

Engendering sustainable socio-spatial environment for tourism activities in the south eastern nigeria: the place of environmental planning and management process.

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Abstract

The South Eastern part of Nigeria was a single state of the twelve states of Nigeria before 1976 – East Central State. Presently, the area is made up of five states. This Paper presents a study carried out to assess the possibility of knitting the once-one-state and presently five states, together to form a tourist destination worthy of international importance. Although the unprecedented dearth of infrastructural development in the zone continues to be a subject of discussion, little attention has been given to investigate the place of synergized intervention. Descriptive analysis was employed, in which the tourism potentials in the zone that are of national recognition were itemized. Data were collected on available amenities, resident population and accessibility of such potentials. Existing literature on various Environmental Management Systems were explored to elicit a system that is capable of affording a sustainable environment for tourism matters in the zone. The study revealed that the zone exhibits similar socio-economic and physical characteristics that are replete with potentials for improvement for optimum tourism utility in the entire zone. Several measures were advanced in the study to achieve this, chief of which is the adoption of the Environmental Planning and Management (EPM) process.

Key words: Tourism destination, national significance, tourism potentials, EPM-process.

I. Introduction

Tourism as an industry did not assume much significance in Nigeria until the end of the Nigeria civil war in 1970. This was when tourists from different parts of the world trooped into the country to witness the effects of the war. Only very few tourist centres of international standards existed before this period. The ones existed consisted of night clubs that provided relaxation avenues for foreigners. Places of this sort were limited to places like Lagos, Calabar, Port-Harcourt, Warri and a few other hinterland towns (Iyi and Ugwu, 2009).

Studies so far on tourism in Nigeria have provided useful insight as to its contributions to development. However, focus of such studies has remained largely at national level. A pertinent question is whether tourism has potentials for revenue mobilization at sub-national levels.

The aim of this paper was to assess the possibility of inducing a unit tourism environment at a sub-level of the national environment. The study area was the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. That was finding a way to knit the five states that make up the zone together, to form a tourist destination that will be worthy of international importance. Descriptive analysis was employed, in which the tourism potentials in the South-East that are of national recognition were itemized. Data were collected on available tourism potentials of national significance and accessibility of such potentials. Existing related literature on various environmental management systems were explored to elicit a system that would afford a sustainable environment for tourism matters in the zone.

II. Literature Review.

The place of tourism industry in national development has gained significant literature. Richardson (2010) argued that tourism sector is the main source of foreign exchange earnings for one-third of developing countries and among the top three sources of export earnings for almost half of all Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Also, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2015), there is evidence to support the claim, that tourism has had significant effects on the growth and development of other sectors of the economy of such cities as Hong-Kong, Sydney, London, Tokyo, Paris, Los Angeles, New York, Buenos, Toronto, Madrid, Berlin, Beijing, Rome and Dubai.

In the area of job creation, tourism has been lauded as a major employer of labour in the recent time. The sector has created large number of direct and indirect jobs. Direct jobs include such job in hotels, airlines, restaurants, transportation, and leisure industry. WTTC (2012) also claimed that tourism contributes to general growth in the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The GDP increased from 2.8 percent in 2011 to 3 percent in 2012 due to contribution from travel and tourism.

The significance of tourism as an industry in any economy therefore, cannot be overemphasized. Such significance can apply to any geographical unit, whether a town, a region or a country. Some of the impacts occur only for countries as a result of international travel which finds expression in the balance of payments of individual countries. A system of environmental management has, therefore, to be deduced to extend the experienced significances at national level to other sub-national levels.

The United Nations centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) came up with the Environmental Planning and Management (EPM) process in 1987. The process is a continuing and dynamically evolving process whose purpose is to make development progressively more responsive to environmental considerations (UNCHS/UNEP, 1987, Bloxom, 1986, and Wahab, 1998). The process is a participatory, interactive and collaborative approach to planning and management of the environment. Characteristically, it is a network of concerned stakeholders that work together to tackle man-environment relationship issues. In this regard, there is active participation of stakeholders drawn from the public and private sectors, formal and informal (Iyi and Ugwu, 2009).

The EPM process has the following attributes (Wahab, 1998):-

- i. Involvement of all that are affected by an identified environmental issue.
- ii. Environmental issues are prioritized and dealt with systematically.
- iii. It is a bottom-up approach.
- iv. Action plans are usually formulated to guide transformation of strategies into practice.
- v. Institutionalization of the process which makes it to get the attention of the public institutions.

