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Tourism, Culture and the Economy: Implications for Eco-Cultural Development in The Gambia

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Abstract

Tourism has become a thriving national business in the Gambia and the country has had a fair share of the good and ills of tourism. These experiences include an improvement in the quality of infrastructure and revenue generation and the accompanying worrisome development of sex tourism in the Gambia and because of the level of poverty and illiteracy in the country. Tourism is a platform for the projection and preservation of culture and a good source of foreign exchange. Therefore, this paper examines how culture can be packaged into tourism to improve the nation's economic and national development in the country. Recommendations were made on ways to rebrand cultural tourism to achieve economic development and cultural preservation.

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1. Introduction

Since the turn of the 21st century, human beings have made giant strides which impacted every sphere of the human society – language, culture, trade, commerce and the economy of nations. The entire world has become a global village and movements of people or contacts with people from other countries have become increasingly acceptable. For centuries, Africa has had her fair share of influx from Europeans, Americans and people from the other continents through slave trade, missionary exploits, colonialism, tourism, commerce, aids and other forms of support. There has been an upsurge in the number of people that travel to different African nations for the purpose of tourism. Cultural plurality, several cultural identities and a rich value system are some of qualities of African countries and the Gambia is no exemption. The Gambia has an estimated population of 2.1 million people in 2017 and it is the smallest country in West Africa. The Gambian society is communal, patriarchal and typically African. In recent years, the influx of foreigners to the country has been either for business or pleasure (tourism).

Tourism is the transit of people for various reasons which include health, leisure, sport, holiday, study or religion. Tourism is the temporary or short-term transit of people to destinations outside the places where they reside and work. It is the migration of people for diverse kinds of reasons which include visitation, relaxation or excursions (Holloway & Taylor, 2006). The earliest account of tourists' visit to the Gambia was in the mid-1960s when a Swede stopped over on the way to Senegal. However, the Gambia's tourism industry received a boost in 1965 after a group of about 300 tourists from Sweden arrived the shores of the country. Over the years, the number of tourists to the country has been on the increase and tourism has evolved into the fastest growing sector of the Gambian economy, biggest foreign exchange earner and is a major source of employment. Tourism accounts for about 16% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (<http://www.giepa.gm/Tourism>). Gambia has increasingly become an ideal place for northern Europeans and other foreign tourists to escape the winter gloom for a holiday in an exotic 'paradise' beach resort from October to April.

The Gambian government, in realization of the potential of the tourism industry, has continued to offer incentives to prospective investors in the form of tax duty waivers and tax holidays. However, through the instrumentality of the law, the country has regulated the heights of hostel buildings with emphasis on African-styled architecture and European style interiors with an African accent. The industry is currently one of the biggest employers of labour in the small country with several hotel and restaurant serving international cuisines and tour guide businesses employing thousands of Gambian youths to cater for the ever increasing tourists. The impact of tourism on the

Gambian economy is very significant because it creates employment opportunities for the citizens and non-citizen residing in the country, most especially for the business owners which include the hoteliers, restaurants, tour guide, commercial cab drivers and so on. Africa and indeed the Gambia is not left out of the numerous impacts of tourism which include revenue generation, investment opportunities, socio-economic development, cross-cultural exploration, inter-racial marriages, cultural exchange, cultural erosion and so on. Apart from the numerous benefits of tourism on a growing economy like that of a developing nation like the Gambia, tourism has dire consequences for the socio-economic and socio-cultural development of nations.

Culture is preserved and transferred from one generation to another within the sphere of his cultural ancestry to evolve into a civilization. Anthropologists define culture as the patterns of attitude and thinking that human beings living in a social group learn, create and share. Therefore, when people travel to other climes and nations, they go with their culture, traits and characters. People come into contact with culture through socialization, interaction, transaction (trade or economy), and tourism among others. Culture is dynamic and it is capable of evolving as a result of contact situations – a product of migration, pilgrimage, tourism. As a result of moving from one place to another, an individual acquires, learns or imbibes other people's cultural ethics. Tourism involves the migration of people from one geographical location to another. Hunziker and Krapf (1942) described tourism as the totality of relations and occurrences from the people who are non-residents of a region moving from one destination to another.

Also, culture is the sum total of the human life as it defines worldviews, traits and characters. It interprets the existence and adaptation of human beings in their immediate environment. Fafunwa, (1974) opined that cultural beliefs are often imbibed from childhood as the child grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people and ingurgitates it. The child pays attention to it, internalizes and mimics the actions of his elders and the society. This shows that there can be no people without culture and human societies thrive on cultural norms and beliefs. Similarly, individuals have their respective shared beliefs and values, customs and traditions, dressing, food, language, religion, and so on.

