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Sustainable tourism and cultural landscape management: the case of Idanre Hill, Ondo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Idanre rural community has increasingly attracted both domestic and international tourists because of the natural and cultural landscape, and the historic heritage found in the area of Ondo state, Nigeria. This is in part due to the development projects in the form of building and maintaining tourists' facilities at Idanre Hill supported by the Ondo state government. Managing tourism development in a sustainable way in Idanre becomes imperative in order to maintain the cultural and natural environment. The paper aims to understand how issues of sustainability are being conceptualised by the tourism officials responsible for managing the attraction, and how they incorporate sustainability issues into their tourism development and management plans. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were used to gain insights into these issues. The research suggests ways in which the Ministry of Tourism in the state can improve their strategic plans for the sustainable management of Idanre Hill.

Keywords: ancient town, cultural landscape, tourism development, sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, with the increasing demand for cultural and ecological tourism, a greater range of local destinations is becoming more popular (Fisher, 2006). Most of the tourism activities in the local areas are directly or indirectly related to the environment in which they take place. For destinations to survive, stay competitive and continually meet the demands from tourists, it is essential that they plan to be sustainable. Sustainable tourism has become a major area of focus within the body of tourism literature as people seek ways to ensure that tourism development does not hamper the environment and at the same time contributes to the social and economic aspect of the area where development is taking place.

Idanre community represents a popular tourist destination reflecting the evolution of historical, cultural and social development. Therefore, it is imperative to protect tourism development in Idanre to ensure sustainable development of the destination. Also, considering the challenge that tourism managers are often confronted with in Idanre, including issues posed by the local community members who disturb and sometimes threaten the managers of the site. To avoid such conflicts and to ensure success on the part of the management it is necessary that local communities be involved in the planning and implementation of the tourism plan and strategy for the cultural landscape (Fadamiro and Adedeji, 2016).

Sustainability is important for policy makers and administrators in tourism management, especially so in cultural destinations. Government and non-government organisations (NGOs) are aware of past environmental and socio-economic problems and as a result of that they plan to avoid unsustainable development in the future (Lei Tin and Russell, 2014). Numerous organisations such as UNEP, UNDP, NGO's and national development agencies have formally embraced sustainable development as a development strategy (Weiss and Thakur, 2010). Moreover, Lu and Nepal, (2009) found that sustainability is poorly represented in tourism research on developing countries, especially in Africa, and Central and South America. These authors found the need for more research in the area of sustainable tourism in developing countries in Africa, of which Nigeria is one.

Further, rural modernization has been said to have a huge impact on traditional landscapes, thereby making them gradually lose their social identification (Yihui *et al*., 2008). For example, the way the people define themselves as members' of a community and their decision whether to cooperate with tourism development in their community. Similarly, as identified by Fadamiro *et al*. that urbanization and modernization often decrease the cultural value of cultural landscapes (2013). For instance, when the local people belief that tourism development can change the cultural value of their community. Tourism development is resource-oriented, and usually requires the development of facilities to ensure that tourists have a good experience at the destination. Also, the requirements of protecting the core areas of cultural landscapes as mandated by UNESCO for Idanre hill. For these reasons, having a comprehensive sustainable plan can help the development process. A major area of concern for Idanre hill has been that of protecting the ancient Idanre landscape as tourism development causes conflicts of interest between the local community and the government. The importance of protecting and managing cultural landscapes has been echoed by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). As a result of these trends referred to above, the growth in demand for rural destinations and cultural landscape, the importance of sustainable development as indicated by the international bodies UNESCO, IUCN and UNDP, the need for tourism development to preserve local community cultural value etcetera. This aim of this paper is to discuss a sustainable way to develop, protect and manage the resources of the ancient Idanre community.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF IDANRE HILL

