

IMPACT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT ON HOST COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF AKAMKPA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of tourism research development on host communities, focusing on Akamkpa Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State, Nigeria. Survey Research Design was adopted for the study. A sample of 230 local indigenes was selected using purposive sampling technique to assess the perceptions and experiences of the community regarding tourism development initiatives. Two Tourism Research Development Questionnaire (TRDQ) and a check list Simple regression analysis was employed to analyze the data in relation to two research hypotheses formulated to guide the study. The findings of the study revealed a significant positive impact of tourism research development on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the host communities in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State. The study underscores the importance of sustainable tourism practices in fostering community development and enhancing the overall well-being of local residents. Based on the results, it was recommended that policymakers and stakeholders should promote responsible tourism practices and maximize the benefits for host communities in Akamkpa LGA.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Research Development, Host Communities Akamkpa, Cross River State,

Introduction

Tourism development research is a systematic examination of how tourism affects local communities and economic, social, and environmental level. To comprehend the intricate links between tourism and its stakeholders, it draws on a number of disciplines, including sociology, economics, geography, and environmental science. Research on tourist development aims to give factual data and insights that may guide policies, planning projects, and sustainable tourism practices. Research on sustainable tourism development that incorporates local people is frequently presented as a way to safeguard vulnerable places' natural environment and cultural heritage while also reaping economic advantages (Kavita, Swratz & Green, 2017). They are marketed as ways to boost involvement and deeply include the local population into development objectives. The economic impact on the town and its residents is typically included when assessing the challenges, dangers, setbacks, and achievements of these initiatives (Igwebuike & Etan, 2018). But there are other aspects of the narrative besides economics. Even though community-based ecotourism has a lot of promise to be a successful and sustainable company for the people, it is important to critically assess any potential gains or losses it may have in addition to the noble ideals of ecotourism. Local communities encounter new ideas and viewpoints about how they will survive and engage with their surroundings at the intersection of tourism and indigenous culture. The communities frequently include a wealth of indigenous and

local knowledge that outsiders are tapping into to deepen their own immersion and comprehension of these cultures (Igwebuike & Agbor, 2022)

The blending of the modern with the traditional and autochthonous in protected areas promotes ecotourism. Other stakeholders include the national and local governments, other businesses, other indigenous communities, and various institutions and organizations involved in conservation and preservation. The effects of this interaction in tourism are not just financial but also cultural, and they have the potential to upend the fundamental assumptions of what and how indigenous people understand the world. Ecotourism as a form of sustainable tourism contributes to the conservation & safeguard of some of the world's most stunning landscapes. It motivates visitors to do more than just pass through it; it urges them to help conserve the environment & contribute to local communities on a much deeper level (Brooking, 2021). Sustainable tourism is an antidote to unsustainable tourism and it's like friend of conservation. Social, economic, and environmental sustainability are three interwoven factors that are frequently used to describe sustainability. However, it is impossible to view community-based ecotourism as a "one-size-fits-all" concept.

The distinctive context of each project and the communities' readiness to provide information about their way of life must be taken into account in order to preserve the projects' integrity (Wang & Tziamali, 2023). Many of the world's community-based ecotourism projects are situated in remote, biologically diverse, and hence very vulnerable areas (Wu, Ai & Wu, 2023). They are often protected sites, the only surviving places where an intangible cultural legacy of a community is kept alive and passed on. It is important to carefully consider how ecotourism can be brought to a place like this in a really sustainable way and what the role of indigenous peoples should be. In addition to providing for the requirements of current visitors and the host communities, sustainable tourism development safeguards and expands opportunities for future generations. Sustainable tourism requires managing all resources in a way that preserves biodiversity, ecological integrity, cultural heritage, and the ability to support life, while meeting economic, social, and aesthetic needs (Marton-Lefèvre, 2020)

Put differently, sustainable growth of tourism is socially and morally just as well as economically and environmentally sustainable. It is long-term oriented and honors the delicate environmental balance that many tourist locations, especially those in environmentally delicate areas, have to offer. If the requirements of the current generation are satisfied without compromising the potential of future generations to satisfy their own needs, then tourism is considered to have evolved sustainably. According to the World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism is defined as a type of tourism development that "meets the needs of the present tourists and host region while protecting and leaving opportunities for the future, leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and material needs can be fulfilled while maintaining the cultural integrity essential ecological processes and all the life support systems (Marton-Lefèvre, 2020).