III. The Study Area

The study area, South-East geo-political zone, is one of the six geo-political zones into which Nigeria is divided. The zone comprises Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. It is bounded in the East, South and West by South-West geo-political zone and in the North by the North-central geo-political zone (see Figure 1).

The zone is situated in the lowland forest region of the country. It is located between latitude 5-7 degrees north and 6-8 degrees east. It has a land mass of about 27,000 square kilometers. It is predominantly of the Igbo speaking tribe of Nigeria.

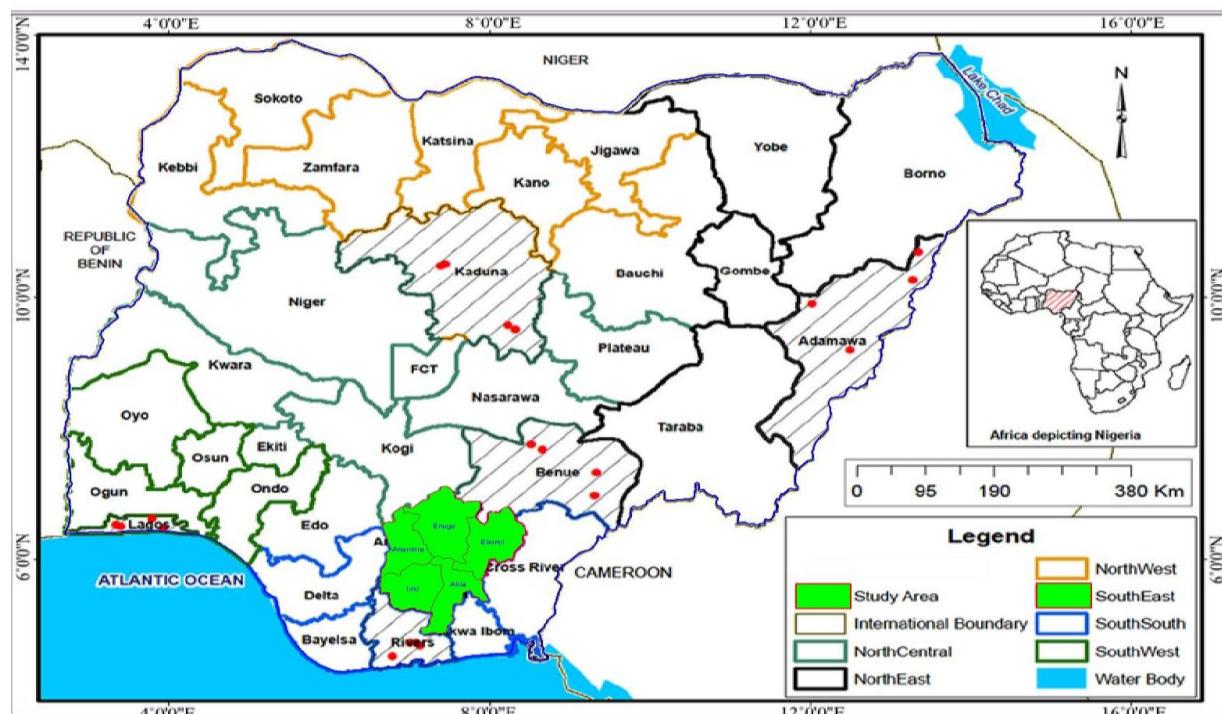


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria Showing the South Eastern States.

Source: google.com, Accessed 24/07/2015

IV. Data Presentation and Analysis

Two sets of data were collected for the study, namely, tourism potentials and accessibility.

4.1 Tourism Potentials in the South-Eastern Nigeria.

The tourism potentials that were sourced in the area were mostly such potentials that are of national importance. Some of the potentials are site based while there some that are event based. Event based tourism potentials come up during certain periods of the year and the location of such events may vary from year to year. The potentials are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Tourism Potentials in the South-Eastern Nigeria.

S/N	State	Potentials	Remarks
1	Abia	i. Arochukwu cave ii. Long Juju of Arochukwu	Site attraction Event attraction
2	Anambra	i. Ogbunike Cave ii. Igbo Ukwu Archeological excavation	Site attraction Site attraction
3	Ebonyi	i. Ndibe Beach, Afikpo ii. Uburu Salt Lake iii. Abakaliki Green Lake	Site attraction Site attraction Site Attraction
4	Enugu	i. Opi Lake Complex ii. Ngwo Water Falls iii. Mmanwu Festival	Site attraction Site attraction Event attraction
5	Imo	i. Oguta Lake	Site attraction

Source: Authors' Survey, 2015.

