

Cultural Tourism And Its Imperativeness Of Achieving Sustainable Development: A Case Study Of Uzoiyi Masquerade Festival In Umuoji, Anambra State.

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Abstract

This article seeks to evaluate and document the Uzoiyi Festival; one of the renowned festivals in Anambra State, Nigeria. An attempt to bring to highlight the imperativeness and relevance of the festival towards sustainable tourism development is the main focal point. The Festival, as the roadmap to cultural tourism showcases the rich cultural heritage of the people. The Uzoiyi Festival exhibits different kind of masquerades using both animal and human motifs and, displaying the artistic ingenuity and innovation of the communities. It is a festival that would be well cherished by tourists because it creates an avenue to display African art and modernize African tradition. Margaret (1970) observed "African art to be a great art, worthy of a place among the other great arts of the world; yet it is not easy to study it for neither actual materials or comprehensive books on the subject are easily accessible to the students". Imonikebe (2008:112) views African traditional festivals to be relevant mostly in their aesthetic arts. Christianity seems to have had a negative influence on the rich cultural value of this Festival. The relevant of the Uzoiyi Festival is in the display of African aesthetics, the showcasing of the rich and dynamic African culture and for the correction of societal ills. There is need to create awareness to the Christendom. The work centred on the use of descriptive survey method and written document. Based on the findings, the study recommend that the State and Federal tourism board takes over the featuring so as to have international standard.

Keywords: Uzoiyi, Festival, Masquerade, Tourism, Sustainable.

Introduction

Among the various types of tourism in Nigeria, cultural tourism is the largest in the tourism industry. Festivals of all kinds, an offshoot of cultural tourism are located within the ethnic communities. If "sustainable" means to acquire plenteous in the present generation that would give room for plenteous for the future without compromising them, then the Uzoiyi Festival, the festivals of the people of Umuoji, Anambra State stand to be an area which would be harnessed to shed off its old look in order to serve as a sustainable means of development in Nigeria. The Uzoiyi festival, fully supported by the three arms of government, would stand as a major driving force behind the economic advancement in Nigeria. It would foster job creation, stimulate economic diversification and boost foreign exchange earnings (IPU, 1999). The paper examines the role of Uzoiyi festival as a veritable tool for poverty alleviation, its contributions towards the attainment of the millennium development goals (MOGs) and sustainable development.

Research Questions

- 1 What is Uzoiyi?
- 2 How is Uzoiyi Celebrate?
- 3 What are the functions of the Masquerade?
- 4 What are the relevance of Uzoiyi festival to cultural tourism in the area?

Methods of Research

The method of this study dwells on descriptive survey and written documents. Ali (1996) posits descriptive survey as events they are without manipulation of what is being observed. The study were carried out at Umuoji town in Idemili North Local Government Area, Anambra State. This is notably for Uzoiyi featuring in Anambra State. Sequel to this therefore, oral interview were employed to the chief and a representation of the Igwe (Town Leader) of the study area who was out of town. Data were collected based on the research questions administered orally. Data collected were in the Igbo language through tape recorder which carefully, translated into English language. Digital Camera was used in taken photograph of depicting masquerades performing during the Uzoiyi celebration.

Result: Results of the findings are in descriptive format below

Uzoiyi festival: Its meaning and Concept

According to ethnographical resources, Uzoiyi festival is celebrated in commemoration of *Ideakpulu* River; the River where the "Abidi" and "Uruegbe" communities draw their water. It also emphasizes that the river is a segment of a long tributary of the Niger that connects almost all the Idemili local government towns, with each having a different name. For example, the tributary of the Niger between Ideani and Nnobi town is called "Mmili

Obiaja”, at Ojoto, it is called “Mmili John” and in Oraukwu, it is called “Tyi – Nwaocha”. In Alor town, it is called “Mmili Okide or Mmili Alor” and in Umuoji it is called “Ideakpulu” and “Amala –Ocha” respectively and at Obosi, it gained famous and called “Idemili Obosi” through which it enters the River Niger.

