

ASSESSING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF OLOJO FESTIVAL TO THE PROMOTION OF DOMESTIC TOURISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ILE-IFE, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explores the Olojo Festival in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, as a crucial cultural event with implications for domestic tourism and socio-economic development. Through desk research methodology involving literature review and analysis of official documents and media sources, the study delves into the historical and cultural significance of the festival. The Olojo Festival, rooted in Yoruba mythology, serves as a religious and cultural celebration, honoring the descent of Oduduwa and the creation of the earth. It is positioned as an integral part of Nigeria's cultural heritage, offering tourists opportunities to experience the rich diversity of Nigerian culture. The study examines the socio-economic impacts of the festival, including local income generation, tradition preservation, economic development, job creation, and community development. Despite challenges such as environmental pollution and overcrowding, the festival's positive contributions to local economies and cultural preservation are highlighted. Additionally, the Olojo Festival is recognized for its intangible benefits, fostering pride, identity, and unity among the Yoruba people and promoting cultural exchange and dialogue within Nigerian society. Thus, the study advocates for continued support and promotion of the Olojo Festival and similar cultural events as essential drivers of economic growth and cultural resilience in Ile-Ife and beyond because the festival as emerged as a vital platform for promoting domestic tourism, fostering community development, and preserving cultural heritage of the Yoruba people.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, Domestic tourism, Festival, Socio-economic development and Yoruba mythology.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural festivals are events performed by a particular group of people at dedicated period of the year in reference to their traditions and culture. In this context festivals are regarded as intangible cultural heritage associated with music, dance, rituals, religion, belief systems, appeasements, spiritualism and others (Agbabiaka, 2016). These festivals are usually organized in special places which can be public or private, religious or sacred and open to people to witness, observe or partake. Anifowose (2020), opines that cultural festivals also depict the cultural identities of the people and serve as the citadels of their traditional knowledge, religious affirmations, rites, rituals and empowerments.

As documented by Agbabiaka *et al.*, (2017), Olojo festival in Ile-Ife is regarded as important religious and cultural means of supplication to the Supreme Being OLODUMARE and Oduduwa the son of OLODUMARE (GOD) who was commissioned to create the earth out of the liquid mass. He descended with the aid of chain and landed on ark at Oranfe. Acting on instruction, he poured the piece of sand which Olodumare gave him on the body water. The fowl with five toes that he came with helped to spread it on the body of water. Surprisingly, the land began to spread; a phenomenon translated to Ile-Ife (the land of spreads). It was from this myth of creation that Ile-Ife derived its name and Oduduwa became described as “Atewenro”, the one who descended with a chain.

Domestic Tourism

Domestic Tourism refers to tourism activities performed within one's country and therefore can be regarded as an important aspect for the development of cultural tourism because it offers other people the opportunity to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of the culture and heritage of a particular people in their communities (Adongo *et al.*, 2019). This aspect of tourism recognizes the special interest where culture forms the basis of either attracting the tourists or creating the motivation for people to travel with the intent to acquire new information and experiences in order to satisfy their curiosities. Balogun and Nkebem (2022), point out that cultural festivals are equally regarded as integral parts of the Nigerian culture depicting our customs, traditions and belief systems thereby reflecting the rich cultural diversities that exist in Nigeria, they provide tourists with ample opportunity to savor Nigeria culture in its purest and undiluted forms.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) in 2008 highlighted that domestic tourism accounted for the highest percentage of tourism activities with an estimate of about 83% that is out of the 4.8 billion tourist arrivals per year in the world, domestic tourism will take 4 billion. This is quite a reasonable figure which many countries of the world have benefitted from using vibrant cultural and natural heritage to drive domestic tourism. Cultural tourism is an important aspect of domestic tourism because it involves visiting historic and archaeological sites, cultural landmarks, monuments, museums; and attending special events, festivals and ceremonies which are manifestations of the culture and heritage of the people (Atci *et al.*, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a desk research approach which involves review of relevant literature such as academic articles, books and publications related to Olojo festival; official documents on Olojo festival such as government report, cultural

archives and festival organizer's records to extract necessary data on the festival. Reviews were also conducted through media analysis, interview scripts, and reputable online sources dedicated to cultural events in Nigeria. By employing this desk research methodology, a thorough and well-rounded exploration of the Olojo Cultural Festival in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria becomes achievable without a field work.