Ogechukwu, Benjamin, and Ann (2014) averred that one of the characteristics of the human culture is that it is vibrant and ever changing. Cultural experiences of people evolve as a result of their efforts to adapt to emerging changes in their environment. It is notable that as the environment changes, people's culture is also likely to change. For several decades, the Gambian people and culture have experienced unwholesome variations as a result of unrestricted and uncensored

contact with ideas alien to their cultural elements and beliefs through slave trade, colonialism, globalisation and tourism. When people of different cultural orientations come together, the reality of the contact situation often affects the 'weaker' or less sophisticated adversely with the more advanced languages and cultures imposing themselves on the smaller cultures.

In the light of this, the indigenous Gambian experience has encountered series of changes through exposure to colonialism, tourism and globalisation which are imports of European and non-African movements into the Gambia. Since 1963, tourism has emerged as a major contributor to economic, societal change, and cultural evolution in the Gambia. Robinson, Lück and Smith (2013) averred that tourism serves as a source of revenue and provides a platform for projecting the different cultural backgrounds of communities around the world. This study examines the impact of tourism on the culture and economy of the Gambian people.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The concern of every nation is to preserve the culture of its people and pursue economic development. These two objectives are often pursued simultaneously to achieve national development. However, one of the mainstays of the revenue generation drive of the Gambian economy is tourism which threatens the indigenous culture of the people. Studies have confirmed that some of the activities of tourists can impact negatively on the culture of locals. The study examined the development of tourism in the Gambia with a view to discussing the relationship between culture and tourism vis-à-vis the impact of tourism on culture. The study will also examine some of the challenges of preserving the Gambian culture in the face of a booming tourism industry.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Two theories underpin this study. These are the **Socio-cultural Learning Theory** and Ecological Theory by Vygotsky (1962) and Urie, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998). The socio-cultural learning theory states that people learn from one another as a result of the transfer of knowledge in his environment. He opined that an individual's knowledge is co-constructed because human beings dependent on one another for assistance in the construction of knowledge or a change in behaviour. People change their views and accept new ideas and make modifications in their experiences and socio-cultural beliefs through interactions. Contact situations through the activities and language of the tourists have impacts on the indigenous culture of the locals. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) outlines the impact and the contribution of other people in the life of an individual as there is an extent to which an individual can handle a task alone and what can be achieved through the help of a more experienced and properly skilled to guide over a period of time.

Urie, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998)'s ecological theory examines the impact and contribution of the environment on an individual and vice versa. Bronfenbrenner highlighted five environmental systems which include an individual, micro-system, meso-system, exo-system and macro-system. All these systems are interrelated. The theory states that people are influenced by their environment despite their historical background and cultural heritage. The implication of this is that the people residing in a particular country can be influenced by the tourists that have come to tour in their country because there will be reasons for interactions which will foster a relationship and provide a platform to transfer different socio-cultural norms and values and will also make them to be dependent on one another.

1.3 Culture and Tourism in the Gambia

Culture and tourism have a complimentary relationship with the latter projecting the former or the other way round. Rich cultural heritage strengthens the attractiveness of a tourism brand in different locality. Culture is gradually becoming a fundamental of the tourism package as it often provides a fresh experience, knowledge or challenge to the tourists. Due to the complexity and nature of culture, various scholars have attempted to define culture as a concept. Rosaldo (1984) and Hinkel (1999) admitted that it is not a caricature to say that there are almost as many definitions of culture as there are fields of inquiry into human societies, groups, systems, etiquettes and activities because culture deals with the totality of human lives. In that perspective, Hall (1998) considers culture as an obfuscated concept, elusive of any definitive definition. Hinkel(1999) ascertain that it is deals with the evolvement of how individuals think, how they feel, what they believe in and how their attitude is translated by their peers in the society. Lyons (1990) defines culture as a socially developed knowledge which originates from social appraisal.

According to Seelye (1997), culture allows the human mind to programme behaviours which can be adventurous, erratic and void towards other people around them. Seelye's assertion gives a precise view and understanding to the way people relate in their environment. Our cultural convictions often determine our relationships, beliefs and actions. Language plays very important role in the preservation, promotion and transfer of culture. Brown (2000) acknowledges that the relationship between language and culture are entwined and should be taken into cognizance when expressing cultural reality in the environment. Also, Corder (1993) purposes that language creates the link between human being and the culture in his Diaspora because culture emphasizes on the behaviour, values and trends as it reflects the culture and serves societal needs.