Therefore, the origin of the festival, according to oral tradition, was not known but dated as far back as 15th century; precisely 600 years ago. Some believed the festival to be as old as the town. The festival was associated with women as the major celebrant. They are the brain behind keeping the pathway that leads to the Ideakpulu River clean, since it is celebrate along the river track. Not only women celebrate; artisans and farmers also celebrate. In the contemporary time, the quest for tourism boom has enhanced renowned festivals such as the Argungu in Sokoto and the Osun-Oshogbo cultural festivals to have modified their festivals to an international standard. Hence Uzoiyi is another rich masquerade festival that has international quality which needs to be retouched by government due to tourism actions. Uzoiyi, instead of celebrating to appease the gods of the river and the rainfall, so as to send plenteous water during the farming seasons as it did in the past, is now celebrated on a particular day, specifically, any Sunday in March that would be “Uka Afor”. The change is to incorporate everybody both far and near to suit with the modernity. The world today is not static; hence Igbo cultural festivals are also no longer static. “The fastest way to destroy tradition is to leave it unchanged” (Ihekweazu, 1992:19) quoted in Anichebe (2009:20). Anichebe (2009:25) also observes a rich cultural heritage to be in tandem with modernity. He cited “Abianshi” festival in Eke town, Udi Local Government, as one of the festivals that has been affected with some modern changes due to the influence of Christianity.

Uzoiyi Festival: The Celebration

Uzoiyi Festival is a festival of unity, peace and harmony among the entire Umuoji community. It is a festival that is used to eulogize the noble stride of Ideakpulu River where the community draws its water. Just like the Osun-Oshogbo festival, the event of Uzoiyi festivals always starts with the preliminaries that usher in the main festival in the grand finale (Ojiakor, 2007:60-61). The preliminaries start with activities such as the *Ayaka* masquerade being a nocturnal masquerade. Other minor masquerades also featured during the preliminaries periods, Okoye (2006:45). *Ayaka*; the nocturnal masquerade, performs the function of entertaining people late into the night with songs. It reminds them about the event that would feature in the grand finale. In the remote past, *Ayaka*'s role reigns for a whole month which was second moonlights, that today is February. In that month *Ayaka*'s feature reminds people that the Uzoiyi feast was near. Men without dwellings and those wishing to repair their houses did so by making use of *Ayake*. It was the duty of the nocturnal masquerade to convey the already cut grasses to their benefactors. They also transported logs of wood although strictly on request. This activity stands the nocturnal masquerade as an agent of mobilization and peace since it does not take money for the job executed.

Still in the preliminary enhancement are the minor masquerades. Examples are *mmuo nzacha-ezi*-meaning, “sweeping masquerades”. It has the function of sweeping people's compound, cutting down palm fruits and entertains by dancing and their charges await them at the end. Another one is soothsayer/ fortune teller masquerade *mmuo na-agba-afa*. Their role is informed of by a town crier that is moving around the town publicizing the impending festival. This accords relatives from the neighbouring towns as well as relatives from within and abroad the chance to visit their relations in Umuoji. An Uzoiyi festival is a festival of hospitality and friendliness. It also breeds cleanliness that depicts aesthetic value. They always keep their houses clean by decorating with cam wood dye. The preliminary events also feature other human activities apart from nocturnal and minor masquerades functions. Prior to the month of March, which is the month of the Grand finale; the month of February acts as the preparatory month. It is always the period when people prepare dutifully by giving an invitation to their friends, in-laws, relatives and neighbours. They also amend their old buildings to wear a new look. The preliminaries of the Uzoiyi Masquerade Festival commence in the month of the first week of March yearly. It normally takes three days: namely, 1st Friday, 1st Saturday and 1st Sunday. In the past, the aim is to appease the god/gods for a successful and plenteous farming season. The chief priest of Idemili always officiates to the earth goddess, with offerings such as yam, chicken and cola nuts. The fun lasted for one month. However, these days, due to the influence of modernity, Uzoiyi has advanced a lot. The take off stage being Friday ushers in the priest of “Ideakpulu” to seal off the stream from the fetching of water by the community. By so doing, the priest of the Ideakpulu shrine makes some ablutions and offer sacrifices in the stream. According to ethnographical resource conducted in Umuoji, the rite of passage is to please and supplicate the Ideakpulu diety for abundance of rains in the year.



