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## THE IMPACT OF ROAD TRANSPORT ON CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF THE THREE GEO-POLITICAL ZONES OF IMO STATE, NIGERIA

IFEGBO IFEOMA

\* IMO STATE UNIVERSITY OWERRI, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*There is no gainsaying that road network connectivity, level of road accessibility and transport services in the rural areas of developing nations are often poor and inadequate, yet, most of the cultural resources with which Nigeria is endowed are domiciled in the hinterlands. Developing these cultural resources into tourist attractions becomes problematic due to the abject condition of the link roads and lack of adequate means of transportation. Under this condition, travel becomes very unsafe, inconvenient and expensive, thereby, affecting tourists' experiences and hampering visits to rural destinations. This research is focused at investigating the condition of roads and transport facilities of rural communities and the impact on cultural tourism development. Three communities were used for the study. The selection was based on the three senatorial zones in Imo State, and from the zones, the communities richer in cultural resources were chosen. The three communities include: Arondizuogu (Orlu Zone), Nwaorieubi (Owerri Zone) and Obowo (Okigwe Zone). Survey method was used to gather the primary data for which the questionnaire was the major instrument of research'. Observations were made and interviews were granted to tourists, returnees, town leaders, commercial drivers and local government staff using a structured guide. Questionnaires were designed for each of the 4 afore mentioned groups of people. To each of them, six interviews were granted and this was administered orally in a manner that attracted appropriate responses. A total of 300 sets of questionnaire were administered to respondents in the three communities. In the findings, it was deduced that roads to the rural communities of Imo State are in a deplorable state coupled with lack of ready and comfortable means of transportation. All these have immensely affected tourist flow to the numerous cultural attractions in the area of study. It was also deduced that poor road condition was also responsible for the high cost of transportation. It was recommended that federal government should expunge the joint account policy between states and local governments so as to empower the later to handle their road construction and rehabilitation projects. A collaborative effort must exist between the host communities and their local governments as a condition for an uninterrupted development of their numerous cultural resources for tourism purposes.*

Keywords: Cultural Attractions, Rural Communities, Road Transport, Tourist, Road Maintenance.

## 1. Introduction

It is not in doubt that Nigeria is lavishly endowed with varieties of cultural resources which are mainly domiciled in the rural areas. The desire to witness cultural heritage like festivals, traditional architecture, monuments, arts and crafts, historic sites, shrines etc, has formed a major motivation for cultural tourism in recent times. Richards (2011) defined cultural tourism as the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experience to satisfy their cultural needs. It is a fact that all forms of tourism, world over cannot thrive in isolation from transport, which provides the link amid the dwelling and destination regions of tourists. Yet, because the cultural resources are domiciled mostly in the rural locations, the need for transport becomes even more important. In the view of tourism professionals, transportation is an integral part of tourism which serves as a means of tourists' displacement from origin to the destination and other surrounding attractions. Hence, Hall (1991) highlights that there is a strong positive correlation between transport development and tourism growth. This implies that improvement in transport has a direct impact on tourism. It was gathered from the historical development of tourism that the key technical transformation in the transportation industry brought about by the industrial revolution, marked the beginning of tourism. During this period in history, massive modifications of transport system were recorded which gave rise to the exploration of new lands to satisfy cultural needs. Hobson and Uysal (1992:209) also testified that the major steps in the development of tourism have been linked with advancements in transport. Prior to the decision to travel to any destination, certain transport needs must be fulfilled, including safety and easy access to tourist destinations. The ability to connect attractions and carry luggage comfortably, and at affordable cost must be certain. Collier (1994) in agreement to this assertion mentioned some of the tourist transport needs that must be fulfilled as:

- Transporting the tourist from the generating to the host area
- Transport between host destinations
- Transport within host destinations

The need for effective transport to cultural attractions is not limited to tourists alone. During festival celebrations, for instance, indigenes of the host communities residing in the urban cities and aboard visit home. Besides, some invited guests like friends, well-wishers and business associates contribute to the population of the crowd moving towards the host community. Also included in the number are the service providers who provide convenience and comfort to the tourists. On this note, Okoli and Igbojekwe (2014), maintained that the quality of the transportation system is an important aspect of the traveler's experience. In their own view, poor service, scheduling problems, and or long delays associated with transportation service could seriously affect a passenger's perception and lead to regrets about a trip. Tourists expect to be transported safely, quickly and comfortably at moderate costs to their destinations before a trip could be termed memorable (Nwankwo, 2005).

