

Original Paper

Exploring the Tourism Potentials of Port Harcourt City

Chinago B. Alexander^{1*} & Kponi Godwin²

¹ Department of Transportation Planning and Logistics, Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

² Niger Delta Science School, Rumuola, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

* Chinago B. Alexander, Department of Transportation Planning and Logistics, Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Rumuola, Port Harcourt, P.M.B 5936, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The emergence of urbanization and application of modern technologies in modern cities is indeed the essence of this academic research. However, Port Harcourt city in South-South Nigeria, it is noted that there are enough potentials for maximum tourism as well as enough resource that are yet to be harnessed for the ultimate development of tourism. Thereby, this paper explores the tourism potentials of the arguing that its tourism potentials have not been fully exploited due to low level of development, associated with lack of interest ignorance neglect form both Government and non-governmental organization in terms of investment or patronage. Also, it posits that the neglect of power town planning has dwarfed the aesthetics of the city. The paper aligns with greater Port Harcourt City plan as long as it is made a State policy and not a regime goal. Observation and focused group interview were employed in gathering primary information/date. The paper recommends for proper town planning and investment as to improve the internally generated revenue (IGR) as well as the GDP of the nation that will embrace Port Harcourt and its environs.

Keywords

tourism, city, urbanization, town planning, science, environment, environ, tourism potential

1. Introduction

Nigeria is richly endowed with natural environment and that can promoted tourism, however the Federal, State and Local governments in Nigeria, did not place tourism in their priority list as a result of oil exploration and exploitation. But, Kraal (1993) noted that tourism is now the world's biggest single industry. It accounts for 250 per cent of world trade in services. In 1995, it was responsible for over 100 million jobs world-wide and by the year 2005, the figure increases to 300 million.

Sheldon (1997) also argues that tourism is the world's largest industry. This is possible due to its multiplier effects. Consequently, tourism could be seen as one industry too many. In fact, tourism boards in most states are not well equipped and are poorly underutilized.

According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC 1995), tourism is responsible for 11.4 per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1995.

Okoli (2001) also posits that tourism has consistently ranked along with petroleum and automobile industries as the highest earners of income.

According to Tide (2002) the neglect of tourism also manifest in poor provision of infrastructure such as vehicles, offices furniture and even funds for the agencies of tourism. The essence of these brief remarks is to buttress the potentials and potency of tourism to a country or state if well harnessed.

Tourism as a multidimensional activity has different facets and types. Prominent among the different types of tourism are: Eco-tourism, Cultural tourism, Religious/Mass tourism, Health tourism, urban tourism, Adventure tourism, Sex tourism, Ethic tourism and the Future tourism, *Education tourism*, etc. (Chuku, 2012).

This paper is concern and focus on urban tourism. In Urban tourism, tourists are accreted to urban destinations. This destination may include landscape, palaces, parks, cathedrals, temples, national museum, galleries, historical sites, game reserves, *schools*, etc. (Chuku, 2011).

Other areas of concerns to tourist include sights and sounds, restaurants/hotels, fast food (hospitality industry), banks, travel agencies, car rentals, entertainments industry, modern architectural designed building, zoo, sport-activities, a view of the architectural and scenic environment of a city, beaches and natural sea shores.

This paper seeks to explore the tourism potentials of the Nigerian's Garden City—Port Harcourt. It argues that the city is endowed with tourist potentials that have not been harnessed for the development of tourism and that the natural and manmade tourism potentials are yet to be exploited to attract tourist to the city.

The paper concludes planning of Port Harcourt City and its environs and also recommended the preservation of parks, zoo, natural beaches, museum and other scenic environments in the city.

Tourism: Tourism as a social phenomenon has undergo flurry of definitions, scholars and even international organizations, such as the World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the International Organizations of Scientific Experts on Tourism (IASSET) have slight differences in their definitions. World Tourism Organizations (WTO) defines it as the activities of persons travelling and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes (Chuku & Enuando, 1997).

