AN APPRAISAL OF TOURISM POTENTIALS OF THE OGANI FESTIVAL

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Abstract

Cultural festivals are veritable tools for tourism development, identity formation and economic empowerment in many African societies. In Nigeria, festivals have become major attractions for both domestic and international tourists, contributing to cultural promotion, community development and revenue generation. However, many indigenous festivals in Igala land remain undocumented and under-utilized as tourist products. The Ogani festival of Angwa people is one of such festivals with rich cultural, historical and performance elements that have not been critically examined for tourism development. This study undertakes a critical appraisal of the tourism potentials of the Ogani festival. The study is anchored on the need to identify, evaluate, and recommend strategies for harnessing the festival as viable cultural tourism resource. Using a qualitative research approach, data for the study were generated through participant observation of the festival, in-depth interviews with custodians of tradition, festival organizers, tourism officials, and community members, as well as texual analysis of festival performances, songs, and oral narratives. Secondary data were sourced from books, journals, government documents and online publications on cultural tourism in Nigeria. The study reveals that the Ogani festival possesses significant tourism potentials rooted in its unique cultural displays, which include traditional performances, music, ritual rites and oral poetry. Based on this finding, the study concludes that the Ogani festival has substantial but largely untapped tourism potentials. Therefore, for the festival to contribute meaningfully to tourism development and community empowerment, there is need for strategic planning, infrastructural development, effective marketing, community participation, and policy support from government and tourism stakeholders.

Keywords: *Tourism, Potentials, Ogani, Festival, Appraisal*

Introduction

Traditional institutions are common to all African societies. Virtually, in all African communities, festivals constitute a benchmark for marking various stages tantamount to befitting life. It is one of the ways through which African expresses his awareness of transcendental beings outside himself through a number of elements including masquerade. Hence, the masquerades are very fundamental to traditional African festivals. In some places, they are believed to be the dead ancestors and messengers of traditional deities from the supernatural world. They are entertaining

characters of ancient African communities likened to the comedians and clown of this modern age. Through the use of masquerades and other artistic elements, African festivals are entertaining events which offers opportunities for celebrating and learning age long traditions. They make a people a homogeneous community and provides an avenue by which the people can be identified. They represent an invaluable and priceless heritage by which the image of the people can be reflected. Beyond the aforementioned benefits, through festivals, the host communities experience other range of benefits. These benefits include building social cohesion, provision of a specific time and place for families and friends to show their commitments to the area, to provide public goods beyond entertainment, and to provide a socially acceptable area for public actions. In addition:

> A community will also experience a number of economic benefits from special events and festivals. These benefits can include looking at the number of participants that attend the event and the estimated monetary value per event (Terry Owens, 26).

The monetary values of the festivals are evidenced in the high rate of economic activities that normally take place during the festivals. In other words, festivals which are integral parts of the cycle of life of a traditional African man or woman are popular attractions that have great potentials to enhance the socio-economic development of a particular place. According to Terry, "communities value festivals because they enhance the community image and provide activities and spending outlets for locals and visitors" (12). Indeed, festival is a driver for development due to its economic and environmental impacts. As such, over the ages, many nations of world including China, UK, India among others have been harnessing their festivals and promote them for socio-economic advantages. Like other nations of the world, Nigeria and Kogi State in particular is rich in beautiful cultural festivals. The state has diverse cultures and different ethnic groups with their languages and religions. Each of the ethnic groups has its mode of performances. Prominent among the ethnic groups in the state include the Igala, Egbira and Yoruba. Each of these groups is rich in beautiful array of culture and traditional festivals which, if properly managed, can promote tourist activities and development. One of these festival is Ogani festival. However, despite the place of culture in the life of man, one wonders at the pace by which most of the cherished African cultural values like festivals that are abundantly found in Kogi State are fast diminishing. In other words, it is surprising that despite the value of the African traditional institution (festival) in preserving, promoting and showcasing the glamour of the traditional African life before the coming of the Europeans little is done to promote and harness the institution today. Many festivals across Igala land the involve beautiful, unique and creative artistic performances that have potentials of attracting tourist attention to Igala land, Kogi state and the nation, but not much has been done to harness these opportunities in order to boost the economic development of the state and country. It is based on this that this research is undertaken.