The influence of tourism on host communities in Nigeria has been a topic of considerable debate among researchers and stakeholders due to its expansion. This study examines how tourism research development affects host communities, concentrating on the Nigerian state of Cross River's Akamkpa Local Government Area (LGA). The region is ideally situated for the growth of tourism because of its rich cultural legacy and stunning natural surroundings. However, the advantages of tourism are not always shared equally, and there may be drawbacks for nearby communities..

Theoretical background

Nature theory by Aldo Leopold (1920)

The nature theory was propounded by Aldo Leopold (1920). The theory stated that the concept of "wilderness" should not be seen as a hunting or recreational ground, but as an arena for a

healthy biotic community. Because it is so simple, Leopold nature theory is substantial and noteworthy. Impressive connection with the natural world is evident in the writers' mental image of the different natural locations they have experienced over many years. Because humans are taught to feel that a culture or civilization has sovereign control over the earth, the author passionately opposed the harm that is often done to the natural ecosystem (especially land). The author of the research believed that individuals may now think on the value of nature and understand more about its happenings from firsthand experience because of the affluence and security brought about by urbanization and technological advancements.

Leopold was a well-known expert in New Mexico wildlife management. Leopold supported scientific management of wildlife habitats for both public and private landholders, as opposed to a complete dependence on hunting, game, and other means, which is directed toward the preservation of certain animal species. Leopold views environmental sustainability and wildlife management as timely methods of preserving and reviving biodiversity in the ecosystem, not only as a way to generate excess hunting.

The display and preservation of animals and forests also acquired new significance. The author now viewed it as a space for a community of healthy living, rather as a place for hunting or amusement. In 1935, Leopold laid the groundwork for the Wilderness Society, an organization dedicated to preserving and growing the country's wilderness areas. The society was considered "one of the focal points of new attitude in intelligence and humility towards man's place in nature" by Leopold (1920).

The Nature Theory by Aldo Leopold, which was first proposed in 1949 rather than 1920, has significant ramifications for increasing public understanding of environmental protection in Nigeria's Cross River State through mass awareness programs and ecotourism in Akamkpa Local Government Area. Leopold's philosophy instills a strong feeling of responsibility for the land and its people by acknowledging the complex web of links that exist between humans and the natural world.

Leopold's idea urges tourists to embrace an ecological perspective, recognizing the interdependence of all living things and the earth, even as ecotourism activities entice them to immerse themselves in Akamkpa's stunning surroundings. This viewpoint encourages people to practice "ecological citizenship," which is the awareness of how their activities affect the environment and the desire to do as little harm as possible. Furthermore, rather than seeing the land as a simple repository of resources, Leopold's idea sees it as a community made up of many species and ecosystems. The mass awareness initiatives that highlight the significance of protecting biodiversity, ecosystem services, and ecological integrity are in line with this holistic approach.

By implication, sustainable tourism development research efforts in Akamkpa may effectively communicate the pressing need for conservation as not just a moral obligation but also an essential aspect of human life by using Leopold's Nature Theory. In addition to fostering amazement, wonder, and a respect for nature, the campaigns may foster a culture of sustainability by motivating people to adopt eco-friendly behaviors and support environmental conservation.

In the long run, Leopold's Nature Theory may change how people view and engage with nature, leading to a greater feeling of connection, respect, and care for the land and its resources through tourism in Akamkpa.

Statement of the problem

The problem of this study lies in the dearth of empirical evidence on the impact of sustainable tourism research development on host communities in Nigeria, particularly in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State. Despite the growing body of literature on tourism development, there is a paucity of research that specifically examines the effects of

sustainable tourism research development on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of host communities. This knowledge gap is problematic because it hinders the ability of policymakers and stakeholders to make informed decisions about tourism development initiatives that can maximize benefits for local residents while minimizing negative consequences.

Furthermore, the lack of research in this area is compounded by the fact that tourism development in Nigeria is often characterized by a top-down approach, which neglects the needs and perspectives of host communities. This approach can lead to the displacement of local residents, cultural erosion, and environmental degradation, ultimately undermining the sustainability of tourism development initiatives (Igwebuike, & Agbor, 2022). In Akamkpa Local Government Area, the situation is further complicated by the rich cultural heritage and natural attractions that make it an ideal location for tourism development. However, the area lacks a comprehensive framework for sustainable tourism research development, which can ensure that tourism development initiatives are aligned with the needs and aspirations of host communities.