WTO believes that business trips and other activities that accrue funds are part of tourism, but for IASSET, anything connected to business or earnings other than leisure is not tourism. For the purpose s of this paper, we limit ourselves to the definition of Mictosh (1975). According to him, tourism is the science, art and business of attracting and serving visitors.

Urbanization refers to the increase in the number of people living within a geographically defined area (Akinjobin & Osoba, 1986). But, on the contrast, it is useful to note that two of the most influential books on the geography of tourism; Pearce (1987a, 1995a), primarily approach their subjects on an acknowledgement on the role of behavioural research.

In contrast, the text on geographical perspective on tourism by Shaw and Williams (1994) provides a far more critical approach to the study of tourism with acknowledgement to the crucial role that political economy, production, consumption, globalization and commodification play in the changing nature of tourism.

City: A city according to Ekpeyong (1992) is a relatively large dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous people or individuals. Bateman and Harris (2008) define city as a large town Chuku (2015).

Scenic Environment: Attractive countryside: Beautiful environment. Betama, Harris and McAdam (2008).

Tourism Potentials: Are intrinsic values of tourism Chuku (2011).

Town planning: The terms, town planning; physical planning, urban and regional planning; town and country planning are synonyms. Urban planning is concerned with a course of action to enhance development, aesthetics and circulation in towns by ensuring an orderly, functionally efficient and sustainable basis for developmental activities in space (Dunizoechi & Areimonu, 2009). Adeniyi (1978) defined urban and regional planning as an activity that aims at enhancing economic growth of the country at both national and regional levels, while at the same time; reducing (if not completely eradicating) the regional imbalance noticeable in the space economy of any country.

1.1 Study Area

Port Harcourt is located on latitude 04° 45'N to 04° 60'N and longitude 06° 50'E to 08° 0'E. It is situated 15.0 metre above sea level; it is a relatively low land area. Port Harcourt is the capital of Rivers State and the entire South—South states of Nigeria. It is generally a low land area. It is the only city or mega city in Rivers State (with the idea of greater PORT HARCOURT). Rivers State has a population of 5.2 million and a population density of 190 persons per km² during Nigeria Population Census of 2005 (NPC, 2005). As at 2006 the population of the city of Port Harcourt was 1,382,592, and in 2016 the population has reached 1,865,500.

Port Harcourt has a humid semi hot equatorial climate (Papadaki, 1960; Salau, 1985). The temperature is moderately high and would have been higher if not for her closeness to Atlantic Ocean. The mean temperature is about 28°C, with a range of about 3-5°C. The mean relative humidity is about 85%, but in the wet months, especially July and September it stood at over 95%. During the few dry months, especially December and January relative humidity is about 80%. Generally RF is recorded in almost all the months following the mean record. However, in some few years there are months without RF. The mean annual RF is about 2500mm per year. Rainy season starts in March and terminates in October, the few dry months sometimes records reasonable RF in February and November.

Port Harcourt has two dominant soil types—the alluvial soil and the ferrasol. Port Harcourt is the only big city in Rivers State. It is host to many multinational companies, though some are moving their head offices outside Port Harcourt as a result of militant activities. It has a Sea Port and three Universities, a Polytechnic and a College of Health Technology, with other higher institutions. The road network in the study area of recent has improved. The study area is shown in Figure 1.

