

TRADITIONAL WRESTLING FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM IN BAYELSA STATE

OPIGO, E. HELEN PhD
Department of Entrepreneurship and Marketing
Faculty of Management Sciences
Federal University Otuoke
Bayelsa State
helenopigo@yahoo.com_opigohh@fuotuo.ke.edu.ng

ABSTRACT: *Report suggests that the tourism sector in the world is experiencing exponential growth, outperforming other sectors like oil exportation, food and automobile production and many developing counties like Kenya, Tanzania and Ghana are cashing in on it. Meanwhile, Bayelsa state, which is one of the 36 states in Nigeria, with a two-digit unemployment rate that has several cultural heritage tourism potentials like wrestling, is struggling to generate internal revenue. Cultural heritage tourism has the potential for tourist attraction and opportunity to accelerate community development by generating revenues and creating employment. The purpose of this study is to assess the adequacy of traditional wrestling as tourism potential in Bayelsa state and investigate the impediments surrounding its non-development. The method of investigation was descriptive; using structured examination of published scholarly papers in academic journals, reports and the Internet. These were collated and summarized as related to the topic. The discourse shows that developing traditional wrestling in Bayelsa state will be encumbered with problems including security, hence the need for political will by the government, assisted by private sector operators and host communities to solve the problems for tourism to commence.*

Keywords: Cultural heritage, tourism, destination, potential, possibilities, Bayelsa state,

INTRODUCTION

Definitions and Importance of Tourism

The definition of tourism as adopted by the UNWTO, which is frequently used today, says that, tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, which involves the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or professional reasons. These people who are either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents carry out activities which involve tourism expenditure among others (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2008). This definition includes tourism between countries as well as intra-country, and refers to both 'tourists' and 'same-day visitors. Tourists (visitors) are generally divided into the following categories

1. Domestic Tourism: residents of a country visiting destinations in the own country
2. Inbound Tourism: visits to a country by non-residents.
3. Outbound Tourism: residents of a country visiting destinations in other countries.
4. Internal Tourism: the combination of domestic tourism and inbound tourism,
5. National Tourism: the combination of domestic and outbound tourism.
6. International Tourism: the combination of inbound and outbound tourism.

The tourism sector continues to observe exponential growth, outperforming the growth of several sectors in the global economy (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017), such as oil exportation, food and automobile production (UNWTO, 2016). Given this fact, it becomes vital to develop tourism industry in states where there are possibilities in order to reap the benefits of these potentials. Tourism contributes to economic growth through foreign currency earnings, attracting international investment, increasing tax revenues and creating additional employment opportunities (Alam, 2016 et al). The impact of global tourism shows that it is an activity of considerable economic importance.

Tourism is not only a basis for income and employment creation, but serves as a major factor in the balance of payments of several countries, and has gained a lot of attention with many governments, regional and local authorities, business investors, and others with an interest in economic development. In a pioneer paper, Kraph (1961) suggests that tourism has a special purpose in developing countries, a purpose which he defined as “economic imperatives”, as follows:

- Exploitation of the countries’ own natural resources,
- International competitiveness due to favorable terms of trade,
- An ability to provide internally many of the goods and services required,
- Improved balance of payments,
- Social utility of investments in tourism: employment generation and multiplier effect
- Balanced growth

Kraph (1961) suggested that tourism has an apparent ability to generate, from limited investment in plant and infrastructure, large sums of capital, which may be reassigned to other sectors of the economy. Such action contributes to the growth of the developing country through the multiplier effect of tourism, the creation of employment, enhancement of education and professionalism, increased public pride, public revenue, foreign direct investment and foreign exchange earnings.

Tourism Destination

Tourist destinations across the world compete with each other, in order to retain their charm and competitiveness in the global tourism industry. That being the case the need arises, for destination authorities to address the different needs of different market segments, and promote their image and manage destinations in a way that attracts tourists. This means that, they need to effectively implement Destination Marketing, such as promoting tourist destinations as a means of improving their imagery and popularity (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). According to Koutoulas and Zoyganeli (2007), an attraction is a place or state of nature, a potential resource until it is developed and cannot be called a tourist attraction, until the existence of a particular type of development, such as provision of accessibility or facilities. Hence tourism destination is everything that exists and provided by the tourism destination, that has tourism resources and developed to have appeal and sought after by tourists. Destination Marketing takes place at two Levels: At the micro-level, independent tourist operators, such as transportation agencies and hotels, support the products and services they offer in the industry. At the macro-level: governments and other official authorities support their countries and states as tourist destinations

Pierce (1996) observed tourist destination from five sectors namely attractions, accommodation, transport, supporting facilities and infrastructure. He argued that attractions inspire tourists to visit locations, the transport services assist them to do so, the accommodation and supporting facilities e.g. banks, restaurants, hotels, shops cater for the tourist's well-being during their stay, whilst the infrastructure guarantees the essential functioning of all the above sectors. The tourism industry is frequently defined as those enterprises and organizations involved in facilitating travel and activity away from one's usual environment like restaurants, hotels and banks. The problem with this definition is that many enterprises that produce commodities for tourists also serve non-tourists (Nelson et al, 1993).

Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism was given a new operational definition from the UNWTO at the 22nd Session of the General Assembly held in Chengdu, China. (UNWTO, 2017: 18): The definition suggests that the tourist's essential motivation is to discover experience, learn and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions relate to a set of distinctive material: spiritual, intellectual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, literature, music, creative industries historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions.

This new definition confirms the much broader definition of contemporary cultural tourism, which relates not just to sites and monuments but also to ways of life, creativity and 'everyday culture'. As the UNWTO (2018) report emphasizes, the field of cultural tourism has moved away from the previous emphasis on classic western tangible heritage towards a much broader and inclusive field of diverse cultural practices, which includes wrestling.

Tourism is one of the vital export industries and earner of foreign exchange in many countries. It is a resource industry, dependent upon nature's endowment and society's heritage. A locality's natural appeal may rest upon one (or more) of its Physical attributes: the climate, landforms, landscapes, flora or fauna; whilst socio-cultural heritage may draw tourists seeking to enjoy centers of learning or entertainment, to visit places of interest or historical significance or to view buildings or ruins of buildings. Socio-cultural attractions may also extend to the perusal of artifacts or works of art; the experience of customs, rituals or performing arts; enjoyment of foreign cuisine; or festivals and spectacles (Williams, 2003:71). Recently people have begun to be interested in the existing local cultures, besides seeing places of ancient civilizations (Emekli, 2006: 54).

With the growth of some traditional local events over time, many events have gained the characteristics of festivals and evolved to become attractions for visitors, targeted tourist markets (Smith & Forest, 2006:140,148) and become an essential part of cultural tourism. Today, there are various traditional events and festivals in various countries such as the bullfights, which are associated with Spain and Mexico whilst Japan and Turkey observe different forms of it Turkoglu (1990). In Nigeria these events and festivals include: New Yam Festival held between August and October yearly, where the festivities usually last for a week or more in some areas in Igbo land which include prayers offered by the King or the eldest man in the community, masquerade dances and contemporary events such as fashion shows and beauty pageants. The Calabar Carnival Dubbed Africa's largest carnival on the other hand is a

must-see event for visitors and tourists. The carnival began in 2004 as a means of attracting tourists to the city of Calabar with a month-long event featuring displays of African culture music, dance, drama, and fashion, all in an explosion of bright colors. The event attracts thousands of visitors from all over the world, both as participants as well as spectators.

Traditional wrestling in Bayelsa State

There are several cultural tourism possibilities in Bayelsa state such as the traditional masquerades and enthralling dances, historical and colonial relics. Bayelsa is home to the historical relics of the Akassa slave transit camps and tunnel, the colonial cemetery at Akassa and Brass where the graves of some colonial masters are located. There are also natural sandy beaches especially at Agge and Twon Brass in Ekeremor and Brass local governments areas respectively. The Palm Beach at Agge is reputed for having a long stretch of coastline with tidal waves, which intermittently flush on the shores, providing possibilities for surfing and many other tourist activities. The Edumanom Forest Reserve is yet another tourist possibility in the state, which remains the last known site for Chimpanzees and Elephants in the Niger Delta. Yet another tourist possibility in Bayelsa state is traditional wrestling, which is practiced by every community in the state.

Given the diverse tourism possibilities and rich cultural heritage in the state, traditional wrestling could be harnessed into the tourism industry because it is one of the most celebrated cultural heritage activity in all the communities in Bayelsa state, on the occasions of burials, coronations, visit of dignitaries etc., hence the tourism board should take note. Traditional wrestling is a practice linked to the rhythm of a community's life, and involves all members of the community especially the pre-wrestling event called Ogele, which sees the participation of men, women and children who campaign for their champion (Olotu) prior to the tournament. By social agreement, the practical organization of traditional wrestling competition rests with the youth in the community. In other words traditional wrestling obeys customary norms and practices and performances attached to it.

Traditional wrestling is a combat sport involving two opponents, using grapple, clinch, throws, takedowns, joint locks, pins etc., A winner emerges when an opponent's back touched the ground. The Sport demands strength, accuracy, coordination, balance and knowledge of the human body and attracts large crowds when villages compete against each other at the public square. From a tourism perspective, festivals create 'product', a destination, and promise a glimpse into the authentic culture of a place (Quinn, 2006:301). Traditional wrestling certainly is a product and Bayelsa State, a destination hence this study's desire to project traditional wrestling as a potential tourist attraction that promises a glimpse into the authentic culture of the people.