In Table 1, of the eleven potentials of national recognition, nine are site based while two are event based.

4.2 Accessibility Characteristics in the South-East.

The ease with which the states are accessed, and the distances were explored. The ease was adjudged from personal experiences of the authors on one hand, and interview of other travelers in the zone, on the other hand. The experiences were based on ease of accessibility of the state capitals, namely Umuahia, Awka, Abakaliki, Enugu and Owerri. The assessment was categorized into three ratings and scores as follows:

- i. Very good – 3: when the interconnection is entirely of tarred road that is in good repair.
- ii. Good – 2: When the interconnection is of tarred road with minimal areas in disrepair; or not tarred but in good repair.
- iii. Poor (1) when the interconnection is tarred and/or not tarred and in major disrepair.

The findings are shown in Table 2 while the major link routes are shown in Figure 2.

Table 2: Rating of Interconnectivity of the South-East States.

S/N	From	To	Distance (Km)	Rating	Score
1	Abakaliki	Awka	-	Poor	1
2	Abakaliki	Enugu	-	Very good	3
3	Abakaliki	Owerri	-	Good	2
4	Abakaliki	Umuahia	-	Good	2
5	Enugu	Awka	174	Good	2
6	Enugu	Owerri	152	Good	2
7	Enugu	Umuahia	62	Poor	1
8	Awka	Awka	141	Poor	1
9	Awka	Umuahia	126	Poor	1
10	Owerri	Umuahia	83	Very good	3
Total Score					18
Average Score = 18/10 = 1.8					
Percentage Score = 100(18/30) = 60%					

Source: Authors' survey, 2015.

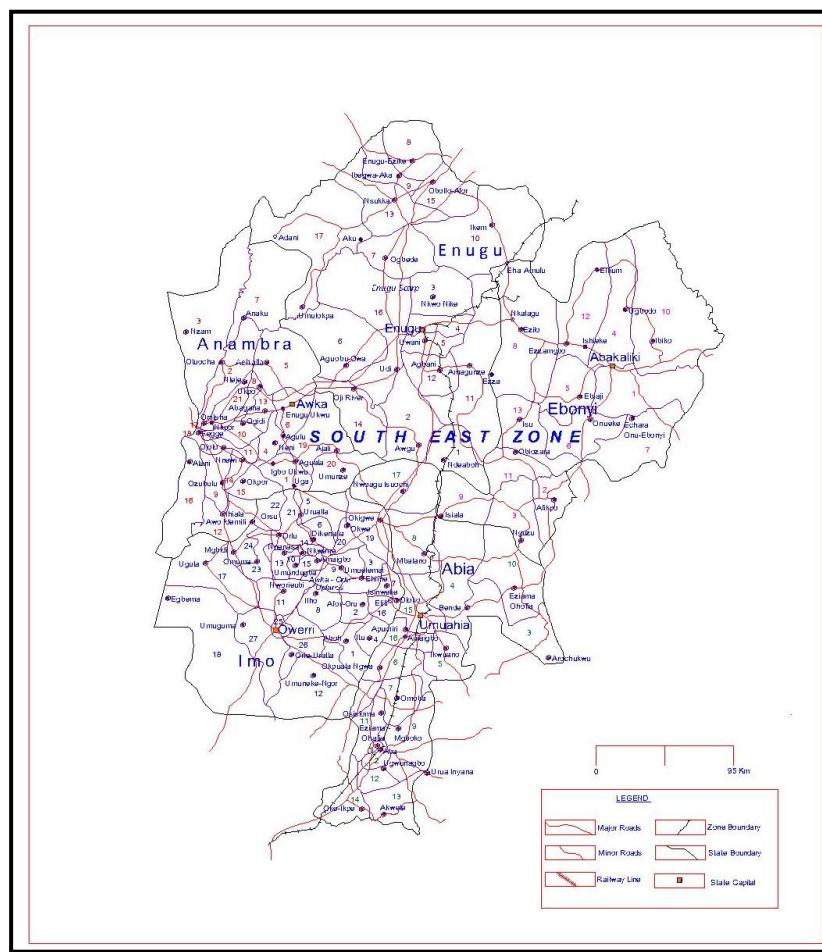


Figure 2: Transport Routes

Source: google.com, Accessed 24/07/2015

VI. Discussion of Findings

The identified tourism potentials in the South-East zone as shown in Table 1, as indicated earlier, are those ones which have been acclaimed to be of national significance. There are however, other site and event attractions which traverse the zone, and which when given attention will attain the status of national tourism sites and events. It is believed that any deliberate attention paid to such sites and events would make them approximate returns from the petroleum industry.