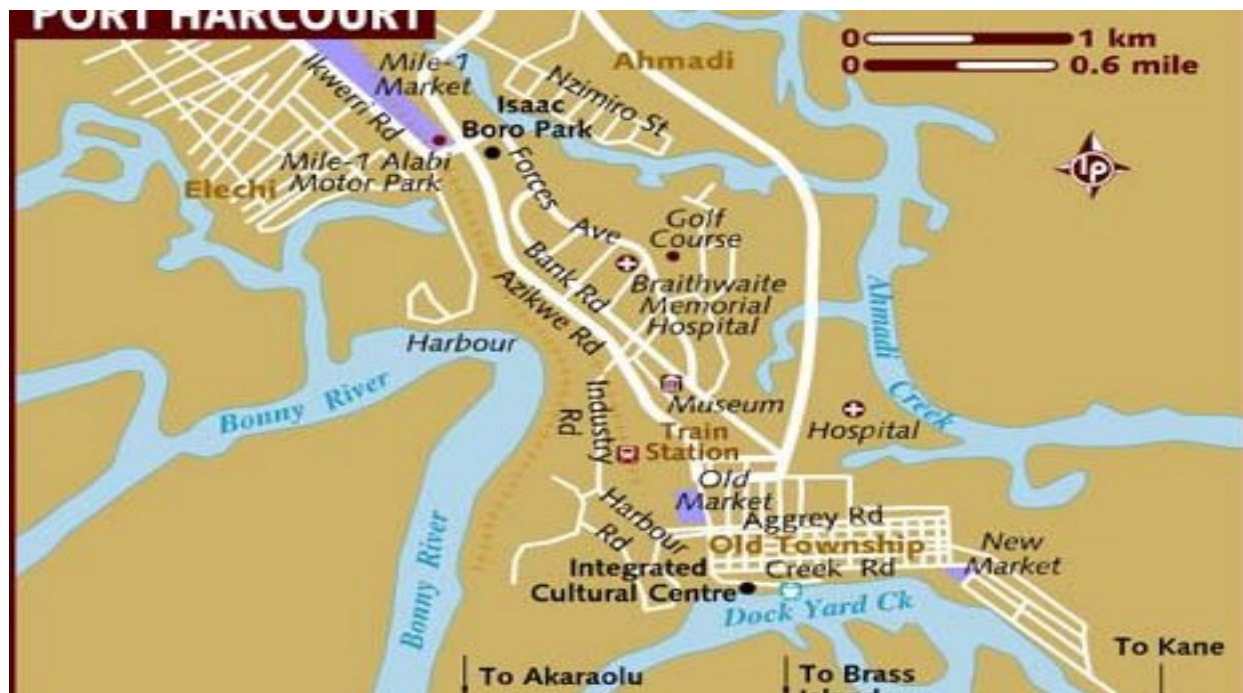


Figure 1. Map of Port Harcourt

2. Method

This paper relied on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were observations, interviews and focused group discussions.

Observation is vital to any scientific inquiry. It was a veritable source of gathering information for this paper. In course of doing this, objectivity was considered paramount, so that the findings would reflect the reality.

INTERVIEWS: The interviews were composed of semi-structured questions.

This method allowed us to probe further as one question leads to another and one response leads to another. Tourism as a social phenomenon is not well known in Port Harcourt and in Nigeria at large. So the interviews concentrated mainly on those who claim to have ideas on what tourism is and how its potentials could be realized in Port Harcourt City. Owing to the fact that it is not well known by the citizenry, our interviews were conducted in higher institutions as the Rivers State University, University of Education, Port Harcourt Polytechnic and part of the State Secretariat. Thus, purposive sampling technique was adopted, mainly for the convenience of the researcher. Ten persons were interviewed in

Rivers State University, ten in Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, and ten as State Secretariat particularly those in ministries of culture and tourism they provided useful information on the tourism potentials of Port Harcourt City.

3. Result

3.1 City Growth and Population

Geographers, Sociologists, experts in tourism and tourist have experienced and expressed urban tourism in different perspectives. Some researchers have argued that the cities of Less Developed Countries (LDCs) are modernizing centres and catalyst for economic growth, while others have argued that they are impediments to development. They are also faced with the problems of absorption (Atemie, 1996).

The persistent high population growth rates of cities in LDCs and the concern of governments and planners on how to cope with the urban problem call for more investigations into the urban phenomenon. Most of the cities in the less developed countries were not adequately planned to accommodate the population they experience, this was due to the false start of the city. In our city (Port Harcourt), the population (people) move before urbanization, and not urbanization before the people. In the real sense of it, urbanization is supposed to move in before the population, that is proper planning of the space before people occupy space, this is how it goes in Developed Countries of the World (DCW) (Alexander & Kponi, 2019).