A cultural landscape is a geographic area, which includes both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife animals therein, usually associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values (Birnbaum,1994). Idanre hill is a cluster of hills that surrounds Idanre town, the hill is significant for the bio-physical landform features and it role as a cultural landscape (Adisa, 2010). Oke Idanre hill consists of high plain and valleys of about 3,000 feet above sea level. Its physical attributes include Owa's (kings) Palace, the Shrines where the gods are worshiped, Old Court for settling cases among the members of the community, Belfry a bell tower which houses the community bell, a noticeable footprint called

Agbooogun foot print, thunder water (Omi Aopara) and burial mounds and grounds. It also has diverse and variegated eco-systems of flora and fauna. In addition, Oke Idanre contains very important bio-physical and landform features whose interaction with the physical features created an enduring cultural landscape within the setting (UNESCO, 2016). On October 8, 2007 the site was added to the UNESCO World Heritage tentative list in the cultural category in keeping with UNESCO's aim of securing world cultural and natural heritage (UNESCO, 2016). The people of Idanre have lived on the rocks for almost a millennium. Since their emigration down the hill in 1923, the topography, vegetation, fauna and flora have remained largely undisturbed. Nevertheless, the festivals celebrated by the people of Idanre still provide occasions for a reconciliation of the people and their natural environments as well as re-enactments or historical episodes in local Idanre history (UNESCO, 2016).

The natural landscape serves as a host for the following festivals in Idanre; Ogun festival, which is partly celebrated on top of the hill in October; Orosun festival; Mare mountain festival; and Ije festival which lasts for seven days. Aside from these festivals that make the site a living tradition, the fauna and flora of the hill are unique. There is a special species of tailless animal called Hyrax that lives on the rocks, which because of hunting are becoming extinct, and also the monkeys spotted near Orosun hill. The site is home to a group of bats, and the people hold a unique festival of bats every year (Usé) festival (UNESCO, 2016).

Cultural Heritage in Idanre
The cultural heritage found in Idanre includes the "unreadable letters" which is believed to be a mysterious handwriting etched on the rock (Idanre, 2016). It has not been deciphered by anyone since it was noticed on the rock (ibid., 2016). Also, Agbogun footprint is a spectre of a mythical shoeprint which could fit into the size of anyone who put their foot into it, regardless of the size of their foot (Idanre, 2016). It is believed that the imprint was made by the first Oba (King) of Idanre Agbogun (Olorunipa, no date). The footprint served as an effective detector of witches and people who committed wicked acts (Olorunipa, no date). The Arun River is a mysterious river in a serene corner of the hill which derives its source from the hot confines of Aghagha Hill (Adisa, 2010). It is believed that the Arun River has natural power to heal all kinds of illnesses and diseases (Idanre, 2016), and for spiritual cleansing (Adisa, 2010). The ancient palace and courtyard is the venue where the Oba usually held court meetings on the top of the hill at the time the people of Idanre lived there. The palace houses some historical monuments on the history of Idanre town (Adisa, 2010). Furthermore, on the Aghagha hill one can have a view of most parts of the Idanre settlement and the towering rock like the orosun hill (Olorunipa, no date). Lastly, the Owa's Palace is an historic building where the Owa (King) lived and still hosts traditional rites and festivals in Idanre town (The National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 2008).

Festivals Celebrated on Idanre Hill
Firstly, Orosun festival is celebrated annually in May, in honour of Orosun, the wife of Olofin, the progenitor of the Idanre people. She was believed to be the famous Moremi, who had offered her only son for sacrifice in order to save Ile-Ife the cradle of the Yoruba from destruction. She

was credited with providing a cure for childhood killer diseases and restoring the fertility of barren women (Olorunipa, no date).

Secondly the Ije or Iden festival is staged every December, a period of grand scale worshiping of ancestral spirits in appreciation of their protective powers over the community. At the Ije festival the Owa wears the beaded crown of Oduduwa which the founder of Idanre (Olofin) brought from Ile-Ife (Olorunipa, no date).

