

Article

Revitalization of Isuochi Carnival and Festivals for Tourism Development

Chiamaka J. Chukwuma¹, Maureen Ogechi Aruomah², James O. Onyeabor³

Department of Archaeology and Tourism, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

¹amakachukwumaj@gmail.com, ²maureen.ukaegbu@unn.edu.ng, ³james.onyeabor@unn.edu.ng

Correspondence: maureen.ukaegbu@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

Carnivals and festivals are not only essential parts of tourism but are also an inseparable part of human society. At present, carnivals and festivals have gained global significance through the tourism industry and there is a need to study the level of revitalization accorded them by host communities. There is also a need to revive and preserve host communities' cultural heritage as they are central to host identity, even though some may have been at risk of being diminished. This article sought the opinion of informants on the revitalization of Isuochi carnival and Egbochukwu, Nsuluonu, and Odichukwu/uma festivals. The study was conducted in Isuochi, Abia state of Nigeria and the qualitative methodology was employed in the collection of data for the study. Using the ethnographic approach, the data for this research were gathered through observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions with community members and other tourism stakeholders in the study area. The data gathered were analyzed thematically and themes that reflect informants' perceptions of the need for revitalization were identified. The findings revealed more affirmative than negative views on the revitalization of the carnival and festivals. More so, in addition to public awareness and provision of funds, adequate collaboration among the villages that make up the study area with the other tourism stakeholders was seen by informants as key in addressing the challenges of revitalization. Implementing collaboration will aid in the successful revitalization and preservation of the carnival and festivals, thereby ensuring that valuable cultural practices are passed on to future generations for sustained tourism development.

Keywords: Revitalization, carnival, festivals, tourism development, Isuochi, Abia State

Introduction

Globally, events, including carnivals, festivals, sports, conferences, exhibitions, and a host of other events, are developing rapidly and making significant contributions to development and tourism (O'Toole, 2011). Carnivals and festivals have the potential for the development of tourism in Nigeria. They are part of the intangible aspect of culture in communities and utilizing their prospects towards the development of the tourism industry will ensure greater productivity. Carnivals are emblematic or symbols of festivals (Gotham, 2002), though they are distinctly described. While a carnival entails a festive occasion that is marked by processions, sometimes exceptional foods, and entertainment (Simpson, 2013), a festival is an event or community convention that is usually organized by a local community that concentrates on a theme and in some cases some distinctive features of the community (Caves, 2004). Tourism, which involves the movement of people to places outside their usual home for at least 24 hours and not more than one consecutive year for a variety of purposes (UNWTO in Okpoko, 2002), is noted to be one of the fastest-growing means of boosting the economy all over the world (Ukaegbu, 2011). Cultural tourism, an aspect of tourism has formed a major basis of why tourists travel. People embark on cultural tourism to have a feel of alien cultures with their complements of festivals, arts, and music (Idris, 2011). Carnivals and festivals are part of these complements since they constitute some of the most

fascinating manifestations of culture that tourists observe with great relish (Okoroafor, 1995). When events are not properly managed, tourists tend to stay away from such destinations as tourism is known to be particularly successful in areas that are culturally and environmentally accommodating (Getz, 1997). This explains the need to revitalize the potentials of tourism such as rituals, ceremonies, festivals, crafts, and arts, that are integral to a community's cultural identity, which have been left to gradually fade into oblivion.

Isuochi carnival, before its deterioration was an important event celebrated occasionally to propagate the Isuochi people's identity. It featured parades, traditional wrestling, cooking competitions, and other entertaining activities that added colour to the people's culture. The selected festivals: *Nsuluonu*, and *Egbochukwu*, were celebrated to remember the unique periods in their history. These periods were characterized by peace, harmony, and love which not only brought the community together but also attracted visitors. However, since their deterioration, the community has recorded quarrels and hostility amongst the villages that make up the clan which ought not to happen. To restore harmony there is a need to resuscitate the local festivals which have been used as tools for promoting togetherness, tourism, and boosting local and regional economy (Felsenstein & Fleischier, 2003). Hence reviving the *Isuochi* carnival and other notable festivals will promote tourism in Nigeria as well as boost the local economy of the host destination by providing social and economic benefits to local people. Although the activities of the carnival in the community have faced a decline which has altered the image of the destination in the long-term resulting in social drift needs to be revisited (Parry & McElroy, 2009) the situation can be salvaged through revitalization. This will be achieved through adopting the opinions of the inhabitants in the host destination where the carnivals and festivals take place, especially concerning reviving them. This will be achieved if the stakeholders who are directly and indirectly affected by these activities have decided on the revitalization of these activities.

Review of Related Literature

Carnival

Carnivals are often associated with large-scale cultural celebrations, traditions, and festivities that attract both residents and tourists to the host destination. Carnival celebrates the two most substantial phases of life namely, life and death and it involves a rejuvenating process where social order is forgotten or temporarily suspended (Haynes, 2009). Festival is derived from the word "feast" meaning celebration, and celebration is the intriguing and important part of a festival. Gibson, Connell, Watt, and Walmsley (2011) see festivals as mirrors that reflect a collective identity of a place through various event programs and activities.

Carnivals have been recorded as being advantageous and disadvantageous to host communities. It has been noted to promote socio-economic development through job creation, and revenue generation both to the local economies and at the federal level. It can promote cultural integration and skill development. Carnival spending provides tax revenues for the government which is in turn used to provide infrastructure and basic welfare services for the people (Essien & Anthony, 2019).