Ekechukwu (2006), noted that since transport is increasingly viewed as part of leisure, the quality of the journey becomes as important as the act of movement itself. In favour of the above assertion, Cooper et al (1993:175) stated that tourist product could be interpreted in its widest sense as everything that the visitor consumes, not only at the destination but also enroute to the destination, and transport provides some of the key elements of the product. Travelling on roads with pot holes, chain gallops and bushy parts causes lots of discomfort and regrets to a tourist and given another chance, may not choose to visit such a destination again. In totality therefore, transport is a key element of tourist experience (Pearce, 1992); Mascardo and Pearce, 2004).

Rural transport is considered as a vital component of the system of services necessary for the continuing existence of a dispersed settlement in less densely populated areas (Tolley and Turton 1995). More so, in most developing countries, the road is the principal mode available, while the rail and inland waterway transport generally play little or no role within rural areas. Considering the nature of cultural tourism, the

location of cultural attractions leaves the travelers with no other choice than the road transport. Yet, the overall road network connectivity, level of road accessibility and transportation services is generally poor and inadequate. The situation is so pathetic that they are highly deprived of infrastructural facilities like smooth tarred roads, adequate drainage system, sufficient road networks and transportation means. The most problematic is the poor physical condition of the rural roads. It was alleged that even up till 1960, other parts of Africa excluding the Southern part have less than 5 percent of their roads tarred, with large proportion of their minor feeder roads still existing as tracks. The condition in the rural communities of Imo State is so bad that a good number of the rural roads can only be managed during the dry season, when the rains are over.

Governments at all levels have not demonstrated adequate effort in the repair and general maintenance of the roads, and this amounts to a domino effect on vehicle maintenance cost and transport fares (Adesanya, 1997). Adeniji (1983), further posits that this level of insensitivity could be as a result of the low volume of traffic and periodicity, as well as seasonality in demand for transport in rural areas. Furthermore, Aderamo and Magaji (2010) expressed some fears that the solution cannot be at sight so long as the local government remains underfunded. Under this situation, most rural roads remain unpaved, narrow, circuitously aligned, and with pot holes, thereby leaving them impassable until dry season reappears. According to Ifegbo (2015), majority of festivals in Igbo land take place during the raining season, when most of the rural roads are in their worst conditions. This has remained a challenge to the respective stakeholders i.e. the government at all levels, tourism planners and the transport industry and until a remarkable improvement is made, tourism development will remain a dream.

## 2. Methodology

In the study of "The Impact of Road Transportation on Cultural Tourism Development" survey method was adopted whereby data was collected through the use of two major instruments of research, namely interview and questionnaire administration. Observations were also made which were non-participant in nature. Using a structured multiplier-choice questionnaire, certain factors were investigated. Information relating to the condition of roads in the remote communities, availability of means of transportation and their state of maintenance, tourist satisfaction from travel to remote destinations and consequences of poor transportation to the tourism destination or host communities was gathered. This was done by administering the structured questionnaire. Systematic random sampling technique was applied in order to select the communities adopted for the study. Based on the three geo-political zones in Imo State, and the communities where the rich cultural attractions are domiciled, three communities were randomly selected for the study, namely, *Aronizogu* (*Ikeji* festival), *Nwaoorieubi* (*Owu* festival, mysterious palm tree, *Igwekala shrine*, a highly dreaded deity) and *Obowo* (*Iwa Akwa*- initiation into adulthood, *Abadaba* lake, *Ogbagbu* waterfalls and *Iyi-Ukwu Ebi* spring. To gather information for the study, the questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part was meant for the department in charge of transport matters in the local government headquarters on the provision and maintenance of transportation means and road networks in the area, the second part was designed for commercial drivers (both automobiles and motorcycle). The aim was to find out the effect of road condition on their operation during the rainy and dry seasons especially on routes connecting the remote areas where these cultural attractions are domiciled. The last part was designed for tourists, returnees and visitors to ascertain the level of satisfaction or complaints during travel to local destinations. Hundred copies of questionnaire were administered to each selected rural community. This number was chosen to ensure that the respective informants are ably represented. Respondents were required to make their responses in the questionnaire according to what obtains in each of the selected communities with respect to the availability of means and condition of roads. To ensure that the questionnaires were filled correctly, they were administered through twelve field assistants. A traffic count was done during festive periods for *Ikeji* to determine the rise in transport means during celebration.