People travel to different locations for several reasons but tourism is the movement of

people often intended as a short visit to a country or location for the purpose of leisure, cultural integration, and socio-economical exchange but without a paid income or job. It is important to note that people who travel for professional reasons or business may no choice than to fulfil the purpose of travelling for a brief period of time (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001). On the other hand, some people travel for personal reasons such as for health reasons, leisure, a holiday trip away from work or an employment. People travel from one country to another to relax and have fun and as a result, tourists are always mindful of their spending so they usually travel to countries that the price is reasonable and affordable (Xiang, 2013). According to Russo (2002), some people don't mind to book their holiday trip in advance while some will even go as far as delaying their travel dates with the hope of a reduction in their travelling expenses.

From the foregoing, it can be noted that travelling from one country to another is elastic for individuals that are frugal in their spending and price sensitive and will be inelastic for business owners that travel for business purpose because they will spend more on accommodation, feeding and transport services (Gillen, Morrison & Stewart, 2003; Brons, Pels, Nijkamp & Rietveld, 2002; Arnott, De Palma & Lindsey, 1993). Tourism is any form of travelling embarked upon for the purpose of leisure or recreation, business, and adventure which is usually organized in groups. Tourism has become a global industry that contributes significantly to the national income of many countries and it involves the movement of people to different geographical locations for fun, recreation and amusement. Tourism stimulates social dealings between people (tourists and natives) who would not have met ordinarily. In the course of these contacts, interactions and social relations, there are cases of cultural clashes which are products of the differences that exist in cultures, values, lifestyles, and languages of the tourists and the host communities. In the Gambia, tourism has become a business that generates revenue to the government of a country and also serves as a source of living for the residents and non-residents of a country.

Lindberg and Johnson (1997) assert that the impact of tourism for the residents living in a particular locality touches both economic and cultural aspects of the society. Also, Butler & Hinch (1996) argue that there is always a cordial relationship between tourists and the residents living in that particular locality. It could be inferred from the submission of Butler and Hinch that tourism provides an important means of enhancing culture and creating income which can support and strengthen cultural heritage, cultural production and creativity. Culture and tourism are interrelated because of their collaboration, input and their thriving potential. Cultural tourism is one of the biggest and fastest expanding aspects of the world tourism markets and the cultural and creative industries

are rapidly being used to promote tourists' destinations. As a result, it leads to an intensifying use of culture and creativity to market destinations which appends to the pressure of differentiating regional identities and images, and a growing diversity of cultural components are being used to brand and market regional localities.

1.4 Relationship between Culture and Tourism: Impacts on the Economy

Tourism is a people-driven industry because it has to do with the movement of people from one geographical location to the other on a temporary basis for the purpose of pleasure, recreation, and knowledge. Apart from the financial and educational dimensions of tourism that are notable to most people, tourism has a social and cultural dimension because tourists have to relate with members of their host communities. Culture and tourism are often regarded as separate entities. However, since the growth of the tourism industry in the 21st century, culture has become an integral aspect of tourism. Cultural sites, objects, heritages and contents are increasingly packaged into tourism to attract prospective tourists from all over the world. Sustainable Tourism Alliance (2015) averred that tourism facilitates the establishment of social relations between people who would otherwise not have met. Therefore, when such contacts are established, clashes in culture can take place as a result of differences in cultures, ethnic and religious groups, values and lifestyles, languages, and levels of prosperity.

Conflict in culture is a real phenomenon in tourism because people are the core of the tourism industry. Fyanka & Nwoko (2015) posited that culture represents the totality of a people's way of life and advised that tourism should be used as a means to an end in the preservation of culture in an increasingly globalised world. Wahab & Pigram (1997) noted that tourism and culture are two similar and complementary topics. The connection between tourism and culture is such that they have mutual benefits. This is because tourism is needed to showcase and preserve the culture of a people and a rich and vibrant culture will drive an efficient and cost effective tourism industry. In other words, tourism provides a platform to market the culture of a people to the world and culture on the other hand, gives an added value to the tourist's experience (Wahab & Pigram, 2007). Therefore, the cultural elements of most of the indigenous African societies are packaged and delivered through tourism.