The Ogani Festival of Ankpa, Kogi State

The Ogani festival is one of the festivals among the Igala people of Kogi East. History has it that, "the origin of the festival is traceable to a group of Hausa immigrants who migrated to from the Northern part of Nigeria during the Jihad or religious war and settled among the Igala people in Ankpa and Idah areas of the state" (Amodu Sule 12). Another account has that:

> Ogani festival has its origin around the 17th Century, when a terrible disease which led to the sudden deaths of many people in Ankpa. This tragic occurrence led to the consultation with the gods. It was revealed that the root cause of the sudden disease was as a result of a stranger who had come into Ankpa" (Osuma Atabo 51).

It was believed that the affliction followed the stranger from his home. He decided to run from his home with the belief that it will stop once he left his home. In the course of consultation, Ankpa people were told pointedly that it was only the same stranger that could solve their problem. Ankpa people therefore:

> Started a frantic search for this stranger in their midst. Meanwhile, when the stranger was found, offered to assist in ending the scourge by carrying out required sacrifices which were to last for a period of seven days and seven nights. There was a notable change in the situation of the people as soon as the sacrificial rites began. Haven completed the seven days sacrifice; the entire community was cleansed of the mysterious disease" (Atabo, 59).

In appreciation, the villagers rewarded the stranger with a parcel of land and a wife. He then settled among the indigenes and their marriage was later blessed with a baby boy. It will become the tradition of the Muslim faithful, that every new born be given the honour of a great ceremony in which the child would be named few days after the child's birth otherwise known as Osuna. During the naming ceremony of the child, Musa, as the stranger was called out to celebrate in grand style as it was his custom back at home. For Musa, when a male child is born to an Imam (Muslim cleric), the men celebrating with him would have their faces painted with blus dye and charcoal. This ceremony in honour as well as naming a new born became the basis from which Ogani festival evolved.

Another version of the origin of Ogani festival is similar with earlier account. According to Okwoli, "the festival dates back to the period of the war between the Igala and Jukun in 1515 to1516". (23). At the peak of the war, the Attah Igala was said to have invited a certain marabout from the ancient city of Kano to pray for victory of the land. The Mallam, as the marabout was called prayed and the Igala as it is widely recounted emerged victorious, in which they celebrated with dancing in grand styles.

However, soon after the victory dance, there arose measles outbreak in Ankpa. The Ejeh, paramount chief of Ankpa sent words to the Attah Igala at Idah, requesting that the Mallam who

had assisted the Igala people at the war front should be sent to Ankpa to assist his people. The Mallam offered his prayers and the measles scourge ceased. The Ejeh was said to have rewarded the Mallam with a plot of land and a wife with him he settled at Angwa Ogebe, Ankpa which later extended to Angwa Edeh, Angwa Opapala and Angwa Ofoda respectively.

The Mallam and his bride later had a son and like the first account, the Mallam celebrated the birth of the child in a strange way. When asked why he chose to celebrate in that manner, the explanation was that, it was the custom of his people back home. According to him, when a male child is born to a Muslim cleric, the men celebrating with him will have their faces painted. The celebration also involved offering prayers to Allah (God) invoking his blessing on the newborn, the family and the people celebrating with them against evil forces. This style of celebration was later adopted by Angwa people as Ogani festival. Ogani since then has become a yearly celebration among the people of Angwa, Ankpa Local Government Area of Eastern part of Kogi State (Ocholi Amodu 38)