The data retrieved from the administration of questionnaire were presented and analyzed using simple tables and clear explanatory paragraphs to allow for easy comprehension of the research result.

### 3. Study Area

The research covered the three geo-political zones in Imo State, namely Owerri, *Orlu* and *Okigwe*. The communities studied include *Arondizuogu* in *Ideato* North Local Government Area, *Nworieubi* in *Mbaitoli* Local Government Area, and *Obowo* in *Obowo* Local Government Area. Imo State was carved out from the defunct East central State in the year 1976 (<http://en.m.wikipedia>). With the capital city at Owerri, it is made up of 27 Local Government Areas. Imo State derived its name from Imo River, which takes its course from the Okigwe/Awka upland. The area of land occupied by the State is about 5,530 sqkm (ministry of Land and Survey, Owerri), and the estimated population is 48million, with a population density varying from 230 - 1,400 people per square kilometer. Imo State lies within latitude  $^{\wedge}45N$  and  $7915'N$ , and longitude  $6^{\circ}50'E$  and  $7^{\circ}25'E$ . It is bounded in the North by Anambra, Abia in the East and Rivers in the South and West. It is one of the states created by the Federal Military Government in February, 1976. *Arondizogu* is popularly known for their rich cultural heritage called *Ikeji* festival; *Nwaorieubi* celebrates *Owu* festival and are endowed with some places of attraction like the mysterious palm tree, *Igwekala shrine* (used to be a highly dreaded deity), and some masquerade dances: *Obowo* celebrates *Iwa-Akwa* (initiation into adulthood) and have some natural resources like *Abadaba* lake, *Ogbagbu* waterfalls and *Iyi-Ukwu Ebi* Spring.

### 4. Literature Review

Cultural tourism, being the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence has become a major aspect of tourism. The development of culture in different forms and expressions has become an incentive for tourism demand, and besides, culture gives an added value to the tourist experience. Even the tourism market has indicated that tourists are much more motivated by the desire for cultural products and experiences than the other forms of tourism (Okoli, 2001). Irrespective of how fascinating is the cultural heritage; tourism cannot thrive without a comfortable means of transportation and good linking roads. Hall (1991:80), highlights that a clear relationship exists between transport development and tourism growth. He testified that the development and expansion of tourist destination are in part, based on the need for adequate access to resort areas, their attractions and resources. Hobson and Uysal (1992:209), however, argued that major steps in the development of tourism have been linked with advancement in transport.

According to history, it was during the industrial revolution that massive modifications were made in the transport system, and it was only then that the act of going to places purely to experience other people and their environment was conceived (Ezeani, 2012). Since then, improvements in transport facilities have promoted tourism even to distant destinations. Sompia (2005) asserted that it is because of improvements in transportation that tourism has expanded. He noted that transportation and advanced vehicles have made travel to all corners of the world possible, and while making some changes in the market, it has brought tourism to a new level.

Ekechukwu in Okpoko (2006) acknowledged the fact that most of the cultural and natural assets of the country are located in the rural communities and sometimes in areas with poor accessibility. Most of these cultural sites and their host communities are not linked by good motor able roads that could enhance the free flow of tourism traffic. He noted that there is abundance of archeological sites, historical monuments, cultural festivals, traditional dances etc but a good number of these cannot be exploited due to poor accessibility.