Objectives of Study

The objective of this study is to assess the adequacy of traditional wrestling as tourism potential in Bayelsa state and investigated the impediments surrounding its non-development thus the specific objectives are as follows:

1. Assess the adequacy of traditional wrestling as tourism potential in Bayelsa state
2. Investigated the impediments to non-development of traditional wrestling for cultural tourism.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of study the following research questions were addressed:

1. Is traditional wrestling adequate as tourism potential in Bayelsa state?
2. What are the impediments to traditional wrestling as tourism potential in Bayelsa state?

Significance of the study

This study will be of great importance to the government of Bayelsa state who are looking for ways to generate internal revenue and create employment for its people. It will also help researchers going into this area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aimed at researching the potential of traditional wrestling in Bayelsa state, thus the research methodology adopted was descriptive, since information was collected without changing the environment. Specifically the phenomenon Tourism was investigated through in-depth and structural examination of published scholarly papers in academic journals, reports and the Internet. They were summarized and collated as related to cultural wrestling in Bayelsa state.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When tourists arrive a destination for leisure, it is expected that the activities they undertake will mainly be focused on recreation (Smith, 1992). Tourist infrastructure includes physical, legal, environmental and mental amenities, which contribute to making a tourism product (in this case traditional wrestling event) enjoyable, reliable and sustainable (Khadaroo & Seetanah 2007). Hansen (1965) and Mera (1973) consider tourism infrastructure to be a sum of economic and social overhead capital. Economic capital focuses on supporting productive activities (e.g. roads, streets, bridges etc.), whilst social capital enhances human capital, provided through social services (e.g. public health and education). Tourism infrastructure provides prerequisites for development, while recreational facilities are meant to improve everyday life and made available to local community and visitors on a daily basis (Bell et al. 2007; Lewinson, 2001). These recreational facilities include, tracks for hiking, trekking and trails to sports halls, water parks and swimming pools (Hadzik & Grabara, 2014; Heldt, 2010). Lohmann & Netto, (2017) on the other hand argues that recreational facilities include all those facilities that tourists use in their homes, and hope to use when they arrive their tourist destinations. Fourie and Santana-Gallego (2011), Hadzik and Gabana (2014), supporting the argument said that most of the tourism infrastructures are those constantly used by residents.

Tourism increases the demand for infrastructural services such as water supply, waste disposal, communication and electricity supply, as necessary elements for comfortable functioning of tourists. Infrastructure also includes the provision of public safety, transportation services, medical systems, financial systems, education systems, and other services involved in the population.

Developing cultural tourism in wrestling in Bayelsa state therefore requires the development of the necessary infrastructure. The transportation sector is vital to the success of the tourism industry. Put simply, if tourists cannot move from place to place, by road, sea, or air, then, there will be no industry. Today, land travel for sightseeing is achieved with taxis, car rentals and walking. In Bayelsa state the transportation infrastructure is neither well managed nor developed to deliver residents and visitor's needs. The entire transportation system is in the hands of, private stakeholders, while the tourist boards' lack financial and human resources

to get involved in the process. Visitors to Bayelsa are not only confronted with poor roads and poor transportation system but are confronted with no proper labeling of streets and houses, and no reliable guide map, illustrating what to see in a given destination. People depend often on oral descriptions, which most times are imprecise. Similar to the infrastructural deficiencies is the lack of organized tour operators necessary to marketing tour destinations. Visitors are also confronted with unreliable electricity.

Security considerations feature prominently in tourism decisions, since negative occurrences usually make the news more than “good news”, it is not surprising that most unstable societies often do not enjoy high tourism patronage. As the information concerning various societies are transmitted through the news, this influences the way the public view the story as well as the people involved in the events. Thus, the mass media through subtle means create unconscious images of the people and events, which ultimately influences the way they relate with the realities surrounding the concepts (Asakitikpi, 2009). The more favorable a country is ranked on security the more progress they would make in tourism, and vice versa. Even though Bayelsans are generally described as friendly to visitors, incessant threat to security of lives and properties remains a major concern to potential tourists.

For tourism in traditional wrestling in Bayelsa state to be operationalized, the necessary infrastructures and enabling environment and information on traditional wrestling must be available. Enabling environment in this case refers to all the parameters required to make a complete tour, such as good roads, functional telecommunications, good accommodation and adequate security. Another important requirement for tourism in traditional wrestling is for the tourism board to come up with wrestling sites and these infrastructures must be available to tourists and the general public. This means that raw data on wrestling sites and infrastructures has to be gathered, processed, structured, then stored and organized in such a way it is easily retrievable from storage Ologun, Taiwo and Adeofun (2010). The tourism sector, need to be funded to develop tourist facilities and wrestling sites to give a better perception of traditional wrestling tourism in Bayelsa state. The optimism here is that the sustenance of the current democratic governance may boost tourism and enhance investment opportunities particularly in the tourism sector. The extent of attracting investors, both local and foreign, into the abundant tourism potentials will depend on the extent good governance is institutionalized.

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