



**ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF RELIGIOUS
TOURISM ON THE HOST COMMUNITIES OF SELECTED SITES IN SOUTH-EAST
NIGERIA**

BY

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ABSTRACT: The study examined the environmental and socio-cultural influences of religious tourism on host communities in south-east Nigeria. The study identified religious activities occurring in various religious sites and examined the influences of the religious activities on the socio-cultural and natural environment of host communities of south-eastern Nigeria. 3 objectives of the study was raised and two hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was carried out in five communities, Umuopara in Umuahia south Local Government Area, Abia State, Uke in Idemili North Local Government Area, Anambra State, Umuchigboji-nike, Emene in Enugu east Local Government Area, Enugu State, Ugwuachara in NkalikiAcharaUnuhuin Ebonyi Local Government Area, Ebonyi State and Arondizogu in Ideto North Local Government Area, Imo State. The population for the study was 139,633 and the sample size comprised 399 residents from the five communities. Three hundred and ninety nine copies of structured questionnaire consisting of two sections were administered to the respondents and focus group discussion was conducted with five groups consisting of different ages of men and women. The data generated for the study were analyzed using mean and ANOVA statistical tools. The decision rule for mean stated that any mean above 3.0 was considered as positive and the decision rule of ANOVA stated that if the F calculated is greater than F tabulated, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. The major findings were; major religious activities identified were adoration, traditional festival and other Christian activities, the economic and socio-cultural lives of host communities were improved by religious activities taking place in the various communities, the religious stakeholders and tourist disrespect the culture of host communities, the religious activities had positive influences on the natural environment of host communities but there were slight negative influence, particularly the degradation of natural environment of host communities by visitors and noise and waste pollution. Based on the findings, it was recommended that there is a need for the cultural and natural environments of the communities to be preserved through use of sustainability policies and practices of natural and socio-cultural lives of host communities. Government should ensure that religious stakeholders carry out environmental impact assessment (EIA) processes depending on the magnitude before any development is done. Host communities should ensure supervision of proper drainage and waste disposal system are constructed by religious stakeholders in the communities to curb pollution. Awareness campaign should be conducted to

enlighten tourism stakeholders and host communities on the importance of preserving and sustaining the cultural heritage of the people and the natural environment to avoid loss of identity of race and environmental hazards.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times in Nigeria, there has been a quantum increase in the movement of people motivated by a new wave of Christian religious activities. A number of Christian pilgrimage centers have sprang up in many parts of Nigeria especially southern part of Nigeria. People frequently and increasingly visit these centers for crusades, adoration and other Christian religious activities which often lasts for days and sometimes weeks. The religious activities motivate substantial movement of people away from their homes to centers where they spend days and often weeks in worship, adoration and other religious activities. The movements now generate substantial amount of income from transportation business, accommodation, food and beverage operations, sales of religious goods that can be termed religious tourism at the domestic scale.

Religious movements are not new to human societies, as the earliest type of travel can be traced to Babylonian farmers and the early civilizations that travelled for business purposes, and religious movement that moved to sites for sacred festival (Holloway, 2006). Indeed, the history of tourism could be linked to religious motivated travels of people from different countries to visit the pyramid. (Holloway, 2006). The Egyptians held religious festivals that attracted not only the devout but also many tourists who came to see the famous pyramid and works of art in the cities. Notable travels were recorded in the 3rd century, when ancient Greeks travelled to visit sites and shrines of healing gods in major sacred sites (Holloway, 2006). In order to provide for this large group of people that embarked on these travels, services