Fig. 1: Sealing of Ideakpulu Stream.

Another reason for sealing the river now is to remind the people about their source of economy: Ideakpulu stream environment was an avenue for the collection of “Akpolo” grasses used for roofing of houses in the past when it was only in use in erecting houses – mud and thatch building. It was this place that the activities of *Onyekulufa* masquerade mentioned in the preliminaries are prominent. The first day is Friday in which activities only revolve around the shrine of “Idemili” and “Ideakpulu” stream with mainly the adult masquerades displaying their potentials.

The second day, Saturday, is known as rehearsal day awaiting the major Sunday events. It is associated with the flogging masquerades featuring. Noise is generated in the various village squares while the purchase of food items in the market, is pronounced in readiness against the great entertainment day. In the evening, the chief priest unseals the place to enable the community to fetch water against the next day.

The third day, which is the last day, Sunday, is marked with the great entertainment day. It is graced with children’s masquerades associated with other designed, lovely and attractive masquerades. Examples are *Enemma* and Soothsayer, *Egbenu-Oba* masquerade, *Akuezuozor* masquerade, *Nnyakwulu* masquerades just to mention a few. These entire feature designed masquerades to exhibit functions according to the name. Its cultural significance portrays an Igbo rich heritage which is under extinction due to the effects of modernity. A few of these masquerades are described with their cultural sequence. Examples include:

- (i) ***Egbenu-Oba* Masquerade:** Okoye (2006) says this masquerade appeared first in 1940 from “Anogu” village. It depicts a prototype of a hunting expedition in the past and appears in commemoration of hunting economy in the town that had become extinct. Names such as *Ogbu agu* literally means “lion killer” and *Ogbatulu-enyi* means “elephant killer”. Any hunter who endeavours and kills such an animal is earmarked one such a name would be accorded to this brave man. The art involved is songs and dances. The masquerade attracts spectators through its music made from two large drums – a pair of metal gongs and a wooden gong. Demonstration is hunting exploitation and techniques of use of guns. The demonstration sums up peoples’ beliefs of masquerades as immortals (spirits) because their shooting targets are always accurate since they are spirits who possess some supernatural powers better than would have been performed by human beings.
- (ii) ***Enemma* Masquerade:** This masquerade is regarded as a female masquerade (*agbogho mmonwu*). It demonstrates female-like characteristics and moves majestically with its costume. Culturally, some people ascertain it to be the ghosts of deceased young maidens that passed away prior to their marriage rites. Their dances represent the community’s appreciation of beauty, drama, dance, music and arts (Okpoko and Okonkwo 2004). For short, *Enemma*, masquerade specializes in exhibiting the female dancing pattern; hence it reflects a great deal of the Igbo concept of beauty.



Fig. 2: Enemma and Soothsayer

- (iii) ***Nnyakwulu* Masquerade.** This is a prototype of a camel from Aguma village which featured first in 1962. It depicts the popular beast of burden, a means of transportation of goods and human beings for long-distance travelling. The featuring of *Nnyakwulu* masquerade is associated with a twenty one gun salute as well as to herald the visit of a queen who mantled the top of the beast of burden – well designed and dressed as she waves to her amassing spectators. Okoye (2006) observed the entire phenomenon to depict the remembrance of Queen Elizabeth’s second visit to Nigeria in 1960 during the celebration of Independence. During the Uzoiyi Festival, one observes also another entourage featuring the *Nnyakwulu* masquerade that includes four security masquerades in the form of armed police and army officers, as well as the Queen’s children – a son and a daughter. As the masquerade moves, the queen waves delightedly to the spectators and the security officers maintaining peaceful outings and oneness. Its music is accompanied with a small metal gong, one wooden gong and a pair of rattles.
- (iv) ***Mgbe afaeli-aku* Masquerade:** The masquerade was depicted first in 1978 by “Umuechem” village communities. It demonstrates a prototype of family life circle. The female being helped by her son in setting a nice meal on a table. It exhibits relaxation and family togetherness after serious farm work. Traditions ascertain the masquerade *Mgbe afaeli-aku* (period of enjoyment of wealth) because it is the period of rest after farming. Again, the featuring of this noble prototype exhibits a well dressed flamboyant king called *Eze mmuo* and dutiful police officer. They accompany the *Mgbe afaeli-aku* masquerade in order to maintain a hitch-free performance. Its dance, according to the music, forms a wooden gong, a pair of rattles, a flute, a small metal gong and two different sizes of drums (Okoye, 2006:36).
- (v) ***Ugo* Masquerade** – This is a popular and likable prototype eagle bird in the animal kingdom. It is a masquerade that featured first in 1985 from “Urumkpu” village. It demonstrates its movement by twisting its head and pauses to dictate its direction of terror/panic against the intruder. After a while, it stretches its head forward and backward; takes a decision and proceeds on its course. In the process, it lays large whitish eggs. Music is according to two drums, a wooden gong, a flute, a large metal gong and a pair of raffles.



