
Austine O. Nnaji

Federal University of Technology Owerri

P. A. Igbojiekwe and C. C. Nnaji

Imo State University

An Assessment of Developmental Potential of Oguta Lake as a Tourist Destination

Recent efforts by the Imo State government of Nigeria to generate income through tourism identified Oguta Blue Lake as a potentially homogeneous region for tourism development. This understanding is expanded through a study of the bio-physical nature of the lake to ascertain its socio-economic viability for tourism development. Sustainability and diversity attributes of the lake were a major focus. Utilizing empirical data generated from structured questionnaires and field surveys, analysis was performed employing ANOVA statistic and simple percentages to reveal the lake's potential as a tourist destination. The paper also projects rapid urbanization of the region powered by tourism while recommending massive infrastructural development of the lake to accommodate the anticipated population surge.

Key words: Tourism Development, Outdoor Recreation, Oguta Lake, watershed management, Recreation, Hospitality industry

Austine O. Nnaji

Department of Environmental Technology

Federal University of Technology Owerri

Nigeria

Phone: 07062678890

Email: dr_nnaji@yahoo.com

P. A. Igbojiekwe and C. C. Nnaji

Dept of Hospitality and Tourism Management

Imo State University, Owerri

Nigeria

Dr. Austine O. Nnaji is a senior Lecturer at Federal University of Technology Owerri, Nigeria, while an adjunct lecturer at Imo State University. He has a Ph.D in Geography from University of Florida, Gainesville (1999), an M. Sc from Florida A&M University, Tallahassee (1993) and a B. Sc from University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1984). Dr Nnaji's research interests are Global Environmental Change and Human Security.

Introduction

As a growing global industry, the hospitality sector contributes a significant percentage of generated state revenue while providing leisure to the tourist. More so, the multiplier effect of tourism spending is particularly high because of the attractive nature of the product and service. Tourism development is vital for economic growth and has recently shifted from income generation to include the promotion of national identity (W.T.O 2000). Examples of such campaigns are “Malaysia Truly Asia”, “Noro Philippines”, “Uniquely Singapore”, “100% pure New Zealand” and “Incredible India”. In Nigeria, the “Calabar Tinapa” and more recently Oguta Lake campaigns are competing models.

The Forbes Traveler ranking of the world’s 50 most visited tourist attractions in 2007, including both international and domestic tourists, reveals that 4 out of the top 5 and 6 out of the top 10, are in the North American continent (Table 1).

Table 1: UNWTO Tourism Highlight Edition 2007

RANK	TOURIST ATTRACTION	CITY AND COUNTRY	NUMBER OF VISITS (MILLION)
1	Times Square	New York City U.S.A	35
2	National Mall & Memorial Park	Washington D.C U.S.A	25
3	Walt Disney World Magic Kingdom	Orlando USA	16.6
4	Trafalgar Square	London U.K	15
5	Disneyland	Anaheim CA U.S.A	14
6	Niagara Falls	Ontario Canada & N.Y U.S.A	14
7	Fisherman’s Warf & Golden Gate Nat. LR Area	San Francisco CA U.S.A	13
8	Tokyo Disney Land & Tokyo Disney Sea	Tokyo Japan	12.9
9	Notre-Dame de Paris	Paris, France	12
10	Disneyland Paris	Paris, France	10.6

National tourist expenditures have risen with the following 10 countries as the top ten biggest spenders (Table 2).

Table 2. Top 10 Countries by Tourism Expenditure

RANK	CONTINENT	COUNTRY	INTERNATIONAL TOURISM EXPENDITURE 2006	INTERNATIONAL TOURISM EXPENDITURE 2008
1	Europe	Germany	\$ 74.8 Billion	\$ 54.7 Billion
2	North America	United States	72.0 Billion	74.2 Billion
3	Europe	United Kingdom	63.1 Billion	70.6 Billion
4	Europe	France	32.2 Billion	34.6 Billion
5	Asia	Japan	26.9 Billion	26.6 Billion
6	Asia	China	24.3 Billion	28.0 Billion
7	Europe	Italy	23.1 Billion	27.3 Billion
8	North America	Canada	20.5 Billion	23.1 Billion
9	Europe	Russia	18.8 Billion	23.0 Billion
10	Asia	South Korea	18.2 Billion	22.0 Billion