THE HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF OLOJO FESTIVAL

Olojo festival in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria is an ancient festival celebrated annually in the month of September to honour the descent of Oduduwa the progenitor of Yoruba race to Ile-Ife. Olojo Festival belongs to Ile- Ife community and the entire Yoruba race all over the world as a mark of celebration of the creation of the world and the ancestral throne of authority and empowerment. It is the celebration of the period when Oduduwa and other deities descended on the earth. It is the commemoration of the descent of Oduduwa to Ile-Ife which is historically tied to OGUN; the quintessential deity of iron and truth (Hassan & Quader, 2022).

In its spiritual meaning Olojo is the day Olodumare the Supreme God created the earth in Ile-Ife. The Yoruba cosmology informs that Ogun charted the way to the earth for Oduduwa thereby acting as the pathfinder for Oduduwa and other deities.

According to Samuel Johnson the Yoruba are said to be descendants of LAMURUDU, one of the Kings of Mecca whose offsprings were Oduduwa, the ancestor of the Yorubas, the Kings of Gogobiri and Kukawa, two tribes in the Hausa land.

The second theory of origin as documented by Johnson (2009) emphasized the work popularized by Biobaku (1955), claimed that Oduduwa was only part of the migrant population that came from the East "Egypt or Arabia". However, in the course of migration, they founded colonies on their way. The party that eventually got to Ile-Ife was led by Oduduwa who later subdued the original

inhabitants (Aborigines) and subsequently became their ruler.

The school of thought which is indigenous to Ife people was postulated by Omotoso Eluyemi. He claimed that the “East” often referred to as Yoruba origin was in actual fact “Ora hills” located east of the present day Ile-Ife. According to Eluyemi, Oduduwa and his party merely descended from the Hills to the bowl in search of arable farmlands, but armed with superior weapons of advanced technology, the original inhabitants were subjugated, suppressed and overwhelmed (Kuri *et al.*, 2022). Yoruba mythology established ILE-IFE as the cradle of Yoruba race and human existence. The ancient town, ILE-IFE with its symbol of authority is regarded as the source of mankind and the OLOJO FESTIVAL is celebrated as the spot on earth for the creation. This festival is also a celebration of the first dawn, first afternoon and first night (IFE OOYE, IBI TI OJUMO TI NMO) and the land of expansion (ILE TI O NFE) OLOJO which translates to *Ojo ti Ojo di Ojo* is an assertion of the spiritual confirmation of the creation of the world by God and all these are held as belief system that GOD called OLODUMARE deposited the instruments of the creation in ILE-IFE. The Yoruba cosmology believed that ODUDUWA the progenitor of Yoruba race descended through chain to Ile- Ife followed by other deities (Olokodana, 2022).

OLODUMARE raised ODUDUWA; the deity of prayers to establish structures and make the world a better place for mankind being in charge of prayers in the presence of OLODUMARE meaning ‘‘ Olu Odu to mo Ade Are’’.

ODUDUWA shortened to OODUA then became the first beaded crown wearing KING in Yoruba land which is called THE ARE CROWN. Oduduwa hereafter established the royal ruling system of governance in the World while the beaded crown became an inheritance of OONIRISA in ILE-IFE.

ARE CROWN is an ornamentally embellished sacred and symbolic crown which the OONIRISA must wear once in a year during the Olojo Festival cultural procession and the sacredness and authority of this crown is traceable to the first King that ruled the World called NIMROD by the Hebrews, LAMURUDU by the Yoruba. Today, all Yoruba trace their origin to Ile-Ife as Ile-Ife bears several sacred and historical landmarks predating the existence of mankind; signaling the establishment of mankind on earth and the Kings as source of authority of their respective beaded crowns. Olojo festival is celebrated annually to appease the ancestors of Ile-Ife so that they will grant the king and the people long life, peace and harmony. It involves many traditional and spiritual activities which include appeasement to the many deities in Ile-Ife. The spiritual seclusion of Ooni of Ile-Ife and final emergence of Ooni with spiritual message which holds at Enuwa palace is the significance of Olojo festival procession (Agbabiaka, 2016).

OLOJO FESTIVAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

Olojo festival is an intangible cultural heritage of Ile-Ife and Yoruba race and therefore the values associated with this festival need to be assessed as critical factors that will create opportunities for economic development for both Ile-Ife community and Osun State at large. In order for Olojo festival to have meaningful socio- economic impacts in Ile-Ife and become relevant for boosting domestic tourism, there is the need to take cognizance of the festival in terms of cultural tourism and package its values as tourism products that will be available to tourists, visitors and other participants (Folorunso *et al.*, 2017).

Bapiri *et al.*, (2021), affirms that cultural tourism is the type of tourism activity in which tourists and visitor’s main motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume both the tangible and

intangible cultural attractions and products available in a tourism destination.