Thirdly, the Mare mountain climbing festival which was introduced in 2009 is held annually in December. This attracts participants from Nigeria, South Africa and Europe (Idanre, 2016). "MARE" meaning "don't fall" is an international mountain climbing festival, which celebrates the land, the people and its rich culture (Adisa, 2010).

Finally, the Usé (bat) festival takes place every February. It reveals vividly man's interaction with nature evidenced in the topography of Idanre. The festival celebrates a congregation of bats which dwells in the Owa cave, and the people believe that the bats are divine messengers (Olorunipa, no date).

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Tourism development offers opportunities for generating income and employment. Its impact on the environment is also well acknowledged, hence, the emphasis on sustainable tourism (Ayeni and Ebohoh, 2012). While tourism is broadly being valued because of its various benefits, other negative impacts can emerge in tourism development process (Canavan, 2016). The growth in resort development often leads to natural and cultural landscape alteration or even damage, which residents are often not happy with. This can also undermine the attractiveness of tourism in the area (Canavan, 2014). While, tourism activities occur in diverse locations and is often attracted to areas with fragile resources and unique natural heritage and cultural attractions, tourism planning and management is essential (Copper, 2016). Hence, sustainable tourism management has helped with the regulation and care for tourism resources, to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive ones (Buckley, 2002). Fadamiro and Adedeji (2016) highlight the importance of minimising the negative ecological impacts of tourism activities whilst recognising the economic, social and cultural as well as political gains.

Sustainability is the long-term enhancement and conservation of both cultural and natural resources (Fennell, 2008). There has been an increased concern in sustainable tourism development planning (Alipour and Dizdarevic, 2007; Hall 2008). Sustainable tourism provides tourists with destinations or attractions where their tourists activities have a lesser negative impact on the environment (Eugene, Judith and Ushie, 2011). Organisations and policy makers have been quick in adopting sustainable tourism in their policies. The issue seems to lie in the question of whether the sustainable policies formed can indeed foster both social and environmentally sound development. Scheyvens (2011) maintained that political and social issues need greater attention to improve the prospects for achieving sustainable tourism development. Aspects of

sustainability include environmental, economic, social and political (ibid., 2011). Similarly, a sustainable approach to planning involves sustainability in economic, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions (Ruhanen, 2004). Ensuring public awareness on the significance of traditional values is key, and at the same time encouraging the community to be actively involved in the process of landscape management is capable of bringing the much acclaimed economic, social and cultural benefits from tourism (Otilia-Elena Vicol, 2013). Therefore, sustainable tourism development needs to encompass these aspects. Likewise, sustainable tourism development involves sustaining activities of people and tourism institutions to harmonise with all other elements like the environment, history, and socio-cultural values (Ekinci, 2014:178). The UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as tourism which takes into account the current and future economic, environmental and social impacts, and also addresses the visitors, industry, environmental and host communities needs (UNWTO and UNEP, 2005).

The definition of sustainable tourism is further elaborated by UNWTO (2013) in three points: First, they cite a need to 'make the best use of environmental resources as a significant element in tourism development, maintain the ecology and help to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity; second, the need to respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance; third, to ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation' (UNWTO 2013: 17-18). Further, sustainable tourism needs effective governance to promote in the pursuit of economic, socio-cultural and environmental goals of sustainable development (Bramwell and Lane, 2011). According to Inskeep sustainable tourism *"meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems"* (1991:461). Hence, sustainable tourism, simply put, is concerned with both current and future impacts of tourism development.

Sustainable development planning ensures sustainable development of all the destination elements through integrated planning approaches (Copper, 2016). That involves the public and private sector (Gunn and Var, 2002), as well as the community as noted by (Tosun and Timothy, 2001). An important way to assess sustainable tourism development is by examining how the needs of the host population can be met in the form of improved standards of living both in the short and long term (Liu, 2003).