For each of these countries, tourism development is carried out by both governmental and non-governmental organizations for a wide variety of reasons. Such reasons usually focus on generating income concurrently with promotion of national identity. In the case of non-governmental organisations, conflicting interests may occur in the form of a dichotomy between economic gain and preservation of the environment. This situation applies to Oguta Lake in Nigeria which faces massive economic development with the risk of cultural assault. For instance, the beautiful lake waterfront which is the cynosure of attraction also forms the centre for traditional religious rites. The latter remains sacred to the people. However, despite these fears, current political will is to develop the Blue Lake. In fact, of the six types of tourism, namely Health, Medical, Religious, Educational, Creative and Eco tourism, Oguta Lake is a candidate for the last two given the rich culture of the people. This paper argues that given a positive developmental potential, Oguta Lake can be promoted as a tourist destination, thus serving as a major foreign exchange earner as well as enriching human knowledge through communication and environmental awareness creation by promoting the cultural heritage of the people. It is in view of this anticipated economic growth that

developing nations like Nigeria are strongly contemplating diversifying their earning structure through tourism.

Today's tourists are better educated and more knowledgeable. They are looking for memorable experiences that combine relaxational, educational, cultural and intellectual interest with leisure. Most tourists choose their destinations because of the nature of the tourist resources available, especially the services expected. Oguta Lake is a natural tourist resource. The question is, does Oguta Lake have what it takes to meet the demands of today's tourists? The aim of the study is to assess the developmental potential of Oguta Lake and its economic and social viability.

Background

Conceptualized as involving individuals travelling for predominantly recreational or leisure purpose, tourism entails the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence. It has become a global phenomenon. In 2006 for instance, there were over 846 million international tourist arrivals (UNWTO Tourism Highlights, Edition 2007). The importance of tourism in the socio-economic development of any country cannot be qualified. Okoroafor (1995) stated that "with the possible expectation of mineral oil, the tourist trade is the most important item in the world trade, with its attendance that has brought top and development to some of the countries not very well favoured by nature in the distribution of important resources of today".

Tourism is the main stay for all the countries in the South African Development Community (SADC). In Zimbabwe it is the third largest earner of foreign exchange and employs sixteen percent (16%) of the workforce. Malawi gets 280,000 tourism arrivals a year. The Swaziland Tourism Authority estimates that, at present, it earns R 200 million annually from tourism and received 410,000 tourist arrivals in 1997, making tourism a major

contributor (five percent) of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. For the Seychelles the value is a massive 10 percent.

The World Tourism Organization shows that between 3 and 5 percent of the world GDP are produced by the tourism sector. Over the past 15 years, international tourism receipts have grown 1.5 times faster than the world's GDP, with no signs of slowing down in the future. It is estimated that 1.6 billion international tourists will arrive by 2020 compared to 592 million in 1996 and 415 million arrivals in 1990. The international tourist arrivals for 1990/2020 show a tremendous increase and this trend will continue in the sector. Even the Asia-Pacific region, which was hit by economic crises that drove away tourists, has again assumed its status of star of world tourism with a growth rate of about 7.5 percent, and a record of nearly 94 million international tourists (Esu and Etuk, 2007).

Tourism involves a variety of industrial sectors and this makes it very difficult to get estimates concerning the number of employees associated with it. It is estimated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) that the travel & tourism industry represents over 4 percent of the global GDP and 8 percent of world employment. Direct employment in tourism industry-related enterprises amounted to 80 million while other related employment brought the total to about 200 million jobs worldwide.

Esu and Etuk (2007) observed that tourism in recent times is a global issue requiring that tourist destinations meet international standards in order to attract a wide market. Such basic international standards include provision of modern communication facilities such as internet, reliable telephone/inter-com as well as cable TV. Likewise, modern tourists demand better knowledge of the tourist destination before making their choice to travel. This could be better handled by a professional management consortium. Such a team will provide wide advertisement as well as ensure online booking. Also, periodic 'sales offers' especially during festivities, advertising special offers/packages, are key to attracting tourists. These offers

coupled with good service and specialized cuisine are conducts to good patronage that ensure profits and eventually viability of the tourist centre. In terms of viability of a tourist centre, Esu and Etuk (2007) further noted that this depends on the ability of the management to attract good patronage. If effectively managed, a tourist centre can make profit and eventually become capable of developing and surviving independently. For example, Florida's tourist centers like Disney World, Bush Garden, Silver Springs, etc. are internationally acclaimed. Their sustainability is attributed to a good management team that has continuously targeted global tourists.

Tourism Potential in Nigeria

Giving Nigeria's vast diversity in terms of population, geographical features and culture, tourist destinations in Nigeria have great cultural potential. Nigeria's cultural prowess includes the relics of ancient Nigerian Art from Adamawa, Alok, Benin, Calabar, Igbo-Ukwu-Cradle of Igbo Civilization, Ile-Ife Cradle of Yoruba civilization, and the Terracotta to mention just a few. Carvings, masks, paintings, sculptures and fabrics such as the Yoruba Adire, Asoke, Akira Ocha (Asaba) Akwete (Abia), Anger (Tir), ill Ota chi (Idoma) and Ejik Udara are among the most exotic in the world. Nigeria therefore has the potential to please any class of culture tourist.