Therefore, this study aims to address this problem by investigating the impact of sustainable tourism research development on host communities in Akamkpa Local Government Area, with a focus on the socio-economic and cultural aspects. The study seeks to provide empirical evidence that can inform policymaking and practice, ultimately contributing to the development of sustainable tourism initiatives that benefit both local residents and the tourism industry.

The concept of tourism research development and socio-economics

Research on the economic impact of tourism is periodically carried out to determine the industry's contribution to economic development and growth (Comerio & Strozzi, 2019). It is widely acknowledged that regional development should strive for environmental, economic, and sociocultural sustainability, as addressed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2020). According to Alarcon and Cole (2019), there is a particular correlation between gender inequality and precarities in the tourist industry. Thus, there won't be any sustainable tourist growth unless female workers' job circumstances are improved. When you take into account Baum's (2015) finding that the state of job-related difficulties in the tourist sectors has not changed considerably in recent years, the lack of effort put into boosting employment becomes even more concerning. Econometric techniques are one way to investigate the socio-economic impacts of tourism, such as income distribution. According to Mahadevan and Suardi (2019), there is no discernible correlation between the rise of tourism and the reduction of income inequality and poverty disparities. Alam and Paramati (2016) showed that tourism even has the capacity to significantly increase income inequalities.

Socioeconomic development induced by tourism is much broader than economic development and includes the expansion of the multicultural environment by raising people's awareness in the host destination about the manners, customs, religions, etc., of tourists. In this way, tourism contributes to a society's increase of tolerance, patience, and empathy towards representatives of other countries and cultures, and the country receives a new impetus for social development. Cultural exchange and the advancement of cross-cultural communication are important factors accompanying travel (Pal & Yashwant, 2020).

In addition, tourism also contributes to the improvement of the educational level in the host destination. The increased demand for the services of qualified personnel, both in tourism and related industries, the need to improve language skills and service culture, and the development of abilities to work with digital technologies and software, which have become widespread in recent years, contribute to tourism promotion. In most cases, tourism has a positive impact on the socio-economic development of countries and regions. The impact of tourism on society is significant, as it brings significant economic and social benefits. Due to

tourism, the interaction between countries intensifies and leads first to improving transportation and personal communications, and in the long term to improving business relations. The positive impact of tourism is manifested not only by increasing the economic benefits of the host destination but also by improving the subjective impressions of both tourists and residents (Li & Shahraki, 2022). In other words, tourism makes its participants happier. In this context, the study focuses on determining the changes in the relationship between the level of countries 'tourism development and socio-economic development, as well as establishing the extent to which the level of tourism development is related to the level of happiness in countries with differing income levels

The concept of tourism research development and indigenous culture

The protection of biodiversity and the preservation of regional customs and cultural heritage might be considered two of the main goals of the rapidly expanding ecotourism sector (Lee, Chen, & Peng, 2021). Ecotourism projects involving local communities are often offered as opportunities to gain economic benefits while protecting the natural environment and cultural heritage of vulnerable areas ((Ekpe, 2020). They are promoted as solutions to increase participation and more strongly integrate local people in development goals. When assessing the challenges, risks, setbacks, and achievements of these initiatives, the focus is typically on the financial effects on the neighborhood and its residents (Nyasha, Odhiambo & Asongu, 2021).

However, the economics is only one side of the story. As noble as the goals of ecotourism and especially community-based ecotourism may be and despite its great potential as a sustainable and profitable business for the locals, the other possible profits and losses that it causes need to be critically evaluated as well. At the junction of tourism and indigenous culture, local populations are faced with fresh perspectives and ideas about how to live and engage with their environment. Outsiders looking to enhance their own experience and comprehension of these cultures are frequently tapping into the communities' enormous reservoir of local and indigenous knowledge. (Nath & Nath, 2018) And it is not only the tourist that brings in new influences to local communities. The other stakeholders such as national and local government, other businesses, other indigenous communities and different institutions and organizations involved in conservation and preservation contribute to mixing the new with the traditional and autochthonous in protected areas promoting ecotourism. The traces left behind by this interplay in tourism are not only monetary but also cultural and may challenge the very basis of what and how the indigenous people know about the world.