The colonial administrators did not plan these cities as modern cities of accumulation and evacuation of raw materials, mainly agricultural products.

Port Harcourt City was planned as sea port and terminal railway line for collection and export of raw materials to the mother country.

Goldstein (1983) refers to urban growth as the increase in the size of the urban population.

It is mainly attributed to high natural increase (births minus death in the urban places).

Another major population increase in the urban centres is the rural to urban migration.

The rate of growth of some towns in Nigeria became very significant between 1953 to 1963.

Towns in Nigeria within this period showed a growth rate of 7.8% per year. As at this period, Port Harcourt received the highest growth rate of 8.7%. Thus, by 1963 Port Harcourt grew more than Onitsha, she had a population of more than 100,000 (Atemie, 1996). The growth of Port Harcourt at this period was not dependent on regional headquarters in Enugu, rather it was because of its location as the second largest seaport in Nigeria and as well as the city is regarded as the home of hydrocarbon industry in Nigeria. Nigeria's former capital and foremost seaport Lagos also experienced tremendous growth rate at 6.1% between 1975 and 2000 (World Urbanization Prospects, 2002).

As at now, it has grown to the size of a mega city and it is categorized as one of the ten largest cities in the world, with a population of more than twenty million.

3.2 Urban Poor Housing

One of the concomitant of urbanization is the expanding population of the urban poor, on the basis of the existing data. Sada (1987) argued that it could appear that Nigeria cities have the largest households in the world. Whereas the average world household size is 4.5 persons, the developed nation, 3-4 persons, developing countries 5.2. The available data in sample case studies in Nigeria are Warri 6.85, Benin 10, and Lagos 7.5. The high households are common with the urban poor in Port Harcourt, most of the urban poor live in squatter settlements or in slums (Chuku, 1997), Izeogu, Salau and Wokoma (1987), explained that the high income areas in Port Harcourt are GRA, Amadi Flat, Trans-Amadi.

Another fact affecting accommodation in the city was that the city has initial plan of 476 square miles. This implies that the city might be faced with the problem of possible expansion. The problem was compounded by the network of Creeks along the fringes of the city.

It therefore follows that the only possible expansion of the city was northwards into the urban villages of Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (Chuku, 1997). The problem of accommodation is further worsen by the lack of proper planning, and high cost of building materials (Obibokun, 1985).

3.3 Town Planning

According to Robert (1999), town planning consists of making choices among the options that appear open for the future and securing their implementations. The essence of town planning can never be over emphasized; because lack of planning can result in costly mistakes. For instance, without a comprehensive planning, haphazard development might occur such as siting a hotel or any project in an inappropriate place. This might result to mistake that essentially can never be corrected, for instance, Port Harcourt zoo is sited in an industrial area. This informed the need to transfer it to Ozuoba or Igwuruta area.

The land was procured and cages bought but the policy was abandoned and the land allotted to people (Chuku, 2011). Presently, there is hold-up or traffic jams along the two major roads in the city. Aba/Port Harcourt Express way and Ikwerre road and this are partly due to lack of planning and the sitting of a military camp (Bori Camp) within the city.

Most issues on Nigeria's underdevelopment are often traced to colonial rule.

In as much as colonial administrators are blamed in certain issues, it is also important to remark that Nigerians have not done so much in planning and development of cities. The city that is properly planned in Nigeria and by Nigerians is Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; as earlier remarked, the colonial administrators planned the then emerging cities with the limited resources though mainly for their interest. Owing to the growing number of civil servants in the city, colonial administrators provided catering rest houses, modern parks, forest and game reserves, etc. (Chuku, 2011) for these civil servants.

During Military Era, some of these parks built in Port Harcourt were converted to other purposes; some were inhabited by touts or area boys.