Most countries of the developing world are characterized by inadequate and poorly maintained road transport infrastructure (Hilling, 1996). This situation is more pathetic in the rural areas of Nigeria due to high deprivation of infrastructural facilities, especially when compared with the urban areas (Akinola,

2007). In a study of rural accessibility problems in Kwara State, Ogunsanya (1987) noted that poor rural situation results from inadequacy of both road network and comfortable vehicles. Adesanya (1997) further testified that only about 5 percent of the rural roads in Nigeria could be said to be in good condition. From his own view, "the bad condition of the rural roads is compounded by the poor response to repairs and delays in rehabilitation by the responsible government agencies. Therefore, most rural roads in Nigeria remain unpaved, narrow, circuitously aligned and with narrow bridges, they are full of pot holes and many of them remain impassable until dry season (Ezeani, 2012)

## 5. Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Arrivals during and off the festival period of *Ikeji* festival, *Arondizogu*

Festive Season	No. of Arrivals	Off Season	No. of Arrivals
3 days before	26	1 <sup>st</sup> day	10
2 days before	34	2 <sup>nd</sup> day	09
1 day before	43	3 <sup>rd</sup> day	12
Celebration day	50		

Source: *Author's Survey, 2015*

Table 1 shows the number of arrivals from the urban cities during the period of celebration of *Ikeji* and at ordinary times. There was remarkable difference in the number of arrivals during the festival season and off the season. The number of arrivals to *Arondizuogu* during the festival period very much out-weighed the arrivals at ordinary times. These arrivals are mostly made up of returnees living in the cities, tourists and visitors. The sudden increase in arrivals confirms the availability of cultural attractions and people's interest to witness them, on hilly lands with hard soil

**Table 2:** Availability of transport modes for the passengers' conveyance at the bus stop at *Akokwa* (the last bus stop before *Arondizuogu*)

Transport Mode	Festival Season	Ordinary Times
Motor cycle	30	15
Car	12	7
Buses	5	3
Touristic buses	0	0
Government Assisted Mass Transit	0	0

Source: *Author's Survey, 2015*

Table 2 revealed the types of transportation modes used in the rural community of *Arondizuogu* and their availability.

It shows that the common modes of transport used in the rural villages are motor cycles, car (taxi) and buses. Neither touristic buses nor government assisted mass transit exists. Among all the available modes, motor cycle is the most available means of transportation. Although the number available during the festive period is more than at ordinary times, yet it is not enough to cater for the passenger's movement during such periods. In actual sense, motor cycle was discovered to be unsafe as a means of transport, especially on long distances and bad roads connecting the host community.

**Table 3a: Waiting time of passengers at the bus stop for transport going to the host communities**

Communities	Waiting time during Festive Periods				
	0-20 minutes	21-40 minutes	41-60 minutes	61 minutes and above	Total
Akokwa	6	44	36	14	100
Nworieubi	26	52	2	0	100
Obowo	29	39	12	100	

**Table 3b; Waiting time at Ordinary Times**

Communities	0-21 minutes	21-40 minutes	41-60 minutes	60 minutes and above	Total
Akokwa	27	3	0	0	30
Nworieubi	30	-	0	0	30
Obowo	26	4	0	0	30

*Source: Authors Survey, 2015*

From table 3a and b, it was deduced that in all the three communities, a greater number of passengers wasted reasonable time between 21- 60 minutes at the bus stop before they could get transport to convey them into the rural villages of the communities. The situation was worse for tourists who wanted to visit some attractions like archeological sites, sanctuaries, or springs etc because the connecting roads are not motor able, even motorcycle move with difficulty to such places because the roads are hilly and rough with stones (consider results on table 4). From the table, it was revealed that the waiting time was longer in the more remote places like *Obowo* and *Aronduogu* than *Nworieubi* which is a neighboring community to the capital city, and therefore, has better roads than the other two communities. It was learnt that only motor cycle could be used to reach certain places in the rural areas of the communities apart from trekking, especially during the raining season, due to flooding and erosion problems mainly.