The development of tourism through carnival events has benefits. Allen, O'toole, Mcdonnel, and Harris (2002) stated that "events like carnival and festival act as catalysts for attracting visitors and increasing their average spend and length of stay. They are also seen as image makers for the destinations, positioning them in the market and providing a competitive marketing advantage" (p.35). Hence, carnivals are beneficial to destination tourism development as they attract visitors, stimulate economic activity, and showcase a destination's cultural heritage for development, however, it has disruptive tendencies such as increased traffic congestion, noise pollution, and crowds, which can disrupt the daily lives of residents.

Festival

In event studies, festivals have become a vital sub-field that has gained the interest of scholars. This is a result of the universality of festivity and the popularity of festival experiences (Getz, 2010). Festivals occupy a special place in almost all cultures and have therefore been well-researched and theorized about by scholars in culture-related disciplines (Lui, 2003). Gelder and Robinson (2011) provided the functions of festivals. In their opinion, festivals

- i. give local communities the opportunity to advance and enjoy their culture with others,
- ii. stimulate rural economic development and social bond among communities,
- iii. give opportunity to community members to share experiences and perspectives,
- iv. create opportunities for tourists to enjoy other people's cultural heritage which contributes to community development, and
- v. create an avenue through which tourists/visitors meet with local people and help them to achieve their aim for visiting the location.

Festivals appeal to communities looking for ways to address issues such as civic design, local pride and identity, heritage, conservation, urban renewal, job creation, investment, and economic development (Gelder & Robinson, 2011). Festival can attract tourists to a destination. This is why Gelder and Robinson (2011), agree that events, arts, and festivals do have a tourism connection. They went on to argue that the relationship among them is especially the ability to draw a large audience both locally and from a great distance, with the latter usually resulting in an overnight stay. Hence, festivals are also a catalyst for attracting tourists.

Relating festivals to tourism development, Getz (2005), referred to major events and festivals as that which have become relatively a significant progressive area within the tourism industry. Festivals hold great promise for tourism (Okpoko & Okpoko, 2002), and in this regard, African countries like Nigeria which have plentiful cultural festivals that are rich in mythology can promote and develop them to enjoy the economic implications. Such can also serve as a means of creating a feeling of shared value and kinship among various tribal groups (Ekechukwu, 1990 in Okpoko & Okpoko, 2002). Festivals like carnivals are, therefore, vital tools that will yield positive results in developing the tourism sector. Conversely, festivals also have potential problems associated with them. The influx of visitors to a festival can have effects like crime, vandalism, prostitution, and traffic congestion, all of which might result in resentment from the host community.

Tourism

Tourism is seen as a vital tool that aids the development of economies. This is visible in the manner it generates foreign exchange for many countries, including Nigeria, by attracting international investment, increasing tax revenue, and providing job opportunities (Asif, Sughara & Ardito, 2020). In most parts of the world, tourism is seen as advancing greatly as a result of combined factors ranging from its impact on the environment, government, society, as well as religion (Galvin & Jorge, 2013). One of the attributed factors to the development of tourism is its demand and supply of services and products (Jefferson & Bodlender, 2002) and also in the existence of new technologies between organizations in the tourism sphere that provide tourism products (Guyane, 2016). No other form of development has so many far-reaching tentacles as tourism (Gunn, 1994) and as such, tourism could be developed, undeveloped, or made efficient through technical assistance given to its workers and integrated into undeveloped areas (Murphy, 1985).

Revitalization

Revitalization can be likened to the reawakening of dormant practices that are central to a community's identity. According to The Burra Charter 2000, revitalization is a thought-out procedure to conserve existing, and very often, historic buildings or districts by putting them to good contemporary use. However, the term cultural revitalization as described by Jacob (2013) has to do with reactivating cultural practices or a way of life to the material reality out of which they originally emerged, in order to provide a stronger base for cultural survival. It can be deduced that cultural revitalization refers to efforts made to revive, preserve, or strengthen a community's cultural heritage, traditions, language, and practices that are central to their identity which may have been at risk of being lost. Revitalization, in order to reach its goals, needs to focus on the creation and simulation of opportunities that will generate income and jobs while maintaining and improving the distinct dynamics and features that make rural life unique (Kenyon, 2008). This way, the host community will appreciate it more and ensure that it becomes sustainable. Revitalization measures according to an online article "should target ensuring sustainable development. The implementation process should ensure that degraded areas can function efficiently again by changing the state of things and giving them new functions (Poland-Operational Programme, 2008).

Research Method

To address the objectives, this study employed a qualitative research methodology while adopting the ethnography approach in particular. The qualitative method aids in driving an "insightful understanding of the subjects or the social phenomenon being studied" (Okpoko & Eze, 2011, p.2). Qualitative research is interpretive in that the researcher, the participants, and the public see the results from different perspectives (Ihuah & Eaton, 2013). In other words, qualitative research does not have a common view of understanding research. There is nothing like absolute truth in qualitative research, it is about savoring the nuances of the moment. It is then about concentrating on the moment be it in the aspects of an in-depth interview, group discussion, or observation (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

This study takes an ethnographic approach to data collection which entails visiting the research subjects and spending a given period with them to collect data relevant to addressing the research questions (Okpoko & Eze, 2011). Ethnography is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies a cultural group in a natural domain over a prolonged or extensive period, to observe and describe the beliefs, values, and customs of others via interview (Creswell, 2009; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). This research under the ethnographic approach employed techniques such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Through semi-structured interviews, information on the carnival and festivals was derived. The first author passively participated in the festivals, observed, and then recorded the nature of the carnival. Group discussions consisting of the diverse informants aided the focus on studying the cultural heritage. Since this project is aimed at exploring the opinions of the host community and other tourism stakeholders regarding the revitalization of Isuochi carnival and festivals, these methods enabled the researchers to achieve their aim. The data was later analyzed and presented in themes.