Sustainable tourism involves preserving the natural resources upon which tourism depends, and sustainability involves developing tourism resources to enhance tourists experience (Ekinci, 2014). Specifically, Ekinci highlights two key things that are important to sustainability which are preserving resources and developing new facilities. Ekinci further highlights that since, tourism activities are environment-based it is important to ensure the sustainability of the resources

used by tourist (Ekinci, 2014). Additionally, sustaining the natural resources features, human, flora and fauna in an area where tourism takes place should be central in any tourism management function (ibid., 2014).

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The study of cultural landscape is essential as it is considered a very important factor in the regional development process. "Cultural landscapes are at the interface between nature and culture, tangible and intangible heritage, biological and cultural diversity. They represent a closely woven net of relationships, the essence of culture and people's identity" (Rössler 2006:334). The European Landscape Convention defined landscape as a resource having market value, that can be used for major economic activities such as tourism. Cultural landscape has remained a vital resource for rural tourism as they comprise of various elements such as religious edifices, monuments, traditions and crafts which represents a focal point of tourist activity (Otilia-Elena Vicol, 2013). Stoffelen and Vanneste (2015) emphasised that cultural landscapes have a key position in most rural tourism destinations in the form of tourism assets and boundaries for tourism development. They indirectly provide the framework in which tourism is often envisaged as a regional development tool (Stoffelen and Vanneste, 2015). Cultural landscapes such as Idanre hill have a noticeable imprint of human activities. It is characterised by a balanced relationship between an ecological system and human influences (Fatimah, 2015). The rural cultural landscape is attractive as it captures evidence of human interaction with nature (Otilia-Elena Vicol, 2013; Beagan and Dolan, 2015). Landscapes are valued environments where people live everyday, a heritage, scenery with aesthetic and recreational qualities, and often important have biodiversity features (Plieninger, et al., 2014). Landforms in cultural landscape created by nature and human culture both exist because of each other (Buckley, Ollenburg, and Zhong, 2008). Cultural landscape is a combination of both nature and culture as its elements, and the relationship between human and their natural environment is a significant factor. As Fatimah (2015) highlights, human and its natural environment are a unity, having inseparable connection. Cultural landscapes are integrally dynamic, with changing conditions, as a result of its cultural and natural forces and therefore necessitate adaptive management (Beagan and Dolan, 2015).

Cultural landscape management is important in planning and in the conservation of heritage, and more significant for communities as a result many regulatory agencies, and organizations, have incorporated cultural landscapes management into their strategic plans. Cultural landscapes management is necessary to protect the outstanding universal value of World Heritage sites for both the present and future generations (Mitchell *et al.*, 2009). A crucial role in this form of management is to guide change in the cultural landscape whilst retaining important values (ibid., 2009).

According to Yihui *et al.* (2008)'s conceptual model of integrated zoning and landscape coordination which consists of the core, buffer, and transition zone. The core zone comprises of the high rank architectures of sound preservation. The cultural factors in this zone are under strict protection without any construction of new facilities. Tourist activities permitted here are usually

of low impact. The buffer zone is constituted by human landscape and natural landscape. New constructions and renovation of buildings are allowed in this zone, but they must be consistent with the cultural characteristics of the core zone. Finally, the transition zone is the open natural landscape area beyond the buffer zone. The core zone of Idanre hill comprises of the ancient monument and no construction is allowed in the area. In the buffer zone there are guest chalets built in a traditional architectural plan style, an indoor game area and the reception. The transition zone is where some local stalls for the community members are built and the road leading into the attraction.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based upon empirical data collection using semi-structured qualitative interviews which were conducted with the tourism director in Ondo State and the managers at Idanre hill resort in summer 2016. The interviews were recorded on an audiotape and then transcribed by the researcher. This was analysed in addition to recorded comments in a fieldwork journal. The interviews were aimed to understand the meanings of sustainability as it is understood by the management of Idanre hill, and how they incorporate sustainability issues into their tourism development and management plans. By reading and rereading the transcribed data it was possible to identify concepts in the form of words, phrases and sentences that reoccurred, and also differences in the opinion expressed, that are connected with the social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainability. Data analysis was structured under three main themes of sustainable tourism which are the recurrent issues raised by the interviewee on sustainability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To questions to be addressed are: *how issues of sustainability are being conceptualised, and how they incorporate sustainability issues into their tourism development and management plans.?* The findings were summarised according to the three pillars of sustainable development the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic aspects and the participants' opinion on sustainability principles. This is consistent with Ruhanen's opinion that sustainable planning approach encompass all the dimensions of economic, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability (2004, Inskeep, 1991).