Tourism and Economic Potentials of Ogani Festival

Tourism is a momentary shift from one's usual residence or workplace to another location for recreational purposes, involving an overnight stay and the facilities that cater to them. This position is even narrow as it ignores the wider range of tourism, which goes beyond leisure activities to encompass a variety of other interests held by travelers. Okpoko Okpoko asserts, tourism, "encompasses leisure activities such as recreation, holidays, health pursuits, educational trips, religious pilgrimages, and sporting events, as well as business trips, family visits, missions, and meetings (21). Additionally, Peace suggests that tourism, in its broad sense, "encompasses phenomena related to spatial mobility, involving voluntary travel and personal interaction with the visited environment, including natural, cultural, and social elements" (23). With no doubt, the selected festivals have tourist potentials. The festivals do not make use of only masquerades, but different forms of other performers who wear customs and make-up which display unusually aesthetics. In other words the performers usually wear different kinds of costume and make-up and dance to different forms of musical instruments including traditional songs and classical music as the case may be. For decades, according to Khadizat Umar (Personal interview in Angwa, 30/10/2025), these elements of the performances have attracted and brought important personalities and visitors from far and near to Angwa. The evidence of this claim is photographically captured thus:

Plate 1 His Royal Highness Ejeh of Ankpa & Prof. Usman Ogbo, Rector, Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja During Ogani Festival



Source: Field Work, 2025

As it is seen in the image, His Royal Highness, Ejeh-Ankpa and Prof. Usman Ogbo, the V.C of Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State were happily present during the Ogani festival. The presence of His Highness and Prof. Usman at the festival goes beyond ceremonial attendance. In the context of African performance and cultural events, their presence carries deliberate socio-cultural and economic benefits for the community, the festival and wider society. As the traditional custodian, the king's presence affirms that the Ogani festival is not "mere entertainment" but a sacred, state-sanctioned institution. It tells the community: our culture is royal, worthy, and alive. This strengthens cultural pride and continuity, especially for youth who might otherwise dismiss tradition. The presence of these tourists transformed the festival from local cultural event into a cultural-economic asset.

Plate 2: Hon. Ibrahim Mohammed (Halims), the Current National House of Representative, Ankpa, Olamaboro and Omala Local Government, Seen Seated During Ogani Angwa for 2025 Ogani Festival



Source: Field Work, 2025

Similar, the person in Pix 8: is Hon. Ibrahim Mohammed (Halims), the Current National House of Representative, Ankpa, Olamaboro and Omala Local Government. His presence has a lot of benefits within economic development in one way or the other.

Plate 3: Large Body of Participants During 2025 Ogani Festival



Source: Field Work, 2025

Indeed, the selected festivals usually attract the attentions of people from far and near due to its unique elements such as song, dance, cultural aesthetics and lots more. According to Hon. Ibrahim Mohammed (Personal interview, in Angwa, 30/10/2025), Ogani festival connects us to our root; it is the singular activity that reminds us about who we really are no matter our education background and religious affiliation. It is one of the cardinal elements of culture. Over the years, a number of friends have joined me here to enjoy Ogani festival. Prof. Usman Ogbo (Personal interview, in Angwa, 30/10/2025) added that Ogani festival is unique on its own. I don't think other festivals in Kogi state can provide the kind of spectacles and cultural esthetics that Ogani festival possesses. Some of the major display involved in the festival includes Oji'Ela, Agboloko dance and Akpata carrier's performance. Their costume, make-up and performance are so beautiful that whoever witnesses them will like to see them again.

Plate 4: Oji'Ela and the Researcher During 2025 Ogani Festival



Source: Field Work, 2025

Plate 5: A Set of Agboloko Dancers Performing Before the Audience During 2025 Ogani Festival



Source: Field Work, 2025

The above and lots more are some of the elements Ogani festival that normally attract the attentions of the visitors from far and near. Alhaji Idris (Personal interview, in Angwa, 30/10/2025), further explains that dance performance in Ogani festival is highly energetic and artistic. The dancers usually commence their rehearsal three weeks before the day of the performance for the purpose of mastering and successful production.