Research Area

Isuochi, in Umunneochi Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria, is located between longitude 5°38'N and latitude 7°20'E of the equator (Nzegbule, Onyema & Ndelekwute, 2013). It is situated on the south, to the southeast orientation of the Udi hill range with undulating terrain and sharp escarpment. Isuochi was formally known to belong to the Bende Division in the Eastern Region of Nigeria until 1929 when it was transferred to Okigwe division. Since then, it has passed from Eastern Region to East Central in 1967, Isiukwuato, Okigwe Local Government Area in 1989, and lastly in Umunneochi Local Government in 1996 where it is currently situated (Okonkwo, Agbasiere & Uduafor, 2020).

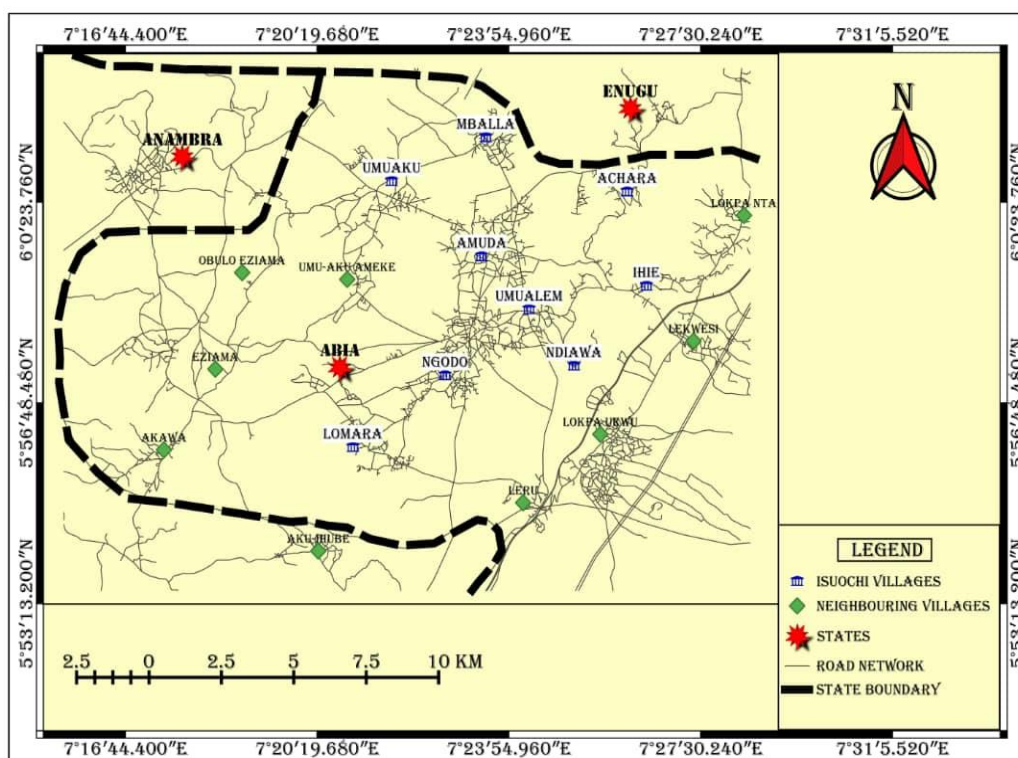


Fig 1: Map showing nine villages of Isuochi, Umunneochi LGA of Abia State
Source: (Cartography Unit, Department of Archaeology and Tourism, UNN)

Isuochi is surrounded by two sister towns that came together to make up its local government. These sister towns are Umuchieze and Nneato covering an area of nine hundred and fifty square kilometers (950 sq-km) with a population of over 2 million people, it is bounded by Lokpa (Umuchieze) in Umunneochie of Abia State, Ugwueme, Agwunta and Achi in Enugu State. On the west, it has a boundary with the *Ibii* stream as the order (Abia Census Board, 2015).

Isuochi Carnival

The Isuochi carnival as explained by some informants is a conglomerate of various festivals such as; *Egwu Egbochukwu*, *Mba-ima*, *Egboajala*, and *Odichukwu*, amongst the other festivals celebrated in Isuochi in the past. This is usually celebrated on the 26th – 31st of December every two years. The Carnival has been generally celebrated twice in Isuochi: firstly in 2013 and secondly in 2015. It was then pioneered by an organization known as Obodo Isuochi Initiative (a non-profit organization that works for the unity of the people) and was sponsored by the House of Assembly members. After 2015, the carnival was no longer celebrated like before. It dwindled that only a few villages in Isuochi celebrated it last. These villages include Umueze, Ehihie, Ogele, and Umuelem. Isuochi Carnival is a cultural celebration that depicts the rich cultural heritage of the Isuochi people and also strengthens their bond of unity and love. It also promotes the Isuochi watchword '*Nwelete di uto* (there is love and bond in brotherhood).'