Indigenous peoples' traditional ways of life are deeply rooted in the natural environment, and their cultural practices and spiritual beliefs are often centered on conservation and sustainability (Whyte, 2022). This is usually due to the fact that in order to protect indigenous culture and knowledge you need to protect the location where it was born; without the land there is no culture. Therefore, participation of indigenous communities in projects such as ecotourism, which aim to protect these cultures, is valuable and nowadays often also desired by the other parties involved

Objective of the study

The major aim of this study is to examine the impact of tourism research development on host communities, focusing on Akamkpa Local Government Area (LGA) in Cross River State. Specifically, the study seeks to;

1. reveal the extent to which tourism research development relate to the socio-economic livelihood in Akamkpa local government area of Cross River State
2. assess the extent to which tourism research development relate to conservation of indigenous culture in Akamkpa local government area of Cross River State

Research questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study;

1. How does tourism research development relate to the socio-economic livelihood in Akamkpa local government area of Cross River State?
2. To what extent does tourism research development relate to conservation of indigenous culture in Akamkpa local government area of Cross River State?

Statement of hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. Tourism research development is not significantly related to socio-economic livelihood in Akamkpa local government area of Cross River State
2. There is no significant relationship between tourism research development and conservation of indigenous culture in Akamkpa local government area of Cross River State.

Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study was a multi-stage procedure that combined purposive and accidental sampling techniques to select a representative sample of adult inhabitants in Akamkpa LGA, Cross River State, Nigeria. This approach enabled the researcher to gather valuable insights from a diverse group of participants, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The first stage of the sampling process involved the purposive selection of Aningeje community, which was chosen due to its proximity to notable tourism sites such as Kwa Falls and Akamkpa Division of the National Park. This selection was deliberate, as the researcher aimed to gather data from individuals who had firsthand experience with tourism activities and their impacts. In the second stage, accidental sampling was employed to recruit participants within Aningeje community. The researcher approached residents who were willing to participate and available at the time of the visit, ensuring a diverse sample that was not pre-selected based on specific criteria. This technique allowed for the inclusion of participants from various socio-economic backgrounds, ages, and genders, providing a rich tapestry of perspectives. A total of 231 adult inhabitants (males and females) participated in the study, representing a broad cross-section of the population. This sample size was sufficient to generate reliable data, enabling the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the impacts of sustainable tourism in Akamkpa LGA.

To collect data, two research instruments were employed: The Tourism Research Development Questionnaire (TRDQ) and a checklist. The TRDQ was designed to gather information on participants' perceptions of sustainable tourism, its economic and cultural impacts, and their experiences with tourism development. The checklist, on the other hand, was used to assess the economic and cultural impacts of sustainable tourism, providing a systematic evaluation of the effects of tourism on the local community. Data analysis was conducted using Simple linear regression analysis, which enabled the examination of relationships between variables. This statistical technique allowed the researcher to identify correlations and predictive patterns, providing insights into the impacts of sustainable tourism on the local economy and culture. Overall, the research methodology employed in this study was robust, comprehensive, and well-suited to the research topic. By combining purposive and accidental sampling techniques, the researcher ensured a diverse and representative sample, while the use of two data collection instruments provided a rich source of data. The analysis technique employed enabled a thorough examination of the data, generating valuable insights into the impacts of sustainable tourism in Akamkpa LGA.

Data analysis

The data collected during the study were analyzed with Simple near regression analysis using package IBM SPSS Version 22. The data were analyzed at .05 level of significance and 228 degrees of freedom

Results

Hypotheses One

Tourism research development is not significantly related to socio-economic livelihood in Akamka local government area of Cross River State. To test hypothesis one simple linear regression analysis was used. The result of data analysis is presented on Table 1

Table 1: Simple linear regression analysis of relationship between Tourism research development and socio-economic livelihood in Akamka local government area of Cross River State

Model	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Regression	77.241	1	77.241	18.17*	.000
Residual	1556.2001	228	10.172		
Total	1633.442	229			

* Significant at .05 level; R, .205; R^2 , .042

The Simple linear regression produced an adj. R^2 of .040. It therefore showed that Tourism research development accounted for 4.0% of the determinant of socio-economic livelihood in Akamka local government area of Cross River State. The percentage though seems small, a cursory look at the Table 1 showed that the Calculated F-value (ANOVA) obtained $F=18.17$ is significant since p-value of .000 is less than .05 at 1 and 229 degrees of freedom. This result implies that Tourism research development is significantly related to socio-economic livelihood in Akamka local government area of Cross River State.