Development of Tourism in Nigeria

Tourism is alien to Nigerian primal culture although Nigerians of all subcultures have always had relaxation and leisure as part of their lifestyle, yet most of the activities are local (Alderman, 1994). According to Ashley (1994) in pursuit of the goal for improving the quality of life of the people as one of the fruit of political independence, the Federal Government of Nigeria set up the Nigerian Tourism Board to encourage the creation and development of tourism. In the third national development plan, 1975-1980, tourism was for the first time included in the National development plan with an allocation of N120 million.

Out of this allocation each of the states was given N1 million for tourism development. In some states the money was gainfully utilized to promote tourism. For example, the Hotel Presidential Port Harcourt, Yankari Game Reserve, Arguugu fishing and culture village, Ikogosi warm spring water and the Mande tourist village near Jos received face lifts out of that financial allocation. Sequel to this, the Federal Government in 1990 transformed the Federal Ministry of Trade to the Federal Ministry of Trade and Tourism, and in 1992 it was named the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Tourism, with tourism awarded the status of a department in 1991. In Imo State where Oguta Blue Lake is located, in order to boost tourism, the state government established the Imo State Tourism Corporation to guide genuine tourism investors. Also the state tourism board sought partnerships with foreign firms in a bid to develop Oguta Lake to a world class tourist center.

Methodology

Study Location

The study area is Oguta Lake in Imo State, Nigeria (See Figures 1 and 2). The temperature is generally high with an average of 27°C. The hottest months are February and March when the temperature rises to between 33°C and 35°C. The climate is tropical high forest with two distinct seasons, a dry season which lasts from October to March, and the rainy season which lasts from April to September (Nnaji, 2009). Oguta Blue Lake is the largest hydrological feature in the state.



Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing Imo State

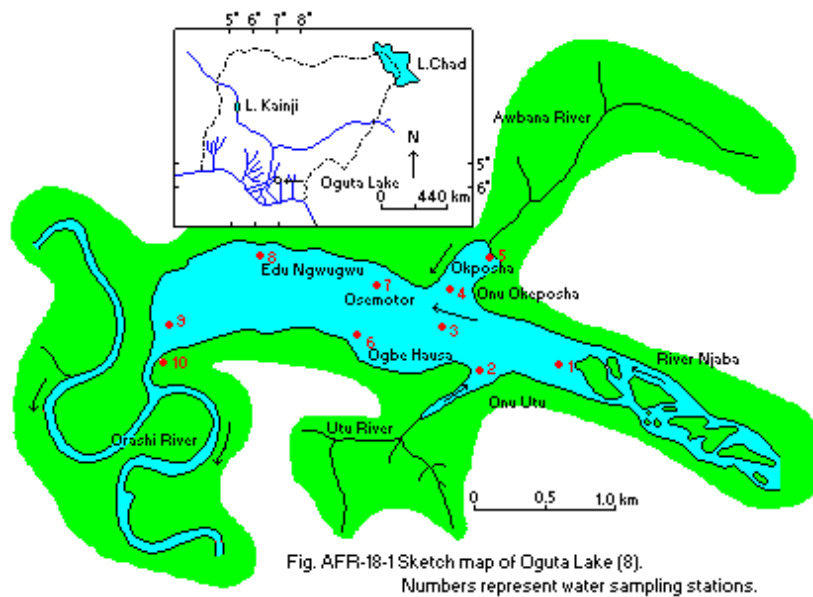


Figure 2: Sketch map of Oguta Lake

The lake which originated from a geological depression is the confluence of three rivers. It is a scenic beauty (Figure 3) and has variously housed a holiday resort and a naval base and,

most importantly, is the economic, social and cultural focus of the people. In fact, the lake is the identity and pride of the Oguta people.



Figure 3: Scenic view of Oguta Lake

Sample and Procedure

The population of this study constitutes all the staff and management team of Oguta Lake and tourists who visited the Oguta tourist centre. The sample unit for this research constitutes of the geographical boundaries of the selected tourist center, the Oguta Lake, Imo State. A total of 45 respondents were recruited. The questionnaire was designed taking into consideration some key socio economic data or information needed for this study.