In achieving this, some social and cultural activities organized as pre events before the final ceremony are assessed which include ADIRE OODUA HUB created to facilitate the production of indigenous tie and dye textiles, ISEDOWO a programme designed to support local artisans. ARIYA OMOLUABI, a platform celebrating Yoruba musical talents and values of hard work and excellence, OMIDAN OSUN beauty pageant designed to promote Yoruba culture of beauty and brain, AYO OLOPON COMPETITION promotion of traditional indoor games in Yoruba land and many others. Significantly, International Chess Competition has been added to attract more visitors and tourists in order to expand the scope of the festival far beyond Osun State. The aspects of focus on socio-economic development are income generation, tradition, pride and social identity, economic development and investment, job creation and employment, youth empowerment and inter relationships, community development and cultural promotion and aesthetics and commemoration (Anifowose, 2020; Agbabiaka *et al.*, 2017 and Johnson, 2009).

Local Income Generation

During the festival many small and medium scale enterprises benefit from the large scourge of visitors and tourists to the town which contribute to the local economy and support businesses by driving consumer spending and providing social opportunities. The economic benefits of this festival produce ripple effects in the creation of local economy affecting both tourism-related and non-tourism businesses alike. The fact that people spend money when they attend the festivals is one major area where there is significant contribution to the local economy of the host community (Laing, 2018).

Apparently, while citizens are preparing to celebrate the festival, they band together to create cooperative and savings societies to create wealth

for themselves. These local incomes can aid in getting start-up capitals that are used to execute different small and medium scale enterprises before and during the festivals (Kuri, *et al.*, 2022). In recent times the ADIRE OODUA HUB created to facilitate the production of indigenous tie and dye textiles has led to massive sale of local textile materials and training of many women and youths in this technology. In addition, many other heritage entrepreneurs in arts and crafts have also received substantial boost in production and sales constituting to greater local income generation in Ile-Ife. In this perspective, the celebration of Olojo festival can be seen as an important instrument in up scaling local businesses because there will be ready market for the sale of these products to different tourists and visitors (Hassan and Quader, 2022). However, the economic benefits of cultural festivals must also be weighed against other negative impacts like increased environmental pollution, traffic congestion, cultural pollution, insecurity, stress on facilities and destruction of heritage properties due to overcrowding and others (Folorunso *et al.*, 2017). In reality, cultural festivals contribute to the local economy and support businesses by driving consumer spending and providing social opportunities.

Tradition

Cultural festival is one of the major pillars of promoting the culture of the people. During cultural festivals, the people share concern over their culture, emotions, sentiments and merriments together. The socio-political significance of this is affirmed by the fact that many people in the community participate in the festival. The cumulative effect is the promotion of cultural values of the community and eventual protection of their heritage because of the values attached to them (Gursoy *et al.*, 2017). The Olojo festival in Ile-Ife is arguably one of the most effective means of promoting and preserving the cosmology of the Yoruba people.

Ile-Ife was the universe, the centre from where the first man was created (moulded) and given the breath of life. Similarly, in spiritual terms, Ile Ife had been and remains the Holy City, the home of divinities of which the Ooni of Ife remains the living embodiment of the living deity. While ODUDUWA is widely regarded as the progenitor of Yoruba people, Ile Ife is regarded as its religious headquarters. Up till now, Ile Ife remains the stronghold of indigenous religious worship in which out of the 365 days of the year, only one day is said to be free of traditional ceremonies and rituals (Olokodana, 2022). This feature is still well preserved in the worship and celebration of Olojo festivals in commemoration of the gods, goddesses and deities numbering 401 and with the Ooni as the only living legend.

Pride and Social Identity

Cultural festival is a veritable mean of promoting cultural values and protection of heritage properties of the community and nation. Cultural festivals have been known to represent important resource centres for participants and admirers whereby the culture of the people are highlighted and appreciated by the visitors thereby giving the owners of the culture sense of pride and identity about the value of their culture (WTTC, 2019). AYO OLOPON COMPETITION which is used for the promotion of traditional indoor games in Yoruba land and many others are means of projecting the Yoruba culture. It develops social identity and social capital through the celebrating of values important to the community and the skills acquired during festivals. In Nigeria, Olojo festival in Ile-Ife has assumed a very colorful traditional festival where there is gorgeous display of traditional attires and visitation to many cultural landscapes in Ile-Ife (NCMM, 2013).