**Table 4:** Quality of the roads in selected communities in Imo State

Communities	Variables	Attributes	No. of Response	%
Aronizogu	Surface condition Road width Number of lanes Reliability in raining season	Rough	20	20.0
		Bad	80	80.0
		Wide	28	28.0
		Narrow	72	72.0
		One	100	100.0
		Two	-	-
		Three	-	-
		Reliable	15	15.0
Nworieubi	Surface condition Road width Number of lanes Reliability in raining season	Not reliable	85	85.0
		Good	18	88.0
		Bad	12	12.0
		Wide	40	40.0
		Narrow	60	60.0
		One	100	100.0
		Two	-	-
		Three	-	-
Obowo	Surface condition Road width Number of lanes Reliability in raining season	Reliable	4	40.0
		Not reliable	60	60.0
		Good	68	68.0
		Bad	32	32.0
		Wide	30	30.0
		Narrow	70	70.0
		One	100	100.0
		Two	-	-
Three	-	-		
	Reliable	40	60.0	
	Not reliable	40	40.0	

Applying the indices used by Adedeji et al( 2014) in assessing road quality as shown in table 4, it was deduced that the condition of road is directly related to transportation system i.e. the condition of the road determines to a great extent, the effectiveness of the transportation system. Very few of the roads in the local communities are tarred while the others are not, coupled with many pot holes. Most of the roads are characterized with poor drainage (no gutters and culverts), narrow width and bushy parts. Only places like Obowo, situated on hilly lands with hard soil enjoy reliable roads during raining season because flood rarely collets anywhere after the rains.

**Table 5:** State of maintenance of the various transport means operating in the selected communities

Communities	State of Maintenance	No. of Response	Percentage
Motorcycle	Well maintained	27	27.0
	Fairly maintained	30	30.0
	Poorly maintained	43	43.0
Car (Taxi)	Well maintained	12	12.0
	Fairly maintained	20	20.0
	Poorly maintained	68	68.0
Bus	Well maintained	10	10.0
	Fairly maintained	20	20.0
	Poorly maintained	70	70.0

**Source:** *Authors Survey, 2015*

From table 5 above, it was shown that all the different modes of transportation used in the rural communities are virtually poorly maintained. The responses for motorcycle in 'well maintained' and 'fairly maintained' are slightly higher than that of car and bus. This could be as a result of the nature of motorcycle (the use of one tire both front and back and the low maintenance cost). This advantage enables them to move through bad roads without feeling many gallops. The poor maintenance states of the vehicles were mainly because of the poor road condition. Most of these roads have poor drainage systems, bad surface condition and bushy paths, and under this condition commuters can never boost of reaching their destinations as scheduled.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The availability of numerous and fascinating cultural attractions in the selected rural communities of Imo State are evident, and the desire of tourist and indigenes at home and in the cities to witness or visit these attractions are not in doubt. These facts notwithstanding, participation has remained below expectation due to the abject condition of the roads linking the destinations and sites from the cities. In addition, there is a general scarcity of good transport which often leaves commuters with no choice than motorcycle. The desire of tourists, returnees and friends to witness cultural festival celebrations are further hampered by lack of comfortable, convenient and quick means of transport services. The usual practice of inflating transportation cost during the festive seasons coupled with the above factors are the causes of the long wait of visitors and returnees at the bus stops especially during festive seasons. Therefore, clamoring for cultural tourism development without securing an all seasons roads in the rural communities may remain a mirage. In view of the findings made in the course of the study, the researcher hereby proffered the following recommendations:

1. The Federal Government should revisit the issue of joint account between the states and their local governments so as to empower the grass root government to handle the construction and rehabilitation of rural roads with competence.
2. Local governments must create a road maintenance department whose task will be to weed the bushy paths, provide adequate drainage system, and maintain bridges and culverts for free flow of flood.
3. To ensure uninterrupted development of the numerous cultural resources for tourism purposes, there is need for a collaborative effort between the host communities and their local governments.

- By involving the people, the local governments can identify the roads connecting the cultural resources, while the local people can contribute to the funding of the road maintenance.
4. At the community level, town union executives can organize for fund raising and use it to execute road maintenance projects as part of their preparations for annual celebrations (e.g festivals).
  5. Apart from commercial vehicles, the government could facilitate easy movement of tourists by providing shuttle buses and special touristic air-conditioned buses (e.g double-deckers buses) at subsidized rates. This could arouse the interest of fun seekers who may see this kind of transport as an additional attraction which may further boost the culture of travel to specific cultural attractions.
  6. To avoid mounting pressure on the poor natives, the illustrious sons of the community can occasionally maintain their local roads, thereby reducing the level of reliance on the government.

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