However, Akpata on the other hand, Ahhaji Idris further explained, is mythical, ritualistic and didactic nature. It looks like a corps prepared for a rite of passage (See Pix 11). Their carriers normally carry it in a dramatic manner, and it is always accompanied with songs and chant. An Akpata for each Ogani festival year is carried to symbolise the death of a particular evil in the land using the name of the evil doer. The person may be a thief, kidnapper, prostitute, or a liar. This is the didactic aspect of the festival. In other words, this aspect of the festival lampoons social ills for societal peace and development. This is in line with the position of Nwosu who says that, "African theatre has a socio-historical placement. It is ideational in superstructure with a communalized aesthetic inheritance and a diversified functional attribute" (25).

This is because the festivals do not only serve as the people's sources of cultural identity and pride, but they also serve as symbol of unity and socio-economic development. They bring

people and their friends, and neighbours together from different works of life, who in one way or the other make contributions to the community developments. According to Yahaya, Imam (Personal interview, in Angwa, 30/10/2025):

> We benefit a lot during the festival. Many of our sons and daughters normally return home during this period. We also have the privileges of having visitors like our in-laws and friends during this period. In no small measures they normally contribute financially to the development of our community when they come, and the achievements of such contributions are seen in some of the community's projects we have initiated and built from the money that were generated during the occasions.

Plate 6: Members of the 2025 Ogani Festival Management Committee Arranging the Money Made During the Occasion.



Source: Field Work, 2025

Plate 7: A Water Project Built from Money Generated from Ogani Festival.



Source: Field Work, 2025

Plate 8: A Historical Site Renovated with Money Generated from Ogani Festival.



Source: Field Work, 2025

In the same way, the money generated during the festival is usually used to carry out certain developmental projects for the community. This is made possible because like it has mentioned earlier, the performers who are often masquerades and set of traditional dancers are usually dressed in colourful costumes and masks, and the performances are well rehearsed with vigorous dances. The activities, particularly, entertainment provided by the performances have over the years attracted the attention of audiences both from within and abroad; some of the members of the audience are members of the community who usually participate in the performance, while the others are people from different places who came to witness the occasion it is rightly captured in photographs abobe. Perhaps the reason Chachah, Selase says that, "festivals provide occasions for social re-union. He further states that relatives and friends see each other again during festivals, also, gifts and drink are exchanged, disputes settled and an atmosphere of mutual co-operation established" (Par.6).

Conclusion

Economic views cannot be dissociated from other aspects of life. Cultural factors also influence the way humans understand and implement their civic and economic affairs, their relationships to other humans, their histories, world of nature and most importantly the principles of development. The purpose of development and the criteria by which it may be evaluated are culture-based and culture-bound and development extends to culture. The culture of the people must be recognized, sustained and preserved in order to give them a sense of belonging in any developmental agenda. The process must be viewed from a wider perspective whereby issues of the whole human person, rather than the essentially economic man are incorporated. Development as a strategy for improving the quality of life and the sustainability of the economy must be viewed from the angle of culture in order to enhance socio-economic development.

Recommendations

The results obtained from analysis of data guide the researchers in recommending that;

- Government should fully give support to cultural festivals in Kogi East so as to derive its benefit of economic development.
- Cultural institutions such as Arts councils across the states in Nigeria, as well as national council for arts and culture should foster their efforts in promoting the nation's cultural wealth
- The media should as a matter of urgency promote the nation's culture so as to educate Nigerians on the benefits of our cultural heritage.
- The schools should not be left out in propagating our cultural values so as to save them from going into extinction.
- The structures of the state and Nigeria in general should be improved to enable people to travel for cultural events.
- There is a serious need to sensitize Nigerians on their perceptions about the nation's cultural heritage
- The nation's cultural arts such as masquerade performances should be traded beyond the shore of the nation

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