During the carnival, which takes place during the Christmas period within at least five days, various activities are involved starting from the preparation to the closing feast day. These activities do not have a particular scheme that directs the celebration except that the preparation process comes first with the main event's activities following. The celebration does not exceed six days. In preparation for the carnival, the major activity of clearing the bushes and main road paths leading to the village square and the traditional ruler's palace by the youths is carried out. They also decorate the village square with traditional designs and colors. The elderly women organize themselves in groups to prepare the local *iwungo* delicacy with *oji*, *anara*, *azuiwu*, or *ugba* to be presented to the visitors and families during the feast. The men get fresh palm wine ready for the event. Everyone is expected to participate in this celebration but not everyone gets to present an activity. Most people especially those who do not live permanently in Isuochi constitute spectators.

Prominent masquerades such as *Igbala*, *Onuoraegbu*, *Mkparadi* (known as the dancing masquerade and popular for their spectacular dance which is purely for entertainment purposes), and the *Ada di mmuo* (known also for dancing and entertainment but not heavily dressed as the *Mkparadi*) grace the occasion. Dancing competitions and wrestling are other important activities that take place during the carnival. A day is also set apart for the display of local crafts and arts known to have been part of Isuochi since time immemorial. Pageantry contest where the winner emerges as the face of Obodo Isuochi was made part of the event. There was a dialectical debate where only the Isuochi dialect was used in various speech presentations. Football match competitions between the villages, March-past

competitions, and cooking of various traditional delicacies contests between the women took place. A day was also set apart for youths to celebrate their prime with friends they invited. Ahia Isuochi is the only Market that sells all through the Carnival celebration period with buyers being mainly visitors.

Subsequently, after the first general carnival in 2013 and the second general carnival in 2015 where the nine villages in Isuochi participated, the carnival has not been celebrated generally. The few villages that celebrated it last tried to add some other events. Since the carnival's inception in 2013, one of the things it did was unite the people. Knowledge and novelty ideas that had been hidden away were also learned. The carnival also attracted people who were not from Isuochi to appreciate the culture. This helped popularize many sites and attractions which are ideal for tourism development in the clan. The first general carnival celebrated in Isuochi as understood was made to create awareness for upholding the Isuochi cultural heritage, bringing the people together, and testing the possibility of this celebration for its continuity in subsequent years. Unfortunately, the purpose for which the carnival was created has become difficult to achieve since the celebration started dwindling for some years.

Festivals in Isuochi

Isuochi people were known to celebrate important occurrences in their history, and this led to their having many festival celebrations. These festivals as stated collectively by some informants include Egbochukwu festival, Nsuluonu festival, and Odichukwu/uma festival.

Egbochukwu Festival

It was learned that this festival was a celebration that required communal eating and merriment of strictly Isuochi people. The festival was usually celebrated towards the beginning of the 'ember' months (end of August through to mid-September). The preparation made for it follows that the villagers in their intense farming season, within this period, find a full week when all the indigenes of Isuochi are brought together. In the past when it was celebrated, the town crier on the mandate of the general Umunna, announced the date for the celebration. The women at this stage begin to buy and prepare various food items in bulk. Men go out in groups to hunt games for storing, children fill the water pots, compounds are cleared, and bushes are cleared. It is during this celebration that most of the houses get repainted and the thatches and zinc replaced. Usually, visitors are not welcome in the house of an Isuochi man during this celebration period. The idea is to have time alone with family (both extended and immediate). Another reason given for celebrating the festival is to propagate unity in working communally as well as check the strengths of families together without external interference.

An informant revealed that the *Egbochukwu* festival is not like the other festivals where masquerades of various kinds display or drums beat to alert neighbors. Rather, the period is usually punctuated with solemnity in a good way. The nostalgic feeling of working and communion is felt that even while the family

members disperse after the celebration, remembering the unity and peace of home, brings them back. To quote the informant's words:

It is the day we decide to stay together and do things that will grow us as brothers. This celebration helps us to understand ourselves and also helps us to see our capability in the face of work. We work out our differences and proffer solutions as to how we will become better during this festive period.

Every year, the *Egbochukwu* festival is ushered in with the approval of *nne-oche*, (an ancestral deity revered for every activity in the clan). Some consultations and sacrifices of appeasement are done if the deity does not respond or confirm the celebration. Because of this practice of appeasing or consulting the deity, it was revealed that Christianity was one of the reasons for the decline of the festival. Many people embraced Christianity and threw away their traditional items and as well stopped being faithful to the deity. This led to the destruction of the deity and the decline of the festival.

Furthermore, some informants stated that another remarkable thing about the *Egbochukwu* festival is that during the period of harvest, it is always bountiful. It is believed that the spirit of oneness makes this possible as a result of the unity and commonness employed in farming. The festival propagated hard work and curbed laziness and social vices which are presently rampant in Isuochi. The nine villages in Isuochi do not practice this festival. Only Umuaku, Nkwogu, Amaokwe, and Ngodo celebrated this festival before its decline.

Nsuluonu Festival

This is a festival celebrated majorly for young maidens. Suitors and suitors' families are the ones being watched out for during this festival. It was stated by some informants that during this festival, the maidens who are mature for marriage are taken to a room where they are trained (*agbasia ha*) for a full year. They are taught the rudiments of womanhood and marriage including how to give birth, take care of babies, cook, and customary formalities that will be accorded to the husband. The role they will play when they are married as new wives and how to relate with co-wives are also explained to the maidens. The maidens are usually between the ages of 14 and above. A maiden who is not selected during the period of training can be selected again during the following year's session.