There is a strong relationship between culture and tourism and this has serious implications for a nation's economic, social and cultural development. According to a research carried out by OECD (2008), international tourism accounts for approximately 30% of global service exports in 2006 and the economic value or contribution of the cultural industries was between 3% and 6% of the total

economy in the year under review. Tourism has become a global industry and money-spinning venture for some countries thereby providing various opportunities to the citizens and foreigners living in such countries. The findings of a study conducted in Spain in 2016 revealed that about 29 million tourists' generated revenue worth approximately €22,000 million and about 40% of tourists travelled for cultural purposes and participated in different cultural activities in the international flow which is a massive boost in the economy of the country (UNTWO, 2016; AEC, 2016).

Due to the healthy relationship between tourism and culture, there has been high patronage of cultural items or souvenirs by tourists. Also, tourism has boosted the image of cultural heroes or icons and made items of culture very appealing to the tourists who often share common local objects or contents of cultural values such as rites, festivals or traditions, drinks, food, clothing, language (mostly greetings) with the indigenes. This has built a cordial relationship between tourists and their host communities in different parts of the world. Culture is very marketable in the tourism business and most countries that are tourists' destination often go to any length to preserve and repackage their cultural themes so as to increase the interest of visitors for cultural attractions which ordinarily would have become relics of oral literature.

The need to widen the size and scope of cultural tourism has prompted government and the private sectors to collaborate so as to develop and improve the infrastructural facilities like good road or transportation network, efficient water and power supply, access to museums and cultural heritage centres, construction of standard hotels and apartments, availability of effective security network, world class health care centres, recreational facilities in tour centres and fair prices to the cost of goods and services in the country that will meet up to the basic expectations of the visiting tourists. An increase in the number of tourists will bring about an improvement in the standard of basic amenities and technological advancement in the country so as to make the stay of tourists in the country easier, better and memorable. All these will have a positive effect on the economy of the locals and the nation in general.

1.5 Impact of Tourism on Culture in the Gambia

It is generally believed that culture is the bedrock of tourism because it plays a vital role in the growth and development of various destinations which deals with the economical, sociological and ecological aspects of human lives. The cultural heritage of a country plays an important role and attracts peoples from every nook and cranny of the world to tour and explore the country which as a matter of fact, it help develop local infrastructures and encourage inward investment in the country. Culture and tourism have a complementary correlation which can strengthen the beguiling and

competitiveness which varies from one country to another. The interaction between the tourists and the locals facilitates the process of tourism Reisinger (1994). According to Richard (2007), culture is the major asset and a motivational aspect for the existence of tourism because it attracts tourists from all over the world.

There are several benefits that tourism provides for the preservation, projection and transfer of culture. For example, the need to widen the tourism market has made several governments in African to rebrand their culture and seek collaboration with multinational companies in the private sectors to help develop the tourist attractions which include natural resources like: hills, plateau, beaches and so on which serves as an asset. Such rebranding also helps in the preservation of cultural heritage, provision of job opportunities and a boost of the economic development in the country. Lantfant (1995) believed tourism has several positive impacts on culture as a last resort as a result of developing, preserving and linking it to the international community because tourism contribute significantly to the economic, cultural, social and ecological development of the country. Tourism provides opportunity for a country to learn and share its cultural values, preserve and conserve its cultural dignity, resuscitate and redeem the cultural norms and tradition (Smith, 2009). It also help the locals to develop their infrastructural facilities like providing good road network, building more health centres, improving the country's electricity and so on.

Most importantly, tourists can make their stay in a new environment memorable by exploring and exploiting other people cultural norms which include: food, dress, religion, language which varies from all over the world. Due to lack of cultural familiarity, Topless sunbathing on beaches, skimpy clothing, excessive smoking and high consumption of alcohol will have a negative impact and will make tourists be at the high risk of violating the cultural values of an ecological environment. Also, there are campaigns and sensitisation for the local communities to make the experience of tourists a memorable one because directly or indirectly, the stay of the tourists will either have a positive or negative impact on the culture of the locality. There must be a cordial relationship between the government and the private organization so as to work in partnership on common interest between culture and tourism for the mutual benefit of both the Gambian locals and visiting tourists.

Gambia has had a fair share of the ills of tourism mostly in form of sex tourism or sexual exploitation of children and underage persons. Sex tourism is a thriving business in the Gambia and because of the level of poverty and illiteracy in the country; children are not left out of this menace. Frans de Man and Bah (2014) noted that the activities of tourists who seek sexual gratifications

from children and underage persons have gradually moved to neighbouring communities of the Tourism Development Area. Most of the people (parents and children) in these communities are vulnerable and easy victims because of poverty. The children often beg for alms or provide short/merit services to the foreign tourists who throng the bars, restaurants and nightclubs. Such contacts encourage a level of interaction between foreigners and children. These tourists come with diverse cultural and sexual orientations and they cut across different social classes.