From the perspective of *environmental sustainability*, one of the participants believed that tourism development like any other form of development can have either negative or positive impacts on the environment. However, the participant also said that having an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) plan will help to mitigate or control the expected negative impact of tourism activities in Idanre:

"There is no sector that does not have impact whether negatively or positively on the environment and that is the reason everybody must ensure they do Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

You must carry out that in order to know the the impact of the business you are bringing on the environment, definitely you know that its going to affect the economy..…. You must carryout the EIA that will guide you, and you will know that this thing we want to do this is the impacts on the environment how do we mitigate it how do we control it" (Participant A). This supports Beagan and Dolan (2015)'s opinion who noted that adaptive management which encompass environmental assessment in cultural landscape management is necessary.

Also, one of the participants mentioned that their construction activities must not destroy the environment given the UNESCO rules regarding construction of new structures in the attraction which they have to abide by. The area consists of the core and buffer zones. The core zones comprise of the ancient monuments, natural landscape and they are not allowed to carry out any new development activity within the core zone. In the buffer zone new facilities can be built to ensure a good tourists experience and to meet the demand from tourists as a result of tourism development. This is coherent with Yihui *et al.'s* (2008) conceptual model of integrated zoning and landscape coordination.

According to Participant A, the UNESCO rule states that no "new development can be done in the core zone area, but we are allowed to construct whatever new structure we want within the buffer zone. Because the core area is where the ancient monuments are, and they want us to maintain the natural structure".

In terms of the *Socio-cultural aspect*, all the participants recognised that the community must be carried along in decision making to ensure sustainable tourism development. This supports the idea of Tosun and Timothy (2001) who emphasised the importance of community participation in tourism, and more specifically for developing countries. They also point out that there is improvement in the standard of living of the local people since the attraction began operation it provides job for some of the community members and brings development to the area. As Liu (2003) puts it, a way to assess sustainable tourism development is by examining how the needs of the host population can be met in the form of improved standards of living both in the short and long term.

"In the state we believe that, for tourism to survive overtime, every relevant stakeholder must be carried along in the development of the sector. Like yesterday we went to Idanre community to hold a meeting with the three three notable Oba's (Kings) all on the issue of tourism development and sustainability of the sector in their place. Because we believe that with community participation and support the sector will continue to strive. Immediately we loose the community's support then it becomes a problem for us to sustain that sector within the region. Also we employ some of the community members as tour guides here like the one who took the tourists uphill now is an indigene of this community" (Participant A).

Another common theme was on the need to promote the culture of the community and not to reduce its cultural value. Fennell (2008) maintains that sustainability is the long-term enhancement and conservation of both cultural and natural resources. The participants stress that they

ensure the activities of the attraction does not have a negative impact on the local culture which also serve as a heritage. 'They do this by encouraging the local people to perform the sacrifices they do not want the tourists to see at night when tourists are away and showcase only those aspects that they want tourists to see so as to preserve their cultural heritage' (Participant A). This action in a way however does impact the culture of the local people of Idanre. Further, as expressed by participants A and B that the management activities at Idanre Hill revolves around the protection of the cultural heritage and values, as they constantly deliberate on ways of preserving the cultural values with the community members.

Again consistent with the *economic* aspect of sustainability, the participants point out the importance of economic activities. That during the festival celebrations in the community the community members are being allocated windows to allow them display and sell items at the attraction such as souvenirs and food etc.