The *Nsuluonu* festival is not for every maiden, only those who are seen to be of age and have possible suitors are recruited for this training. A group of elderly women known as *Otuagada Agbogho* is in charge of the training but the selection itself is made by another group selected by the people. At the beginning of the recruitment, the young maidens are tested for virginity. They are checked using a leaf which is inserted gently into their private parts. This is done in a separate room, away from the eyes of people except the maidens. There are days when the young maidens are taken out to the markets and the village at large. Those days are called "*Nlechaubochi*". It is these days eligible men from different places come to buy or sell at the main *Ochi* market. The main objective is usually to pick a wife rather than buy and sell wares. At the end of the full year, the suitor makes his intention

known to the family of the maiden who must have known beforehand from the elderly women in charge.

The training at the end of a full year turns into a celebration. This celebration is the main festival which signifies the end of the training and the union between a suitor and a chosen maiden. The suitor and his people come with different gifts during the festival. The gift may include items like *akwa achara* (clothing materials), *mmanya* (drinks), *tangele* (eye liner), *ola aka n'ukwu* (jewelry), *udummiri* (water pot), *okuko* (fowl), and *ewu* (goats) among others. Mothers watch out for their daughters' suitors to ensure that no desecration or atrocity is committed before a maiden's bride price is paid.

A ritual known as '*Nwaanyibuihe*' usually carried out at the *okiri* stream is made on all the maidens each month through the induction period. Again, this ritual was one of the reasons why the festival was abandoned when Christianity came into Isuochi.

Odichukwu/Uma Festival

An informant explained this festival was one celebration every young man in *Isuochi* looked forward to. After the festival, young men are recognized and are considered legible to pass through the *Iwa Ogodo* (*Iwa Akwa* for some villages) festival. It is a festival celebrated before the farming season. Young men utilize the period to showcase their strength. They measure the number of farmlands to cover in a day and at the end of a working season. This festival and the *Uma* festival are most times celebrated together according to the informants. The *Uma* festival comes up after a year. That is, during the end of the year. It is celebrated just a few days before the end of the year to thank the gods for a full year and to usher in another year.

Stakeholders' Perspectives on the Revitalizing Isuochi Carnival and Festivals

The views collected from participants were categorized into two groups, namely: the heritage managers and the host community.

Heritage Managers

Most of the informants had positive views about the revitalization of the *Isuochi* carnival and festivals. Participants were of the view that the decline of the carnival and different festivals affected the host community because the local people used to participate actively and also gain in the celebration. In this regard, an informant said:

Everything about revitalizing the cultural heritage is all shades of good. The people here used to participate very well and enjoy the gains that accrue from them. People get menial jobs and make money. Many also socialize and meet those they haven't met before or for a long time...

In addition to the above view, another informant highlighted some potential benefits of revitalizing *Isuochi* festivals and carnivals including the generation of

funds, showcasing of cultural identity, togetherness, appreciation of culture, and provision of infrastructure.

At the meeting with some heritage managers, emphasis on sponsorship and awareness campaigns which will bring about a new orientation on why preserving these cultural events is important were given by some informants as a point to note if the cultural heritage will be preserved.

To revive the carnival and festivals will definitely require funding and a good way to get it is through funding or sponsorship by private and public organizations. And I must tell you that to revitalize something that is already declining. Efforts need to be geared towards enlightening the local people...

Reorientation is very imperative if the revitalization of the festivals is to be achieved. Already, many people see them as archaic, outdated, or fetish so it will take some work to explain to people the benefits of revitalization...

Another set of informants was of the view that revitalizing the Isuochi carnival and the festivals is a decision that needs to be taken by the community and other tourism stakeholders. It was understood that revitalizing Isuochi Carnival is a work that requires the input of the host community to make the process a sustainable one for developing tourism. They went on to state that there is nothing wrong in keeping a culture alive as long as it is properly maintained as supposed. Also, the provision of funding and reviving the cultural norms and rituals were highlighted as recommendations for reviving these cultural events.

Festivals like Nsuluonu for example, will need the chief priest and will also need those rituals and the structures where the training of the maidens was carried out. Another thing that should be considered is the current trend, religion, and socialization mediums. In all, the major decision and the way to go about it will come from the community, though others will also be involved...

The views expressed highlight that heritage managers believe revitalizing carnivals and festivals is a feasible goal. However, they also emphasize that the key to success lies in engaging the community members who are the custodians of the culture, as their involvement is crucial for the revitalization process to be effective.

Host Community

The first set of informants which included mostly elderly women and men asserted that bringing back the festival and carnival is a good decision. This is because, since they are not getting any younger, they would want the festivals to be revived before they join their ancestors in the great beyond. The carnival celebration is no longer as it used to be since 2015 whereas the festivals declined a long time ago. However, to them, the strategic planning, coordination, and implementation will be left in the hands of the agile youths along with other authorities. They posited that the festivals they knew of in the past might be difficult to revive to their original state

due to the change over time. Rather certain modern activities can be added to the events which will make both Christians and non-Christians participate in them.

For me, it will be a good thing if it happens before I die. At least I will be happy that we left them [the carnival and festivals] for the upcoming generation. That way, the agile youths will be at the forefront with the authorities so that they will continue from where we stopped...

As much as I want them to be revitalized, I would prefer that they are done carefully so that everybody, including Christians, will be ready to participate. I would not like anyone to term them fetish as that will still affect the festivals negatively...

The second set of informants from the host community included the traditional rulers and some titleholders in the community. They agreed that especially, Isuochi Carnival should be revived because a lot of benefits are attached to it. The issue of fundraising was debated as to how the funds will be generated. In the end, it was agreed that if the carnival was restored, the women's group, the youths, able councilors who are also members of the house assembly, and other volunteer groups could support the Isuochi carnival. On how this should be done, recommendations on introducing arts and crafts display to the event as well as the opening of more markets for visitors and indigenes were given. In the end, this group was of the view that they also wanted the carnival to be revived. Two informants further said:

Restoring the carnival and festivals is something which we will all benefit from because it will teach our children to enjoy some of the core traditions we did before they were born. Since it will help boost tourism in this area and open our businesses and help us become known, it is a good idea to revitalize the carnival and the festivals...