Fig. 3: *Ugo* masquerade

These are just to mention a few because every village in Umuoji exhibits one kind of prototype masquerade or the other. The festival comes to an end after the parades of all the villages display their masquerades. The *Igwe* then reads his Farwell address; the Governor of Anambra State makes his remark and the Local Government Chairman gives a vote of thanks.

Uzoiyi Festival: Its Tourism Imperativeness and Relevance

Tourists are curiosity seekers, looking for what to snap and take home. African heritages and similar cultural heritages are laudable and unquantifiable. African culture of the past is classified as heritage industry and is used in both tourism industry and in making available the medical, agricultural and technological experiences of past societies, some of which are relevant to the present (Renfrew and Bahn, 2000:542).

The relevance and imperativeness of Uzoiyi cultural Festival is in its touristic opportunity as well as the enactment of some vital virtue in the field of socio-economic drifts, religious attributes, technological experiences and educational glide.

Touristic Opportunities

Uzoiyi Festival of Umuoji, with its laudable cultural festival, has its footing with the aim of Agenda 21 Global Earth Summit Conference in Brazil. The Summit emphasizes the achievement of sustainable development and the continuity of improving the living standard. It requires and mandates nations to make a revolution into economic and social policies in order to wipe out poverty and ensure the health of humans (WTTC, WTO, EC, 1995). The Summit defines sustainable development as the development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations into meeting their needs (Brundtland commission in WTTC, WTO, EC, 1995 quoted in Okpoko 2005). Tourism and its products in Nigeria and elsewhere stand the chance to meet up with the agenda's policies. According to Okpoko (2005:241) sustainable tourism development and its products "meets the needs of present tourists and host region while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future". Sustainable tourism products are products which are operated in harmony with the local environment, community, and cultures and becomes the permanent beneficiaries not the victims of tourism development (WTTC, WTO, EC 1995).

Uzoiyi Cultural Festival is one of tourism cultural products in Igboland, especially in Anambra state, that stands as an option in sustainable development. It is a cultural festival that was inherited from Umuoji ancestors and projects with the dynamic outlook and performance in this present era. The packaging of the masquerade has also changed to shade the fetish practices of the past.

In the area of **socio-economic drift**, the Uzoiyi Festival accords people a nice forum for interaction and peaceful co-existence (Okoye 2006:46). The truth about Okoye's observation is that the festivity happened to be the period that the sons and daughters of Umuoji community returns en-mass from far and wide, as well as friends, in-laws and other dignitaries from various parts of the country and beyond. The visitors are welcomed because of the Umuoji hospitality gesture. Festivals serve as a means of fostering love, brotherhood and hospitality among the various ethnic groups (Ekechukwu. 1990). Hence the Uzoiyi Festival can be used as tourism imperative for development. What is needed is support of the Government. Economically, the Uzoiyi Festival has helped to strengthen the wealth of the community and it's environ. The gate fees collected from the entrance of the arena is profitable and local products in the form of crafts and arts works made by the indigenes of Umuoji and neighbouring town are for sale to tourists. The Uzoiyi Festival is a festival that can be seen as a vehicle for co-operation. People are encouraged by the micro-finance bank in the form of soft loan to produce attractive products for tourists.