Economic Development and Investment:

Muresan, (2016), affirms that cultural festivals have continued to excite great interests among tourists. As a cultural resource, it has a fair share in the development efforts of most communities.

Some of the Nigerian festivals have graduated from a mere community or traditional festival to international festivals attracting large number of international tourists translating to higher economic development and investment to host communities and revenue to the nation. In fact, because of the international significance, the host communities have benefited from different development projects and foreign investments (Uysal *et al.*, 2020). Some notable examples are Olojo and Osun-Osogbo festivals in Osun State, Argungu fishing festival in Kebbi State, Ojude-Oba festival in Ogun State and Eyo Festival in Lagos State which are now regarded as the most economically viable festivals in Nigeria attracting large tourists to the states and multiple investments from governments and private sectors including international organisations.

In the past years, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Babatunde Ogunwusi, Ojaja II, the Oonirisa of Ile- Ife has added different cultural dimensions to Olojo Festival since ascension to the throne of his forebears. In recent times, the city of Ile- Ife has been adorned with spectacular cultural edifices such as ORI OLOKUN courtesy of Osun State Government. Because of the need to give Ile- Ife a new cultural landscape, the Oonirisa conceptualized Olojo festival to assume the level of national and international standard fiesta that would project ILE-IFE's cultural heritage as a world tourism hub using Community Public Private Partnership (CPPP) Strategy (Anifowose, 2020).

Although, there were sizable hotel facilities in Ile- Ife to accommodate visitors and tourist but the grand master plan of His Imperial Majesty to establish Ife Grand Resort with a projection of 300 room accommodation in 2017 has opened a new vista in visitors' facilities, tourism support and recreational opportunities. It is noteworthy that His Imperial Majesty had visited some Diaspora countries especially Brazil as the father of the entire Yoruba nation. This singular initiative has

exported Olojo festival and other traditional Yoruba practices and worship far beyond Nigeria thereby creating opportunities for international investments in domestic tourism in Ile-Ife because during the festival many diasporians from the world will be present in Ile-Ife to renew their cultural allegiance and affirmation as Yoruba people (Agbabiaka *et al.*, 2017).

Olojo festival has now become a turning point in the promotion of the cultural values of the Yoruba race, Nigerian nation as well as the entire African culture. His Imperial Majesty has widened the scope of the festival by involving partners, stakeholders and shareholders, cultural ambassadors, business magnates, corporate entities, government agencies, media gurus, financial and telecommunication giants, oil and gas magnates and many others (Osogbo City Web, 2023).

Job Creation and Employment

Since tourism is one of the greatest employers of labour in the world, it significantly translates that domestic tourism will create avenues for large scale employment and reduction of poverty in any community and country (Folorunso *et al.*, 2017). Olojo festival has provided great avenues for job creation and employment either on temporary or permanent basis. ISEDOWO a programme designed to support local artisans. ARIYA OMOLUABI, a platform celebrating Yoruba musical talents and values of hard work and excellence are good examples of such ventures because the festival attracts many tourists to Nigeria, Osun State and Ile-Ife communities it creates jobs, boost tax revenues and generate businesses for the hospitality industries like hotels, restaurants, eatery places and others.

Other sectors like transportation, security, also benefit from the large presence of tourists and visitors who must patronize them for their successful and hitch-free stays. However, UNTWO (2023), survey indicates that the creation of jobs may be seasonal because at the close of the

festival the status quo remains. In certain instances, some of the employees may be able to retain their employment status and become permanent staff. Festivals in this dimension apart from creating jobs also facilitate collaborations and networking thereby promoting domestic tourism. This is because many tourists and visitors may be able to establish business contacts and future collaborations with the host communities.

Youth Development and International Relationships

The prestigious Olojo festival has gone many steps ahead in creating avenues for youth developments and international relationships by organizing Osun Beauty Pageant tagged face of Osun Pageant "Omidan Osun" This event has attracted female contestants from different parts of the country who are girls within the age bracket of 18 to 22 years. The event is not only about beautiful faces but also beauty and brain combined where the contestants discussed various issues concerning the development of our youths. Some of the discussions centered on Girl Child Education, Sex Education and National Security among others. The finalists of the contestants will be declared as the most beautiful Queens of Osun State. One of the important significance of this event is that it has brought our youths together and creates unity among them as well as promoting the tradition and culture of Ile-Ife and Osun, the *Land of Virtue* (Olokodana, 2022).