Governor, Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi revisited the initial town plan of the city and decided to restore the parks and recreation centres in the city. However, when the present Governor, Barr. Nyesome Wike took over; the administration did not continue from where the previous administration stopped, he abandoned the plan and it remained where it was. Alan and Gurgler (1992), argued that the cities in third world countries (Nigeria inclusive), were not planned, even when they were planned, they were never implemented to the letter. It is only when the damages have been done, will the government be compelled by exigency to correct the errors.

In Port Harcourt, the experience of Urban renewal has not been palatable to residents. However, the then Governor, Amaechi led government was bent on reclaiming the waterfronts from squatters. To give the city a modern status, some major roads were dualized such as: Ada-George; Rumuomasi, Elekahia, Nkpogu, Rumuola, etc., even the present Wike government continued from where he stopped and dualize some roads.

Good road network is essential to promoting tourism. A basic assumption in urban development planning is that planned changed in the physical and socio-economic. Environments of urban areas would have far reaching implications in the lives of urban residents.

This is so because planning instead of ameliorating housing and other socio-economic problems of low income urban residents seems to accentuate wide disparities in the level of living between the poor and the rich.

3.4 Port Harcourt City

Port Harcourt city is located at longitude 7.15° and latitude 4.45° . It has master plan that covers an area of 478 square kilometers.

Port Harcourt like other Niger Delta area lives in the tropical belt and shares command boundaries with Obio/Akor Local Government Area, in the north, Okrika in the South-east, Degema Local Government Area in the South-west. The annual range varies from 5°C to 3°C . The Diurnal range is between 6°C and 8°C and varies from season to season (Ede, 1995).

The Creeks and water-fronts serve as veritable place for squatters in Port Harcourt (Ekpeyong, 1992). Rainfall in the city would be described as seasonally variable and energetic in down pour, it occurs every month of the year, but varying duration.

According to Adoki et al. (1998), rain is remarkably spatial in magnitude due to proximity to the coast. Geologically, Port Harcourt lies on a peninsular and criss-crossed by meandering creeks, the bonny river, etc. Port Harcourt is dominated by the mangrove swamp forest in the coastal areas.

The city is generally a flat or plain land with green vegetation which dots the city. It was this that initially earned for the place the name, the Garden City of Nigeria. Its annual rainfall is more than 1975mm (79 inches). This provides good environment for flowers and trees.

Port Harcourt was established in 1913 by the British Secretary of State for colonies, Mr. Lewis Harcourt. In 1927, Port Harcourt was made the Headquarters of the eastern terminus of the Nigeria Railway Corporation (Izeogu, Salau, & Wokoma, 1987).

Originally, the City comprised of three main areas, the European Reserved Area (ERA), the main Town and Diobu. The physical expansion of the city has led to the incorporation of virtually all the surrounding villages. These villages were not planned and so as the city expands, they were engulfed without modern facilities. These villages now accommodate greater population of residents in the city. However, the 1973 master plan has the following greater population of residents in the city. However, the 1973 master plan has the following areas: Borokiri, Main town, Coronation Layout, Harcourt Road Complex, GRA Phase I, Diobu Mile I, II, III, Poly Clinic Complex, D/Line Complex, Amadi Ogbonu-abali Villages, Trans-Amadi Complex, Rainbowl, Town Complex, St. John T.TC Complex, GRA Phase II, Ogionwo (1979). 1976 Diobu Master Plan, by virtue of this plan, 69 houses were demolished, about 43 more than the initial plan.

4. Discussion

Out of the thirty persons interviewed, 26 persons indicated having a firm knowledge of tourism. Those in the ministry of culture and tourism affirmed having deeper understanding of tourism. On the issue of tourism potentials, 24 persons affirmed that the city is well endowed with tourism potentials that have not been tapped for the development of tourism in the State. Those in the ministry of culture and Tourism responded that the scenic environments in the City are affected by the indiscriminate land use and security. They complained that the Greater Port Harcourt needs to be revisited and to work with them. The essence according to them is so that they could spot out the areas already marked out by the ministry as likely tourist destinations. They also indicated that of all the Creeks and waterfronts along the fringes of the City, it is only one that has been developed as Port Harcourt tourist beach, and has also been abandoned. Even at a period activity in the beach were affected by touts. Tourist destinations are usually divided into two: nature made and man-made.