Similarly, many of the natives offer services such as cab driving, bureau de change, tour guide, bar tending and so on, to the numerous tourists that troop into the country annually. Therefore, the level of interactions and contacts between the tourists and the people of Gambia is continually on the increase. Some tourists have taken up philanthropic engagements in the country to sponsor local schools while others have found love and settled down to marry to Gambian citizens. One of the implications of this is that there are cross-cultural relationships between the natives and the tourists. Therefore, the indigenous culture of the people are being influenced to accept certain Non-African contents in their mode of dressing, choice of occupation, philosophy, lifestyle and activities such as clubbing, smoking, sexual orientations and so on.

Tsoudis(2001) highlighted some negative impacts of tourism on culture which include embezzlement of the income being generated through tourism, high rate of conflict and theft by the locals, commercial sexual exploitation and so on. There is also a high rate of cyber criminals also known as (yahoo boys and girls) looking for an abode in tourist countries so as not to get caught in their own country Shaib (2019). According to Ghuman(1997), the youths are more exposed than the men and women in the locality and due to their intention of modern civilization, the local youths try to imitate what the tourists do through their attitude, dress, food, songs which as a matter of fact, the culture is interfered and diluted due to the changes in their lifestyle which is an evidence of the effect of the cultural erosion.

In addition, Frans de Man and Bah (2014) described some of the tourists that visit the Gambia as situational abusers who do not come to the country purposely to seek sex with children but take advantage of such vulnerable children who are available to them. At times, the members of the host communities such as poor parents or young boys lure the tourists with offers of underage girls who are still virgins. A study by Frans de Man and Bah (2014) reported that children, mostly girls (aged 14 to 17), engage in commercial sex with the population of boys-sex-workers on the

increase. It is not an uncommon sight to see young Gambian males who are mostly prostitutes working out or trying to maintain bodily fitness to attract or engage prospective female and male tourists. Such unprotected sexual encounters and exposures have dire consequences on the prevalence of HIV and AIDs epidemic in the Gambia. The activities of some randy tourists especially the paedophiles who engage in child sex have dire implications on the culture of Gambians. The government is conscious of the trend and the danger it portends for the preservation of the indigenous way of life of the people.

The government has embarked on several measures through the Gambia Ministry of Tourism & Culture (MOTC) to preserve the culture of the Gambian people. As a matter of fact, MOTC was established and saddled with the responsibility to oversee activities in the tourism sector of the economy and ensure that government policies are carried out. Among other things, the MOTC is responsible for the safeguarding, management and development of tourism and culture in Gambia. Scholars (Raina & Agarwal, 2005; Macintosh, 1972) posited that physical and cultural factors influence peoples' choice of tourist destinations. Physical considerations include factors that borders on the bodily wellbeing of the tourist and interest in the landscape, topography and specific medical treatment. The cultural considerations on the other hand, include factors connected with the tourist's passion to acquire knowledge about other countries, people, and culture as expressed in art, music, festivals, and literature. Bearing this in mind, the Gambian government desires to ensure that the cultures of the people are not eroded while the country embraces tourism.

1.6 Tourism and Culture in the Gambia: Recommendations for Eco-cultural Development

The relationship between tourism and culture has been found to be mutually beneficial for economic development. The tourism industry helps to project the cultural objects, themes and identities of the indigenous community hosting the tourists. Cultural tourism has become a significant contributor to social integration, revenue generation, and infrastructural development among others. Tourism and culture in the Gambia has several implications for the country in terms of economic development and cultural preservation. Some of the recommendations based on the discourse in this study are:

- Tourism has to be rebranded in the country to project and protect the multicultural elements of the Gambian people. The design and sales of locally cultural souvenirs and objects with cultural themes should be massively encouraged.

- Restaurants and hotels in the Tourism Development Areas (TDA) should be compelled to showcase local or indigenous cultural themes in furniture, cuisines, dressing and so on.
- More Gambian nationals should be involved in the tourism and hospitality business.
- Choice of tour locations for tourists should be planned and special tours should be conducted to culturally-sensitive locations like local market places, historical sites, cultural or traditional landmarks and so on.
- There is need to increase tourists non-mandatory expenditure level and also reduce the tax rates on goods and services so that it does not get to the extent of being counter-productive.
- There should be programmes like tourism trade fairs with cultural themes to help increase the influx of tourists, local and foreign investors to the country. This will project the culture of the people and boost the economy.

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