Specifically the questions were designed in such a way as to source information on infrastructural facilities, funding, development and environmental potential as well as economic viability of Oguta Lake as a tourist destination. A summary of the results is discussed below. The questionnaire was validated first with a pilot test of 20 respondents before full administration. This was necessary to ensure reliability of the research instrument. In terms of the validation of the questionnaire, 20 questionnaires were distributed as a pilot test to workers at Oguta lake Motel on the scale of 5 to senior management, 5 to junior staff

and 10 to visitors. The test period was one week. No limitations were observed during this pilot test. The full questionnaire was administered 2 weeks after the pilot. For the main study, the survey was administered to 10 senior managers, 10 junior staff members and 25 visitors over a period of 1 week. A total of 45 questionnaires were administered.

The sample size for this research was determined using the formula described by Stephens (1994) while simple percentages, contingency tables and ANOVA were used to analyze the data collected. These were then presented as charts and graphs,

The responses in the above contingency tables are weighted as follows:

Strongly Agreed \longrightarrow 4 , Agreed \longrightarrow 3
 Disagreed \longrightarrow 2 Strongly Disagreed \longrightarrow 1

Results

A total number of forty-five questionnaires were administered to the staff, management and visitors of Oguta Lake, but only forty-one were completed and returned, resulting in a 91% response rate. From Table 3 it can be seen that regarding impact of poor infrastructure on development of Oguta Lake as a tourist destination, a total of 29 persons or 70.78% agreed to the question positively, while 12 persons or 29.27% disagreed with the question. This means that poor infrastructure at Oguta Lake is seen as detrimental to its development for tourism by the respondents. However, a majority of the respondents indicated that there is potential for tourism development at Oguta Lake (Table 4). In terms of economic viability of Oguta Lake and its environs, about 70% of respondents believe that it is viable economically (Table 5).

Table 3: Impact of Poor Infrastructure on Oguta Lake Development

Options	Responses	Percentages
Strongly agreed	16	39.02

Agreed	13	31.71
Disagreed	7	17.07
Strongly Disagreed	5	12.20
Total	4	100

Table 4: Tourism Potential of Oguta

Options	Responses	Percentages
Strongly agreed	14	34.15
Agreed	11	26.83
Disagreed	9	21.95
Strongly Disagreed	7	17.07
Total	41	100

Table 5: Oguta and its economic viability

Options	Responses	Percentages
Strongly agreed	17	41.46
Agreed	12	29.27
Disagreed	7	17.07
Strongly Disagreed	5	12.20
Total	41	100

Additional Evaluation

Ensuring optimum development at Oguta Lake requires that results of analysis be compared to recommended standards for viable tourism development. Results of analysis as derived

above, point towards a viable potential of Oguta lake as a tourist centre. To further confirm these results, they were compared with some known criteria for assessing economic viability of a tourist site. The criteria used in this assessment were modified from Odumeya (2008) and are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Assessment Criteria

STANDARD FOR ASSESSING ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF A TOURIST CENTRE	
INPUT FACTORS	OUTPUT FACTORS
Landmarks/Physical features (Climate Mophology, Scenic beauty)	Targeted/anticipated patronage/catchment area
Available Technical Know how	Cost and availability of funding
Accessibility	Income leisure , Employment, Revenue
Government policy	Multiplier effects
Product market, that is nature of the tourist attraction	
Reliable infrastructure (Power supply, water, etc socio-cultural activities).	

The criteria above are grouped into input and output factors. For the input factors consisting of physical variables (example climate etc) and artificial variables (example Accessibility, Government policy etc), it is expected that their full availability will sustain a viable tourist centre with positive outputs such as employment, leisure, income etc.

In terms of infrastructure such as roads, water supply, and power, the lake is fairly accessible by road. what is needed is a reliable water supply through boreholes since the aquifer is close

to the surface. However the problem of power supply needs to be tackled, though generators could be temporarily be used to supply electricity. The site can feed from a well populated catchment area spanning the whole south eastern states and by extension, Nigeria. Such population need to be enlighteend and attracted to the Oguta lake through aggressive advertisement (Wang 2006). The above however will need massive support from the government through favourable policies. Such policies will require massive funding from capable technical experts. Policies should also ensure that the product meets the need of today's tourists.

Conclusion

The research work assessed the tourism potential of Oguta Lake for economic growth and development. The findings shows that the majority of the respondents believe that if properly developed, Oguta lake has potential to be a tourist destination. In fact, the study complements Ekpo (2007) which identified the lake as a potential tourist destination. This conclusion gives impetues to plans by the government to dredge the lake and possibly improve the transportation system within and around the lake. Likewise the rich culture of the host community can be imbibed as part of the tourist attracttion.

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