of all kinds sprang up along the travel corridors to cater for the needs of such travelers such as accommodation, food vending activities, hawking of souvenirs (Ngoka&Onyebinama, 2008). Mohammadi and Kooshki (2014) define religious tourism as when tourists visit religious heritage as a response to its historical and cultural or spiritual motivation. Enemu and Oduntan (2012) define host communities as people who live in the vicinity of the tourist attraction and are either directly or indirectly involved with, and / or affected by the tourism activities. This entails that the interactions between the members of the host communities and pilgrims/tourists have direct and indirect influence on the environment of the visited places. The influences are seen as social and cultural, economic and environmental arising from such movement and the associated activities. The impact of tourism leads to changes like improved socio-cultural lives of the host communities, increase in economic activities and threats to indigenous identity and environment of the communities. Nigeria is a country with long history of religious practices that play a vital role in the lifestyles and cultures of various societies in Nigeria. Before the coming of Islamic and Christian faiths, Nigerians practised African traditional religion (Umujei, 2009). The traditional practices were evident in the way ceremonies were carried out such as in naming ceremonies, marriages, dressing, funeral and pregnancy ceremonies (Awolalu&Dopamu in Owolabi&Omotoye, 2015). The arrival of alien religions into Nigeria evolved between the 17th and 18th centuries through the introduction of Islam by Shehu Usman Dan Fodio in the northern part of Nigeria. The Islamic militant forced the Emirs in

the northern part of Nigeria to convert to Islamic religion or lose their lives (Lewis, 1966 in Owolabi&Omotoye, 2015). Christianity started in Nigeria through the coming of Portuguese merchants in their quest for trade and personal travels. By 1515, the Catholic Evangelical group had set up schools and converted the natives of Benin to Christianity in order for the locals to learn how to recite and write catechism of the Roman Catholic (Owolabi&Omotoye, 2015). The expansion of trade across the territory of Benin and Lagos, enabled the missionaries to plant their faith on the host communities as they moved on (Owolabi&Omotoye, 2015). Modern movement and pilgrimages found their root in Nigeria in the 1970s with the advent of Pentecostalism in the Christendom. One of forerunners on development and growth of Pentecostalism is a radical evangelist called Benson Idahosa who can be regarded as the father of Pentecostalism in Nigeria (Sweeney, 2000). The sporadic spread of his revival programmes and crusades drew people from the western and eastern parts of Nigeria to Benin City for religious activities (Garlock, 1982). This gave birth to other pilgrimage centers, including the most renowned Eucharistic Adoration and Special Marian Devotion Pilgrimage Center in Elele, Rivers State, founded by the Rev. Fr. Edeh, in 1985, Aokpe Pilgrimage Center in Okpokwu in Benue State, the Awlum Monastery in Awlum, Enugu State and several others (Umejei, 2009).

Pilgrimage is a journey or search of moral or spiritual significance, while a pilgrim is a traveller who travels to a distant place from his own country or place of residence to visit a holy place or pay his devotion to the remains of dead saints (KJV Dictionary, 2016). The South-eastern geopolitical zone of Nigeria consisting of the Igbo communities and their social system of living has on their traditional religion which ensured that the morals and ethics of the communities and the environment are

maintained (Owolabi&Omotoye, 2015). Owolabi and Omotoye (2015) posit that the nature of the Igbo made it easier for them to transit from the traditional religious practice to Christian faith. Hence, these activities of the Christian missionaries greatly changed the religious environment in Igboland. With this adoption, religious pilgrimage centers easily sprang up to satisfy the motivating desire to draw closer to their God (Anikpo, 2002). Since the post war years, a lot of communities started playing host to monasteries, pilgrimage centers, adoration and prayer grounds and crusades. Communities like Awlum in Enugu State had Awlum monastery established in 1970 with pilgrims tramping in their thousands (Ezeani, nd). Hence, many other Christian bodies started developing various religious centers to meet the demand of growing pilgrims. Religious tourism, like any other forms of tourism, is an environment-dependent activity as anywhere tourism takes place, there is an interaction between tourists and the host communities (Rad & Agbajani, 2013). The consequences of the interaction between tourist and the host communities are often referred to as impact of tourism (Oduntan, 2012). This interaction brings about direct and indirect effects which result in changes in value system of the community, threat to the indigenous identity of the community, economic and socio-cultural development of the community (United Nation Environment programme, 2006). Zaei and Zaei (2013) define environment as the physical setting in which tourism takes place; which could be coastal resorts, historic cities, mountain ranges, picture villages, cultural and religious sites, which provide the stimulus for travel. The environment comprises home environment and destination environment; this is because the relationship between tourism and the environment is not just concerned with destination that tourists go, but also the societies that host the tourists (Oduntan, 2012).