The nature-made is the waterfronts. Beaches and sea shores, and they are important dimension of Tourism. The ministry informed that they have identified some basic areas, creeks that could serve as tourist destinations they mentioned areas like, Mugbuitanwo in Emohua, near University of Port Harcourt, to see how efforts can be made to actualize tourist destination. According to them, it is a confluence, a meeting point between fresh water and salt water and produces sparkling colours when the lide is low. Man-made tourist destination in the city include the State Secretariat, Sea port, Airport, government House, Petrochemical refinery. At the level of Hospitality, those who responded to the interview indicated that Port Harcourt is rich enough in the hospitality industry.

There are 3 stars and a five star hotel and numerous hotels as catalogued by the ministry. Those who are interested in African cuisine or African pots shall have wide experiences in Port Harcourt City.

There are restaurants, gardens, parks, zoo, museum, etc., the banking industry is now a global phenomenon, so one could travel anywhere and still transact business and communicate with members of his family.

Furthermore, residents of Port Harcourt have one essential element of tourism-hospitality. They are hospitable, peaceful, generous and warm-hearted. The open door policy of the state enables non-indigenes into the State capital to feel at home.

5. Conclusion

Tourism is supposed to be dynamic not static, thereby the tourism potentials of the city of Port Harcourt can only be realized if they are packaged to attract domestics and international tourists. The tourism potentials of the city of Port Harcourt are understudied and underutilized.

This research work looks at how these resources can be explored and exploited. We also conclude that the city was not properly planned with the views of sustainable development. That in course of development, the aesthetic of the city has been affected negatively. The essence of the creation of Greater Port Harcourt City Authority is to correct the errors of the past and plan the City with a view of its metropolitan nature. This necessitates taking the surrounding villages into consideration.

6. Recommendations

It is noted that tourism enhances the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country to a very large extent because of its dynamism.

Port Harcourt zoo needs to be relocated to a quieter place. It also needs to be expanded as the present site is too small, and could not allow for possible expansion.

In the same vein, the State museum should be relocated from State secretariat to where the public could access it during weekends.

The ministry of culture and tourism need to work in tandem with Greater Port Harcourt City Authority.

This Agency, GPHCA should not be seen as a regime image making agenda, it should rather be taken seriously as a State policy.

Port Harcourt Zoo, tourist beach, park and garden, etc., should be quoted in the Nigeria Stock Exchange as to attract investors who will be able to turn around the fortune of this industry.

Cruise vessel need to be attached to the Port Harcourt tourist beach. The State should make tourism a priority by investing on it.

Citizens and Communities who wish to operate a tourist beach should obtain permission from the relevant ministries. Government could also assist by providing security.

6.1 Security

This is a major challenge as far as the business of Tourism is concerned, because if there is no proper security check on place it will hamper the free flow of Tourism and even investors cannot have the mind to invest in tourism in the area, but the dynamics of every security challenge is within the context of that environment. For instance, the current menace of kidnapping that has spread to every part of the country, Boko Haram sect menace in the north, north-east particularly.

However, another pertinent security threat in the said area is the rival secret cult crisis and their extortion that is going on the research area. Government and some non-governmental bodies need to collaborate and come with strategies that can help to arrest the menace as to enable the business of Tourism to thrive very well in research area (Port Harcourt) Rivers State.

6.2 The Culture of Rivers State

Rivers State (Port Harcourt) like other ethnic groups has a lot of Cultural Heritage that show-cases the rich culture of the people among which is the CANURIVER, a festival that different cultural troops from the twenty-two Local Government Area that make up Rivers State show-cases their respective display. Other cultures include; boat regatta, Local crafts, canoe carving and local gin distillation etc.

There are different types of security which are;

a Military security, political security, economic security, environmental and social security. In this write-up we are concern with environmental and social security.

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