All the participants recognised the need for sustainability in the management of the attraction and they expressed this throughout the interview process either implicitly or explicitly. However, it was conceived by the researcher that sustainability is more understood by the people at the State/Ministry level rather than at the attraction management level even though the state ministry has plans that support sustainable tourism, operationalising the plans at the attraction/community level could be problematic. It reveals that the authority need to pass this knowledge to the managers of attractions within the state so they really understand what it is in practice and can effectively ensure the implementation of sustainability plans at the level of the attractions. Participants at the attraction level emphasised that they need training in sustainability and other aspect of their job to help them perform better and be able to compete with their counterparts in other countries. This training could also be extended to the local community as well so they are aware of the concept of sustainability.

Furthermore, certain things that hinder sustainable tourism management plans were reiterated by the participants. They all agreed that a major problem has been funding as tourism development needs money to invest in capital projects. The government is trying to encourage public private partnership as they believe that the private sector has the capital to invest in tourism development. Again, they expressed the idea that the government attitude towards funding for tourism should change, and that there should be more willingness on their part to support the growth of the industry.

Further, the local community also pose problems to the attraction management at times becausethey believe that the attraction belongs to them and they sometimes disturb the activities going on around the attraction. For example, at times when tourists visit the attraction the local people say they want to take the tourist uphill, highlighting that the attraction management has done enough that once it is 6 o'clock they will take over as tour guides (Participant A, B and C). This is in spite of the facts that it has been agreed by the community and signed by the king of Idanre on behalf of the community for the attraction to become a state monument as part of UNESCO's requirements to enlist it as a cultural landscape. It is worthy of note that the ownership

of the attraction is jointly by the community, the state and federal government (The National Commission for Museums and Monuments NCMM, 2008).

Moreover, there was a consensus among all the participants on some other issues that include the: challenge of physical constraints due to the rock formation in the area and UNESCO's restriction at Idanre hill. Only limited space is available for the construction of new buildings like chalets for tourists to lodge and the already constructed chalets are very close to the rock. Additionally, security issues arise as the local people sometimes scare the visitors because they are allowed to go uphill free of charge, and they sometimes go there to smoke. Finally, lack of good electricity supply in the community which makes the management at Idanre Hill spend most of the money realised on purchasing fuel to power the generator.

CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings are relevant to sustainability planning in tourism. The participants agreed that tourism expansion in the area need not cause landscape damage. Tourism is seen as having a significant and positive economic role, as it provides jobs and supports the development of new facilities in the community. Due to the fact that the attraction sometimes experiences lack of support from the community, it could be that benefits is not distributed evenly within the community, as this can go a long way in determining their attitudes towards protecting resources and tourism development generally. For example, as identified by Yihui *et al*. (2008), sustainable tourism development ought to begin with community development as this will induce the residents to participate in tourism development activities. Likewise, the political issues from the government can pose a challenge to their efforts of operating sustainably. Two of the participants emphasised the current problem of funding from the government who have been a major sponsor of development projects at the attraction in previous years. This is no longer so since the new government in power seem to be focusing on developing another sector. It could be said that an alternative source of funding for maintaining the attraction should be sought so as to avoid problems associated with loss of traditional landscape the degradation of the area or threat to the sustainability of cultural and natural environments since tourism development need to be budgeted for.

Additionally, to ensure the sustainable future of tourism development in Idanre hill, it requires a proper understanding of some of the issues that hinder the management of the attraction in a sustainable way, so as to better achieve the strategic aim of preserving the environments, protecting cultural values, meeting the needs of the local community, guaranteeing the sustainable use of resources, and more importantly devising a means to meet the objectives by integrating same into planning as well as practice. This study is limited as it does not examine cultural landscape zoning. Future research can investigate the land use planning in the area as it can contribute to achieving sustainable tourism development in Idanre hill. Other stakeholders involved with Idanre hill tourism development such as the community tourism entrepreneurs can also be interviewed to get more insights into the issues.

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