In Nigeria, religion has had an immense effect on the socio-cultural environment of society. People tend to add religion to every aspect of their lives, making it a part of culture. This makes it difficult at times to separate religion from culture in Nigeria (OwolabiOmotoye, 2015). In this era of mass movement of people based on their spiritual motivation around the nation and the globe, it has brought about a lot of tourism developments at various destinations source. Many communities now embark on pilgrimage for spiritual and heritage activities; a phenomenon that has been building up from 1980s till date (Anikpo, 2002). This has created an interaction between the visiting worshippers and the host communities. In Nigeria, with no exception of the South-eastern part, there is hardly any guided environmental impact assessment (EIA) by government or stakeholders before any tourism development including the pilgrimage centers is launched. Hence, the outcomes of this development are not known. Also, the perceptions of the host communities towards religious activities taking place in their domains are hardly considered as they are expected to absorb whatever outcomes that arise from this development. This study is,

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

a. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Tourism is said to be as old as humanity, as it is said to be traced to when life started on earth (Wearne, 2001). Tourism has simply been defined as the movement of people from one place to another for a period of less than 24 hours and for purposes of leisure, recreation, site-seeing, relaxation, visiting friends and relatives (VFR), religious purposes, conferences, educational purposes etc; and money spent at the vacation should be derived from home (Okonkwo and Nzeh, 2009). Tourism comprises the industry that packages, facilitates, promotes and delivers services such as travel and care for those on the move as well as the impacts the visitors and host communities have on each other before, during and after the experience (UNWTO, 2011). Tourism

therefore, aimed at identifying the influences of religious tourism on the natural and socio-cultural environment of host communities in South-eastern part of Nigeria.

a. OBJECTIVE

- i. Ascertained the influences religious tourism has on the socio-cultural environment in each identified site.
- ii. Appraised the influences religious tourism has on the natural environment in each identified site.
- iii. Ascertained the perception of the host communities about the religious tourism occurring in their domains.

b. HYPOTHESES

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of environment of communities where religious tourism takes place and the environment where there are no religious activities

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the socio-cultural life of communities where religious tourism takes place and communities where there are no religious activities.

involves the undertaking of people away from their usual habitat and the establishment which responds to the requirement of travellers and the impact that they have on the economic, environmental and social well-being of the host community (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). Getis, Judith and Jerome (2004) define tourism as an activity undertaken for the purpose of recreation rather than business. Also Wall and Mathieson (2006) define tourism as the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal place of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in these destinations and the facilities created and service provided for cater to their needs.

The development of tourism industry has been integrated into a model, where various elements

interact with each other to respond to the environment change that ensures the smooth operation of the industry. The stakeholders in tourism model are anchored around the tourist (traveller) (Cook, Roy, Yale, Laura, Marque & Joseph, 2001). They further posit that this model consists of tourism promoter, tourism service suppliers, external environment and the tourist which is center of the model. The promoters such as the travel agents, tourism board, tour operators etc. provide information and marketing services to the tourist to enable the planning get to the desired destination, while the tourism service suppliers which are the transportation and accommodation companies provide the services of movement and lodging services to the tourist. While the external environment (social, political, physical, economic and technological) determines how the tourist and organization can work together effectively. This model buttress the relationship between tourist and the environment of host community of religious sites. The host community environment comprises of social/culture, physical, economic and technological environment. The way host communities perceive the reward on the external environment influences their reception to religious activities. Many authors have propounded various types of tourism based different classification. Tourism can be classified based on geography or based on objective (Ashiegbu&Achunike, 2014). Considering classification based on geography, Rodgers (2001) identifies three types of tourism as named domestic, inbound and outbound tourism. These suggest movements within and outside a geographical location, either as an indigene or as a foreigner. Okpoko and Okpoko (2002) also identified three geographical types of tourism, they are domestic, regional and international tourism. Classification based of tourism based on intention or purpose, Okpoko, Okonkwo &Diminyi (2008) posited five types of tourism, namely, cultural tourism, Ecotourism, sport tourism, business/conference tourism, and religious tourism. As the names already

preempt, these types specify the purpose for which the tourist undertakes the travel.