Technological experiences

Technology brings continuity of culture to endless situation. Masquerade faces and artifacts of the past have some economic lessons and advantages. The techniques of the past, especially in the case of *Ennemma /Agbogho-mmonwu* masquerade, had been modernized to serve as one of the decorative objects of the present time. Other artistic inclinations featuring masking during the Uzoiyi Festival depicts a highly organized and cooperative society. Music and dance from the beaten instruments are also highly technical which moves the environment in high density as well. Inspiring also at this time is the charged atmosphere created by the beating of drums and the corresponding ovations and movements generated from songs coupled with the firing of canon shots (Imonikebe 2008:116). Tourists are seen in a frenetic mood through masquerades and dances, chanting of songs and dramatic acrobatic display. The Umuoji Festival portrays beautiful scenery through the visual and performing artists.

Religious attributes

This is part of yearly observations made by the writer during the festivals; that is clash between Christian denominations and the traditionalists. Oral traditions revealed that in 1981, a threat from Christian believers was revealed to boycott the Uzoiyi Festival. These days, the conflict was stopped by a colloquy on "Religion and

culture” made by the Rev. Father Joe Izuku Okoye during his mass solemnization. After his colloquium, the insurgence was controlled and the festival featured peaceful. Another impediment though not religious was in 1984 between Umuoji civil servants and traditionalists. The civil servants in different part of the cities frown over Sunday the “D-Day” of the great festivity. According to them (civil servant) Saturday would suit the great occasion to enable them the opportunity to participate and rest and then Sunday travel back to their destinations to resume work on Monday. The argument raised tension and prevented performance inside the stadium in 1984, (Okoye, 2006:49). The situation was calm, followed by a dialogue; and, in 1985, a perfect performance was witnessed, though still on Sunday. As if the 1984 episode was not enough, the Pentecostal brothers resisted vehemently the featuring of the Uzoiyi Festival; because according to them, it is fetish. They then organized a three-day crusade, Friday to Sunday evening, being the end of the festival. Colloquy each year is made by the Governor of Anambra State. The colloquium is to bring co-existence and unity between religion and culture.

Educational glide

Uzoiyi cultural festival lectures from the Igwe, local government chairman and Governor of Anambra State are seen as a catalyst to the cultural revival of the State. A colloquium is held to brainstorm on the culture and tourism. The festival attract tourists, dignitaries, students and people from far and near as a result of the colloquium. Last year’s festival sponsored by Governor Peter Obi attracted thousands of people to the State, which has helped to promote unity and co-existence.

The festival will also help researchers who wish to research Igbo culture, especially as it pertains to masquerading. It has also helped students in the territory’s institution mostly studying humanities and culture to document Igbo culture and Anthropology. This is geared towards term paper writing. Here, oral tradition will serve as a methodological approach in gathering information (Okonkwo, 2007).

Recommendation

Okoye (2006:49) is of the view that Uzoiyi festivals have a bright future. He said this based on the active role of Umuoji Improvement Union (U.I.U) of Nigeria. The Union is the brain behind the hosting of the cultural festival.

I therefore suggest that the Union should not only be the sole organizer of the aesthetic masquerades. Both lovers of culture, NGOs and government should be in partnership in order to achieve an international standard. They should see the cases of China’s Festival, Osun-Oshogbo Festival etc., so as to reap the benefits accruing from tourism.

The Uzoiyi Festival should be declared a state festival by the government of Anambra State. Therefore, the present stadium used for the celebration in Umuoji should be renovated with recreational facilities, a museum and a Cultural Coliseum. Social Amenities – good roads, transport systems, electricity, good water and guest houses and hotels should be erected and maintained. These amenities would help to accommodate tourists during the three-day festival. Tapping of rich cultural heritages/products would aid in the promotion of a viable tourism industry in Nigeria (Ekechukwu, 1990). Hence, individuals should be educated on the values of our rich cultural heritage as well as governmental roles towards our heritages. If our heritage is cherished then conservation and management becomes the watch-word and so as to avoid cultural extinction.

Conclusion

The result above shows that Uzoiyi masquerade cultural festival in Umuoji has inspired awareness for all works of life. It offer leisure and happiness and helps to relieve the on lookers of the burden of the bustle and hustle of life. It has also act as an aspect of national integration and unity. In essence, it has helped to boost Igbo cultural heritage, thus acting as a viable vehicle for social mobilization.

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