Another important event of youth development and international relationship is the 5th Edition of Olojo Festival Chess Tournament coming up from 22nd to 23rd September, 2023. Raia Rooks Chess Club Partners Prince Adeyinka Adewole to host the 2023 Olojo Festival under 17 Chess Competition. Prince Adeyinka is the Vice-President of Nigeria Chess Federation, (NCF). He is an internationally renowned chess player and administrator with years of track records in chess promotion at local and national levels particularly in his home city, Ile-Ife. The event is organized in

collaboration with Osun State Ministry of Culture and Tourism and holding at Ife Grand Resorts and Industrial Hub. According to reports from the Sporting Sun media outfit, this event is co-sponsored by Hon. Awope Adebisi the Vice Chairman of Osun State Chess Association. Other co-sponsors are Hon. Tope Omitogun and Ambassador Surajudeen Ajilesoro who are recognized as a youth role models. Additionally, the event is supported by Prince and Princess, Roland Innovation, Amazing Grace, Hybrid Hotel, France Lag and Olobe Restaurants among others. It was also reported that one International Chess Master Player came from Egypt to add colour and professionalism to the event.

The theme of this championship is “Give Kids the World; Empowering Young Minds”. This theme is very appropriate with the intention of using Olojo festival to promote youth development and interrelationship among our youths from divergent fora of the country. The chess competition is also symbolic with the AARE CROWN worn by the Ooni of Ile-Ife during Olojo festival because chess is regarded as the game of royalties and nobles.

Community Development and Cultural Promotion

Cultural festivals have created opportunities for fostering community developments and cultural promotion of the heritage values of different communities in Nigeria. In order for any community to develop and promote her culture, there must be common understanding of the traditions and values of the culture which must be devoid of religious fanaticism (Mohamad, 2022). There will be need to identify the necessary action plans that will improve the well-being of the people and build their sense of identity, pride and solidarity.

United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recognized that the inclusion of culture into the community and economic models can take many forms and shapes as culture can serve as the centre focus for tourism.

This will lead to the preservation, enhancement and promotion of both local and national cultures which can create the basis for development and protection of local identity, community pride and social well-being of the people. Notably festivals like Osun-Osogbo and Olojo Festivals in Osun State have created ample opportunities for the development of both Osogbo and Ile-Ife communities whereby the Osun State Government and private organisations have invested heavily in the promotion of the festivals and development of social facilities. Invariably, these festivals have become well known to international communities and attracted visitors and development partners to the country (Osogbo City Web, 2023).

Aesthetics and Commemoration

Cultural festivals are usually associated with music, songs, dances, merriments, entertainments and others (Mohamad, 2022; and Leenders *et al.*, 2015). During the celebration of Olojo festival a lot of beautification and decorations take place in the community while the people are also dressed in gorgeous attires. The environment is also kept clean and all important places decorated with different paraphernalia as symbols of commemoration. All these add significantly to the aesthetics of Ile-Ife metropolis and create ambience of beauty to the entire cultural landscape of Ile-Ife.

The rendition of ILE- IFE ANTHEM and special songs used during the festival to appease different important deities and identify their roles add significantly to the intangible heritage of the community. It creates nostalgic and spiritual fulfillment to all the sons and daughters of Ile-Ife and the entire Yoruba race. It is a reminder of the essence of the festival and significance of Oduduwa and the various deities that made Ile-Ife the cradle of Yoruba race and spiritual headquarters of creation of humanity.

CONCLUSION

Generally, community festivals are veritable means of promoting domestic tourism which

inadvertently will lead to local and national revenue generations, socio-economic developments and the preservation and conservation of the heritage of the people, community and nation. This can further be sustained through the participation of community-based model of heritage management.

Olojo festival is a rich Yoruba cultural heritage. It is an iconic festival regarded as the epitome of culture in Ile-Ife which is fundamentally in celebration of Oduduwa the progenitor of Yoruba race and establishment of humankind in the universe. It is one of the biggest events that attract all descendants of Oduduwa at home and in diaspora to their roots and reminder to their existence.

In addition to its tangible socio-economic impacts, the Olojo Festival holds immense intangible value in fostering a sense of pride, identity, and unity among the Yoruba people and the broader

Nigerian community. Through its celebration of tradition, spirituality, and cultural heritage, the festival strengthens social cohesion and promotes intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and values. Furthermore, the Olojo Festival serves as a platform for cultural exchange and dialogue, facilitating understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural practices among attendees and participants. As such, continued support and promotion of the Olojo Festival and similar cultural events are essential not only for driving economic growth but also for nurturing cultural resilience and fostering mutual respect and understanding within Nigerian society. In this study the importance of Olojo festival and its contributions to domestic tourism and socio-economic development of Ile-Ife have been assessed and discussed.

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