- i. **Religious Tourism:** Religious tourism is a cultural and environmental nature, combining physical activity with an interest in identity, with reference to the historical, social and economic heritage of the places visited (Rizzo and Trono, 2012). According to Okonkwo (2015), religious tourism is a form of tourism whereby people of the same faith travel individually or in group for religious purposes. Religious tourism can be defined as travel with the core motive of experiencing religious forms, or the product they induce, like arts, culture, traditions and architecture (Strategic Initiatives & Government Advisory, 2013). Okpoko and Okpoko (2002) remark that religious tourism is aimed at gaining spiritual satisfaction. The major religions which embark on large scale faith tourism, known as pilgrimages, are Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The first faith travel mentioned in the New Testament of the Christian holy book was not done by Christians but by three men of the priestly class of the Zoroastrian religion called Magi, who came from Iran to Bethlehem to see baby Jesus (Matthew 2:1). The Bible also informs us that the parents of Jesus who were Jews went on pilgrimage every year for the feast of Passover (Luke 2:41) and later Jesus went on pilgrimage on his own as an adult (Okonkwo and Nzeh, 2009). Religious tourism is becoming internationalized; whereas this kind of tourism was previously a largely domestic phenomenon, it now involves different nationalities and even in certain destinations different spiritualities and religions. The spectacular development of religious tourism destinations over the past thirty years has allowed pilgrimage to regain the prominence they enjoyed in the past, making it possible for religious gatherings to attract tens of millions of persons and for pilgrimage routes and religious gathering itineraries to once again play their role as links among people and nations (Tala&Padurean, 2008). Religious tourism is important today not only due to its quantitative dimensions, global reach

(Collins- Kreiner, 2010) and impact on those who practice it, but also because of its influence on the host community.

Religious tourism is an excellent means to increase *social cohesion*, because the interaction that is generated between those who participate in the journey and share the same motives and values as the event (ceremonies, deeds, itineraries of a religious nature) and, if possible, the local host population who manage the places and situations. It also becomes an economic and cultural resource, which not only allows visitors to become witnesses and participants in the memory of the host community, but allows the latter to adopt a less self-referential approach to their religious heritage, linking it more closely to the context, traditions and communities that contributed to its construction (Rizzello&Trono, 2013).

Most communities around the holy sites are in support of tourism development because it is a source of income, employment and public service. Likewise host communities whose religious and cultural heritage is positively portrayed by the tourism destination will be more likely to support tourism development than those whose religious and cultural heritage is ignored (Gedecho, 2014). Therefore, these religious organizations cannot isolate themselves from the communities as they need the communities support and communities need the money from religious tourism (TalaPadurean, 2008).

ii. **Environment and tourism:** Tourism is an environmentally dependent activity. At the broadest level, the natural environments and heritage belong to people of each country and even some of them belong to all people of the world. Tourism has been converted into a complex phenomenon, with economic, social, cultural and natural environmental dimension (Holden, 2000). The environment comprises home environment and destination environment, because the destination of the tourists are societies where people come from. Home environment refers to aspect of people's domestic lives that contributes to their living

conditions; these factors may be physical, psychological or cultural pattern of the location, while destination environment refers to surrounding and environ of the place visited (Oduntan, 2010).