Data on interconnectivity of the different states in the zone as deduced from quality of the average rating of 1.8 depicts a situation that is below good standard. This can be said of other facilities. The routes that connect the state capitals depict similar physical characteristics. Whatever form of intervention on roads to enhance connectivity can be replicated in such other areas of tourism facilities as parking areas, railway lines, harbours, airports, runways. Utility services like water supply, electricity supply, drainage and sewage disposal would also be included in any such intervention scheme. The intervention that best suits the quest of this study is one that is anchored on the Environmental Planning and Management (EPM) process.

6.1 EPM Process in Good Tourism Environment for the South East Zone

This section showcases an epitome of the strategies that are capable of engendering sustainable socio-spatial environment for tourism activities in the South-East geo-political zone of Nigeria, while adopting the EPM process. Three levels of operation of the process can be adopted. The levels include:

- (i) Zonal Level-comprising the five states.
- (ii) State Level- comprising the local government areas in each state.
- (iii) Local Government Level- comprising the communities.

There will be a similar process for all the three levels. The difference will be on the composition of the stakeholders. At the zonal level, each of the states will be represented in a forum to be called the Zonal Tourism Forum (ZTF). Other stakeholders will include representatives from international and federal agencies that are

domiciled in any of the member states. The state representatives should be those in charge of Tourism Boards. ZTP will be coordinated by relatively qualified personnel in tourism matters. The appointment of the coordinator will be by the minister of the ministry in charge of tourism matters in Nigeria.

At state level, all the local governments will be represented in a forum to be called State Tourism Forum (STF). The representatives should be those that are charged with the responsibility of tourism matters in the local governments. Other stakeholders will comprise representatives from related ministries, tertiary institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions and other related national and international agencies. The coordinator of the forum will be the officer in charge of the State Tourism Board.

At the local government level, the communities where tourism potentials exist will be represented in a forum to be called Local Tourism Forum (LTF). Other stakeholders will include representatives from community based organization (CBOs) faith based organization, trade unions and other related agencies. The co-ordinator will be the personnel incharge of the local government tourism committee.

At each level of the forum, the following steps will be followed to address any issue that is of tourism importance:

- i. Identify, prioritize and clarify the tourism issues.
- ii. Agree on methods, actions needed for the issues.
- iii. Formulate plans with all necessary imports like finance.
- iv. Institutionalize the process.

Tourism action plans from the local governments and states will be collated at the zonal level to form an action plan for the ZTP.

6.2 Areas of Operation

The objective of the Zonal Tourism Forum (ZTF) will be to achieve an all-round development of tourism sites as well as events in the South-East zone of Nigeria. The development will range from the known ones to those to be explored in the zone. The development will be in form of ensuring that the following items are in place:

- i. Good roads to the sites
- ii. Parking areas
- iii. Airports and runways
- iv. Water supply
- v. Electricity supply
- vi. Drainages and sewage
- vii. Railway lines

The activities of ZTF will enhance private development of such other infrastructure as:

- i. Passenger traffic terminals
- ii. Hotels
- iii. Restaurants
- iv. Shopping facilities
- v. Entertainment facilities
- vi. Shopping facilities
- vii. Telecommunications
- viii. Taxis and buses.
- ix. Commercial and other banks.

VII. Recommendations

The following recommendations are advanced with a view to achieving the objectives of this research work:

- i. The fora advocated, Zonal Tourism Forum (ZTF), State Tourism Forum (STF) and the Local Tourism Forum (LTF) should be adopted and implemented to ensure a sustainable socio-spatial environment for tourism activities in the South-East zone of Nigeria. In those fora, the tenets of the EPM process as exposed by Wahab (1998) will be engendered in the zone.
- ii. There should be an exhibition of political will on the parts of elected officials at the federal, state and local government levels to explore tourism as an economic venture. In this way, fiscal policies towards achieving the quest of this study will be frictionless.
- iii. The entire process should be institutionalized by the concerned states in union with the federal government to enable follow-up actions in the operation of the process.

VIII. Conclusion

This study has shown the quality of the five states that make up the South-East zone to be formed into a unit of tourism location. The place of the EPM process in achieving this has also been addressed. Being a bottom-up approach to environmental planning, the process is capable of ensuring a smooth and frictionless way to ensuring a sustainable unit of tourism environment in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria.

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