Hypotheses two

There is no significant relationship between tourism research development and conservation of indigenous culture in Akamka local government area of Cross River State. To test hypothesis one simple linear regression analysis was used. The result of data analysis is presented on Table 2

TABLE 2: Simple regression analysis of the relationship between tourism research development and conservation of indigenous culture in Akamka local government area of Cross River State

Model	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Regression	101.322	1	101.322	11.31*	.004*
Residual	1532.120	228	10.261		
Total	1633.442	229			

* Significant at .05 level; R, .188; R^2 , .035

The linear regression analysis in Table 2 produced an adj. R^2 of .032. It therefore indicated that tourism research development account for 3.2% of the determinant of conservation of indigenous culture in Akamka local government area of Cross River State. The Calculated F-value (ANOVA) obtained $F=11.31$ is significant since p-value of .004 is less than .05 at 1 and 229 degrees of freedom. This result implies that there is a significant relationship between tourism research development and conservation of indigenous culture in Akamka local government area of Cross River State.

Discussion of findings

Data in Table 1 showed that tourism research development is significantly related to socio-economic livelihood in Akamka local government area of Cross River State. The conclusion is in line with the study of Pal and Yashwant (2020) that stated that socioeconomic development induced by tourism is much broader than economic development and includes the expansion of the multicultural environment by raising people's awareness in the host destination about the manners, customs, religions, etc., of tourists. According to the authors, in this way, tourism contributes to a society's increase of tolerance, patience, and empathy towards representatives of other countries and cultures, and the country receives a new impetus for social development. Cultural exchange and the advancement of cross-cultural communication are important factors accompanying travel.

The result of the study contradicts the study of Saarinen and Rogerson (2022) who stated that tourism research development has often been touted as a panacea for socio-economic development, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. According to the authors the relationship between tourism research development and socio-economic livelihood may not be as significant as previously thought as the impact of tourism on local livelihoods is often overstated, and the benefits of tourism development are not always equitably distributed

Data in Table 2 shows that there is a significant relationship between tourism research development and conservation of indigenous culture in Akamka local government area of Cross River State. This conclusion is in line with the study of Lee, Chen, and Peng (2021) stated that the protection of biodiversity and the preservation of regional customs and cultural heritage might be considered two of the main goals of the rapidly expanding ecotourism sector (Ecotourism projects involving local communities are often offered as opportunities to gain economic benefits while protecting the natural environment and cultural heritage of vulnerable areas.

The findings equally aligned with the study of Nath and Nath (2018) that stated that tourism and indigenous culture, local populations are faced with fresh perspectives and ideas about how to live and engage with their environment. According to the authors outsiders looking to enhance their own experience and comprehension of these cultures are frequently tapping into the communities' normious reservoir of local and indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous peoples' traditional ways of life are deeply rooted in the natural environment, and their cultural practices and spiritual beliefs are often centered on conservation and sustainability (Whyte, 2022). This is usually due to the fact that in order to protect indigenous culture and knowledge you need to protect the location where it was born; without the land there is no culture. Therefore, participation of indigenous communities in projects such as ecotourism, which aim to protect these cultures, is valuable and nowadays often also desired by the other parties involved

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- I. Policymakers and stakeholders to promote responsible tourism practices. Policymakers and stakeholders can promote responsible tourism practices by developing and implementing sustainable tourism policies and regulations. They can also provide incentives for tourism businesses to adopt environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices.
- II. Maximize the benefits for host communities in Akamkpa LGA. Additionally, they can support community-based tourism initiatives that benefit local residents and promote cultural heritage conservation. Effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders are crucial in promoting responsible tourism practices. By working together, policymakers and stakeholders can ensure that tourism development benefits both the economy and the local community

Conclusion

From the result of data analysis, the following conclusions were reached that: Tourism research development is significantly related to socio-economic livelihood in Akamka local government area of Cross River State and there is a significant relationship between tourism research development and conservation of indigenous culture in Akamka local government area of Cross River State.

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