You need to see how enjoyable the carnival used to be because a lot of activities are attached to it. Besides, people come to Isuochi and our people make money and get to meet other people. In fact, I want it to be revitalized. Our local crafts can even be displayed to make more money...

Some other informants asserted that the major problem with organizing the carnival might be concerning how the events will be managed, how it will be funded, and how the lack of involvement in the affairs of the carnival will be corrected. They indicated that if the carnival must be revived which they are not against, the youths must be involved, and the elders must consent to it too.

Discussion

In addition to the carnival that used to be celebrated in Isuochi, Egbochukwu, Nsuluonu, and Odichukwu/uma festivals were also studied. During their existence, the festivals played vital roles in the lives of the Isuochi people by encouraging togetherness and unity, showcasing the people's culture and yielding

socio-cultural and economic gains, and by serving as an avenue through which the local people communed with and revered their gods.

The potential of the Isuochi carnival and notable festivals like Nsuluonu, Egbochukwu, and others can be used as a means to boost the tourism industry if the right step is taken towards revitalizing them. Listening to informants give their views on the state of these intangible cultural heritage was enough to understand that the bad state of the cultural heritage bothered them and therefore resuscitating them is a task that should be done. This is because the benefits will outweigh the costs. Nonetheless, the festivals and carnivals have been paused for years. The last time the Isuochi Carnival was celebrated was in 2015 and the festivals had long declined. Hence, the condition of the carnival and festivals in Isuochi is not encouraging and as such will require some developmental strategies to achieve a successful revitalization.

From the views of informants, religion is among the reasons for the decline in the celebration of the festivals and is also likely to be one of the challenges of the revitalization process. Eze-Uzomaka and Oloidi, (2017) noted that since the introduction of Christianity, some traditions, festivals, and cultural practices are regarded as idolatry and syncretism. Some of the festivals that involved rites, spiritual consultations, rituals, and killings in the past may be difficult to revitalize as most people have dropped traditional religion. In addition, some of the ideas behind these events have been forgotten as some of those who practiced them were said to be no longer in existence. Since most of the local people have embraced Christianity, they may see the revitalization of some aspects of the heritage as fetish or outdated. Be that as it may, it was recorded that Calabar Carnival uses authentic cultural activities that still retain their original form to keep visitors coming every year (Esu, 2011). Thus, if the original nature of the festivals and carnival needs to be embellished or remodeled with modern activities as some of the informants suggested, there is a need for proper care and planning to be put in place. This should be done bearing in mind that the originality of cultural heritage and events is what attracts tourists to the destination in the first place. Solving this problem will be a leaping step to revitalizing these heritage resources.

As much as none of the informants disapproved of revitalization, the affirmation does not mean that they all understand the dangers of reviving every festival in Isuochi. For instance, the Egboajala festival involves killing and no society in its right senses would want to bring back an activity that brings pain to it. What this means is that since they all agreed to revitalization, the focus will be on the cultural heritage that will ensure peace and stability in the community. It has been argued that the objective of any tourism development is to be economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and socio-culturally manageable (Page & Connel, 2006).

Another issue highlighted in this study was poor funding which is usually a problem some researchers in the tourism sector have highlighted (Timothy, 2011; Emeghara, 2015). In this regard, the revitalization of cultural heritage is not exempted. The heritage managers confirmed that the state government allocates

funds for cultural projects, but that is hardly sufficient to take care of cultural heritage in the museum and other cultural properties. Revitalization will certainly involve sittings, meetings, negotiations, property restructuring, major road and facilities construction, advertisement/marketing bills, and planning bills amongst others. These would require funding. This idea is not novel to the government but releasing funds for starting and developing has always been the problem. If the success of this scheme will be possible, tackling the issue of funding would have to be considered. Sponsorship by private and public organizations can also go a long way to help.

Lack of awareness was also found to be a problem. First, the local people need to be aware of the need to protect their cultural heritage and for them (the festivals and carnivals) to be revitalized. It has been noted that a lack of awareness contributes to a lack of interest in the preservation of cultural heritage (Agbu & Raji, 2020). Secondly, strategies for reaching out and announcing to the people that the festivals will be celebrated on certain days were in place in the past. The town criers were there to take care of that, and the villages in the community were more unified. It was part of the people's culture, and their festival calendar recorded it. With the new patterns and socialization factors, however, these structures have long been tampered with. Hence, for the project of revitalization to be successful, new measures of communication and marketing should be put in place.

Stakeholders are important in the development of any tourism proposed activity and/or existing tourism attractions. For cultural heritage to be sustained and continue to exist, they have to be left in the hands of the host community who are the owners of the heritage. This assertion is made based on the management and implementation of policies created to manage tourism products at different levels. This resonates with Ukaegbu's (2011, p. 129) opinion that "plans made towards the reviving of cultural heritage in any area that involves the local community will help in keeping surveillance and sustainability of the revived heritage". The importance of stakeholders to the progress of every developmental function is what Gunn (1988) referred to as applying a community-oriented approach. This approach emphasizes involving those who will be directly and indirectly affected by tourism activities in the decision-making. In other words, determining the opinion of the local people or getting them involved is pertinent. Any attempt to revitalize the carnival and festivals or develop tourism without involving all relevant stakeholders is likely to fail (Oluwatoyin & Ileri, 2016; Ukaegbu, Carr, & Okpoko, 2019).

