum) can help visitors/tourists appreciate the many different values of the sites and can enrich the experience of visiting the sites (Ekechukwu, 2002). A few examples will help buttress the point. At Chaco Canyon in North-Western New Mexico in the United State of American, the Native American Anasazi established a series of settlements. The magnificent archaeological ruins of this ancient

community now form the Chaco Culture National Historic Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site which is managed, by the U.S National Park Service (NPS).

To help public/visitors appreciate the various values of the site and also generate tourism, a “visitor centre” was built within the ruins.

The centre consists of a series of exhibition galleries in which materials excavated from the ruins for several years now are exhibited. It also contains photographs, maps on the Native American Anasazi. The ruins with its associated visitor facilities attract thousands of tourists every year.

At Luxor in Egypt, is situated the tomb of Queen Nefertari, one of the Queens of the Pharaonic Egypt. Through a collaborative programme between the Egyptian Antiquities Organization and the Getty Conservation Institute in California, U.S.A the tomb’s elaborative wall paintings were conserved and subsequently the tomb was opened to tourists who have been visiting the site from different parts of the world (Agnew, N. 1997:6). The tomb itself can be described as an on-site museum or a museum “in-situ” and with the wall paintings, grave goods and other information materials such as brochures and charts, the visitors can appreciate the various values of the tomb and its place in Egyptian history and culture.

In line with the above examples, on-site museums or visitor information centres can be built around some of the identified sites on the Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta in order to achieve similar objectives. At Otobo Dunoka in Lejja, for instance, where blocks of iron-slag are arranged at the village square, a visitor information center or on-site museum can be built with pictorial illustrations and other displays that could show – case the process of iron-smelting in that area in the past. This will that doubt help to educate and inform the public including the local inhabitants on the significance of the slag blocks and also enlist their support in any efforts to preserve this important cultural property. A similar thing can be done at Ugwuele, Uturu in Okigwe to educate and inform the local inhabitants and the visitors about the importance of those stone tools as part of the people’s cultural heritage. At the Ugwuele stone-axe factory site, pictorial illustrations of previous excavations as well as stone tools can be displayed in the site-museum to enrich the visitors experience. The visitor centre could also exhibit some of the unique contemporary arts and crafts of these areas to complement the archaeological exhibits. Another pathway that could be followed in harnessing the potential of these sites and feature for the promotion of cultural tourism is by integrating the various traditional festivals celebrated in the various communities on the cuesta during the year,

with these archaeological tours. This could be achieved by producing festival calendars for the various circuits and planning and scheduling tours to coincide with the celebration of these festivals and routing the tours through the venues of these festivals, sometimes these sites and features could be chosen as the venues for these festivals. For example, the *Ngidi* Mound in Ovim in Isuikwuato, the venue of the famous Ikungidi masquerade festival, could be chosen as one of the tour destinations. Similarly, the Obinna abandoned habitation site in Ahaba Imenyi, Isikwuato, where the founding father of Isuikwuato clans is said to have lived in antiquity and the venue of certain festivals involving the three clans that make up Isuikwuato in honour of their Ogundu goddess could be another venue. Such venue can be incorporated into the circuit and tours can be organized during the celebration of these festivals. At the archaeological site of Ephesus in Turkey, an international festival known as the international Ezmir festival is usually held in the ancient theater at the ruins of Ephesus (Torre and Maclean 1992:12).

It is important to note, that the Igbo communities, on the Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta, along with their other Igbo neighbours have rich cultural festivals some of which are celebrated annually.

Among the Igbo communities of the Nsukka Plateau, the *Omabe* masquerade festival is widely celebrated. In Ukehe communities, the *Odo*, the cult that symbolizes their ancestors and dead relations like the *Omabe*, is celebrated along with other festivals. In the Okigwe scarplands, the people of Isuikuwuato are associated with a number of cultural festivals like the “*Ajala-Ebe*”, “*Oke-Ekpe*”, *Ahia-Ehgwu* and the “*Ajonkwu*” festivals, among others. The Uturu communities also celebrate a variety of festivals like the “*Oru-nta*”, “*Achi-Cha*”, “*Gbudugu*” festivals, among others. These abundant and rich cultural festivals can be harnessed and embodied in the various circuits to boost and enrich the tours in these circuits.

Stake-Holder Involvement and Adequate Publicity

In order to meaningfully plan and develop the natural and cultural resources there is the need to adopt a participatory approach that will involve all the stake-holders. Some of the identified stake-holders include members of the local communities in the areas where these sites are located, the Local Government Tourism communities in these areas, the State Tourism Boards, the Councils for Arts and Culture in these States, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and the Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation. These government agencies in charge of tourism matters should collaborate with representatives of these communities where these sites are

located to plan and develop them into Tourists products that could generate a huge flow of Tourist traffic. These agencies along with the local communities can also partner with the private sector such as site developers, tour operating companies, property companies, to realize the above objectives. In order to reach the target markets both within and outside the local communities, the need for adequate publicity cannot be over emphasized. Publicity using the appropriate language and materials will help to attract visitors to the sites. Publicity materials that could be used include the tour brochure (manual of electric), bill-boards, production of souvenirs embossed with the pictures of the sites. The use of brochures, both manual and electronic, as a marketing tool for advertising and promoting tourist products across the world, has become a common practice today. Information on important cultural and natural attractions in Nigeria should be made available on the worldwide web in order to create awareness about them and arouse some curiosity in the minds of people in Nigeria's primary tourism markets (Ekechukwu 2009:16). Promotional campaign using the various media of communication should be used to advertise the various circuits and for creating tourism awareness among the people of these areas.

Discussion of Conclusion

Natural and cultural sites and features that have survival from the past such as those located on the Nsukka-Okigwe custa can be transformed into tourist attractions. This is been achieved with sites and feature in different parts of the world such as Egypt, Turkey, Zimbabwe and the United States of America. When these sites are developed into tourist attractions, it could create the demand for goods and services which may, in turn, lead to the creation and expansion of some local industries. If the archeological sites at Ihube and Uturu are developed into tourist attractions, the demand for some local crafts like mats and hats produced from the Pandamus palm, that grow in the area, will increase, this could lead to a boost in the local economy. Similarly, the development of tourism in general and cultural tourism in particular, have often led to the provision and improvement in rural infrastructural facilities such as motorable roads, local airstrips, water and electricity supply. These public utilities are usually provided or extended to the rural communities where these sites are located. If such facilities are provided by the interested private sectors such as tour operating agencies or

site developer or by government agencies for the comfort of tourists, they are at the same time being made available to be local communities of these areas.

Besides, tourism is known to create jobs at various levels that are essential to the growth of the rural and national economies of a country. For instance, tourist guides, interpreters and site managers could be recruited from within the local communities by the tour operators, Local Government Tourism Committees or the State Tourism Boards, when these sites are developed and become operational. The stakeholders such as the Local Government Tourism Communities, the State Tourism Boards, in the states around the cuesta such as Enugu, Imo and Abia, should join forces with the local communities in these areas to harness the abundant tourism potential of these sites and features. This could go a long way in generating a viable and suitable cultural tourism in this part of the country with the accompanying socio-economic benefits.

Tourism in general and heritage tourism, in particular, has made giant strides in the socio-economic development and prosperity of many nations. Nigeria with abundant natural and cultural resources can take advantage of these by developing her rich sites and features, especially those located on the Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta, to promote tourism through the various pathways enumerated above.

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