Suffice it to say that the role of stakeholders in revitalizing the carnival and festivals for tourism development centers on planning, implementation, and management. While the secondary stakeholders such as the heritage managers, tourism operators, and other governmental bodies will be responsible for constituting policies that will aid in the management of this cultural heritage, the bulk work of organizing activities, controlling functionaries, and following the policies effectively will be done by the host community. If with the help of the secondary stakeholders, these events are planned but they are not sustained further to produce the expected benefits, it would be as good as not starting the revitalization process in the first place. Thus, the cultural heritage which is being sought to be preserved will end up

dying. Therefore, all hands need to be on deck by all the people involved during the process to ensure that the policies are followed and monitored closely. When stakeholders are effectively involved at all levels of decision-making, the issues hampering the progress will be solved and revitalization of the Isuochi carnival and festivals will take place. This will in turn lead to tourism development and the effect will be economic and socio-cultural viability among other things.

The tourism industry provides an economic boost to countries. When the revitalization process goes well and tourism development is achieved, the economy of the local community will improve in the areas of employment opportunities, income distribution, and the development of infrastructure. It is asserted that festivals and related events generate over one million jobs in Nigeria yearly and 20% of Nigeria's workforce works in the tourism industry (Nwankwo, 2017). There will also be the distribution of income among the residents in Isuochi and beyond which can improve the people's standard of living. However, this might happen seasonally as a result of the events' nature. In addition, facilities like good roads will be constructed, while electricity, water sources, accommodation structures, etc. will be made available in Isuochi.

Summary and Conclusion

Different parts of the world now utilize carnivals and festivals as part of their heritage resources to develop tourism in their setting. These tourism potentials are vital though delicate tools for developing tourism. This is why when they are overlooked, they end up deteriorating, especially with the trend and fast rate of acculturation.

Because carnivals and festivals have gained global significance through the tourism industry, this study deemed it necessary to explore the issue of the revitalization of Isuochi carnival and festivals which can lead to tourism development. The need to take the resuscitation and preservation of host communities' cultural heritage seriously cannot be overemphasized. Apart from making it possible for the cultural heritage to be passed on to generations, they contribute to the economic and socio-cultural development of the area. With these in mind, the opinions of informants were sought particularly on the revitalization of the Isuochi carnival and Egbochukwu, Nsuluonu, and Odichukwu/uma festivals.

Discerned from the data presentation, most of the informants saw the revitalization of their carnival and festivals as a welcome development in their setting. Among the other issues like awareness and funding raised by the informants, this step will involve collaboration between the host community and other tourism stakeholders. Implementing collaboration will aid in the successful revitalization and conservation of the carnival and festivals, thereby ensuring that valuable cultural practices are passed on to future generations for sustained tourism development.

The development of tourism in any given setting comes with some responsibilities. This informs why it is imperative to ensure that there is a careful consideration of appropriate bodies. The idea of those who should be involved in decision-making and carrying out the process is dependent on the expected outcome. Some

approaches like boosterism, physical/spatial, economic, and community-oriented approaches have been outlined and deliberated on for tourism planning towards development (Okoroafor, 1995). Among them, the community-oriented approach appears to be the best for a successful developmental project concerning host communities.

Finally, revitalization and tourism bring new results and changes wherever it is applied. While the intention is for a completely positive outcome, the possibility of some negative implications coming up cannot be ruled out. It is pertinent therefore that every step made towards achieving them should be carefully done while steps that can be taken to salvage any potential negative outcome included in the plan.

References

- Abia Census Board (2015). *Population Counts*. Abia State Nigeria: Ministry of Land and Survey.
- Agbu, F. S. & Raji, F. (2020). Developing Heritage Tourism in Nasarawa State Nigeria. *African Scholar Journal of African Sustainable Development (JASD-2)* 17(2), 267-282.
- Allen, J., O'toole, W, McDonnel, I.& Harris, R. (2002). *Festival and Event Management*, (2nd ed). John Wiley & Sons.
- Asif K., Sughara B., Lorenzo A., Jiaying L., Hizar H. & Anas M.A., (2020). Revisiting the Dynamics of Tourism, Economic Growth, and Environmental Pollutants in the Emerging Economics – Sustainable Tourism Policy Implications. *Sustainability, MDPI*, 12(6), 1-26
- Caves, R.W, (2004). *Encyclopedia of the City*. Routledge.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Emeghara, E. E. (2015). Towards Proper Cultural Resource Management for Sustainable Development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Development and Management Review (INJODEMAR)* 10, 1-12
- Essien, C. K., & Anthony, G. B. (2019). Carnival Activity and Economic Development of Youths in Southern Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria: Implication for Environmental Adult Education. *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7(6), 11-19.
- Esu, B. B, Arrey, V.M., Basil, G & Eyo, E.E (2011). Analysis of the Economic Impacts Of Cultural Festivals: The Case Of Calabar Carnival in Nigeria. *Tourismos: An international multidisciplinary journal of tourism*, 69(2), 333-352
- Eze-Uzomaka. P. I. & Oloidi, A. J. (2017). Modernization and its Effects on Cultural Heritage in Southwestern Nigeria. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 6(2), 81-93.
- Felsenstein, D. & Fleischer, A, (2003). Local Festivals and Tourism Promotion: The Role of Public Assistance and Visitor Expenditure. *Journal of Travel Research* 41(4), 385-392.
- Gavin, E. & Jorge, C. (2013). Perspectives on Tourism Development. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 8(7), 44-51.
- Gelder, G. & Robinson, P. (2011). Events, Festivals, and the Arts. In Robinson, Peter, Heitmann, Sine & Dieke, P.U.C. (Eds.), *Research Themes for Tourism*, pp. 128-145. CABI
- Getz, D. (1997). *Event Management and Event Tourism*. Cognizant Communication Corporations
- Gert, D. (2005). *Event Management and Event Tourism* (2nd ed.). Cognizant Communication Corporation.
- Getz, D. (2010). The Nature and Scope of Festival Studies. *International Journal of Event Management Research*, 5, 1-47.
- Gibson, C., Connell, J., Watt, G., & Walmsley, J. (2011). The Extent and Significance of Rural Festivals. In Gibson, C. & Connell, J. (Eds.), *Festival Places: Revitalizing Rural Australia*, pp. 3-24. Channel View Publications.

- Gotham, K. F. (2002). Marketing Mardi Grasi: Commoditization, Spectacle and the Political Economy of Tourism in New Orleans. *Urban Studies*, 39, 1735-1756
- Gunn, C. (1988). *Tourism Planning* (2nd ed.). Taylor and Francis
- Gunn, C. (1994). *Tourism Planning*. Taylor and Francis.
- Guyane, T. (2016). Tourism Development Trends in the World. *European Journal of Economic Studies*, 17(3), 429-434. DOI: 10.13187/es.2016.17.429
- Haynes, B. F. (2009). *Elements of Carnival and the Carnivaleque in Contemporary Australian Children's Literature*. An unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the University of Sydney, Australia.
- Idris, A.I. (2011). Promotion of Cultural Festivals: A tool for Community Development and Revenue Generation. *Bulletin of Social and Behavioral sciences*. Retrieved from <https://www.inticjournals.com>
- Ihuah, P., & Eaton, D. (2013). The Pragmatic Research Approach: A Framework for Sustainable Management of Public Housing Estates in Nigeria. *Journal of US-China Public Administration*, 10(10), 933–944.
- Jacob, M. (2013). *The Renaissance is Now – Next Steps for Healing and Social Change. Yakama rising: Indigenous Cultural Revitalization, Activism, and Healing*. The University of Arizona Press.
- Kenyon, G. (2008). Tourism Development: A Practical Approach. *International Journal of Tourism Management*, 29(2), 254-265
- Liu, Z. (2003). Sustainable Tourism Development: A Critique. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 11(6), 459-475.
- Murphy, P. E. (1985). *Tourism: A Community Approach*. Methuan.
- Nwankwo, A. E. (2017). *Fundamentals of Tourism Studies*. University of Nigeria Press
- Nzegbule, E.C, Onyema, M.C & Ndelekwute, S.C (2013). Plant Species Richness and Social Nutrients in a 35-year-old Cashew-nut Plantation in Isuochi, Southern Nigeria. *Tropical Ecology* 54(2), 205-212.
- O’Toole, W. (2011). *Events Feasibility and Development from Strategy to Operation* (1st ed). Elsevier.
- Okonkwo, E. E, Agbasiere, N. D, & Uduafor, S. (2020). The Isuochi Artisans: Implications of Traditional Arts and Crafts of Isuochi People for Tourism Development in Abia State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Research in Tourism and Hospitality (IJRTH)* 6(1), 1-15.
- Okoroafor, C. N., (1995). *Tourism Development in Nigeria: Problems and Progress*. African Educational Services Ltd.
- Okpoko, A. I & Eze, P.I (2011). *Methods in Qualitative Research* (2nd ed). Great AP Express Publishers Limited.
- Okpoko, P. U. & Okpoko, A. I. (2002). *Tourism in Nigeria*. Afro-Orbis Publishers Limited.
- Oluwatoyin O. & Ileri, O. N. (2016). Cultural Tourism and Community Involvement: Impacts on Sustainable Tourism Development in Ekiti State, Nigeria. *Dannish Journal of Geography and Regional Planning* 2(1), 1-8
- Parry, C. E., & McElroy, J. L. (2009). The Supply Determinants of Small Island Tourist Economies. *The ARA (Caribbean) Journal of Tourism Research*, 2(1), 13-22.
- Page, S. J., & Connell, J. (2006). *Tourism: A Modern Synthesis*. Thomson Learning.
- Poland-Operational Programme (2008). *Polskie* MEMO/08/117 Brussels. Available at: europa.eu/rapid/press-release-MEM-08-en-pdfaccess
- Roller, M., & Lavrakas, P. (2015). *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach*. Guildford Press.
- Simpson, D. (2013). Definition of Carnival. *The Guardian Weekly*, 1.
- The Burra Charter (2000). *The Australia ICOMOS Charter for places of cultural significance 1999*. Retrieved from http://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/BURRA_CHARTER.pdf.

-
- Timothy, D. J. (2011). *Cultural heritage and tourism: An introduction*. Channel View Publications.
- Ukaegbu M. O, Carr, N. & Okpoko P. U (2020). Local People's Perceptions of the Potential Implications of Cultural Revitalization through Tourism in Benin, Nigeria. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 18(4), 455-469.
- Ukaegbu, M.O. (2011). *Monuments, Historic Preservation and Tourism Development: A study of Lokoja, Kogi State, An Unpublished Masters Project*, Department of Archaeology and Tourism, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
-

Publisher's Note/Disclaimer: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of NJH. NJH disclaims responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.