The environment is promoted as an attraction in tourism industry due to its natural and cultural attributes, such as the mountains, rivers, flora and fauna, festivals, arts, language etc. However, there is a growing concern on how tourism, the natural environment and the locales can interact in the most beneficial way as different destinations have their different degrees of tolerance to tourism based on their environment characteristics, while tourism provides considerable economic benefits to a place; its rapid expansion can also be responsible for adverse environmental impact as well as socio-cultural impact. Environment in religious destination is influenced by the influx of visitors in many ways. These impact usually exerts demand on basic service of the environment and impacts are most likely to peak and dispute over time in and around the religious destinations. Accumulation of huge quantities of residual (waste), high level of pollution, deforestation and destruction of flora and fauna are most experience impact in religious destination (Singh, 2002).

iii. **Environmental impacts of tourism:** The quality of the environment, both natural and man-made, is essential to tourism. However, tourism's relationship with the environment is complex; many activities can have adverse environmental effects.

Tourism activities can put pressure on natural resources when it increases consumption in areas where resources are already scarce (Cessford&Dingwall: 1999). The effects of tourist/visitors on natural environment are grouped under three categories;

- a. Physical damage,
- b. Depletion of natural resource and
- c. Pollution.

Physical impact comprises of those direct structural changes to physical and biological features and environments that occur where

visitors walk, ride, drive, swim, rest and are accommodated. Typical effect relating to religious tourism is direct trampling on soil, vegetation, impact on wildlife and micro-fauna. The tourists and visitors using the same trail over and over again trample the vegetation and soil, eventually causing damage that can lead to loss of biodiversity and other impacts. These effects can result in plant and micro-fauna damage, displacement, or death, soil disruption, damage to natural surface or features and damage to the physical integrity of historical or cultural features. These effects can also contribute to secondary diffusive processes, such as induced soil erosion, increased stream sediment loads, disruption to species balances, and changed habitat viability (Sunlu, 2003). Wildlife can be adversely affected by the construction and maintenance of tourist infrastructure, and by tourist activities, wildlife habitat is altered by tourists' trampling and by the use of off-road vehicles.

- a. Depletion of natural resources comprises of water resources, local resources and pollution. Water, especially fresh water, is one of the most critical natural resources; the overuse of water resources by the tourist or visitors to the host community result in water shortages and degradation of water supplies, as well as generating a greater volume of waste water (Sunlu, 2003). Tourism can create great pressure on local resources like energy, food, and other raw materials that may already be in short supply. Tourism can cause the same forms of pollution as any other industry: air emission, noise, solid waste and littering, release of sewage, oil and chemicals, even architectural/visual pollution. Transport emissions and emissions from energy production and use are linked to acidic rain, global warming and photochemical pollution. Air pollution from tourist and pilgrim transportation has impact on the global level, especially from carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions related to transportation energy

use and it can contribute to severe local air pollution. Noise pollution from airplanes, cars and buses is ever-growing problem of modern life (International Civil Aviation Organisation, 2001). In areas with high concentration of tourist activities and appealing natural attractions, waste disposal is a serious problem and improper disposal can be a major spoiler of the natural environment; rivers, scenic areas and roadsides. When visitors come to a natural environment they can import harmful external materials, substances, or biota. Also, disposal of waste water is an issue because it finds its way into the natural ecosystem of the hills, especially during peak visitation due to malfunctioning of the sewage treatment plants. Foul smell and overflowing gutters around public conveniences are not uncommon during tourist activities. Sewage runoff causes serious damage to coral reefs because it stimulates the growth of algae, which cover the filter-feeding corals, hindering their ability to survive. The aesthetic appeal of a destination are destroyed through graffiti or the construction of building that clashes with the surrounding environment, creating "architectural" or "visual" pollution (Andereck, 1993; Mathieson & Wall, 1982 in Sunlu, 2003).

- ii. **Socio-cultural impact of Tourism:** Tourism has often been associated with the contact between cultures, behaviors, values and traditions. . Tourism is considered a framework where hosts and tourists can learn better about from each other, through direct interaction. Interactions between locals and tourists generates the emergence of new ideas, values and motivations for social and economic progress (Brown 1998, Bersales 2005, Nyaupane et al. 2006). We cannot talk about the socio-cultural impact of tourism without talking its effects on local cultures. Globalization is seem as one of the major indicator of tourism on socio-cultural environment of the society, and this result in both positive and negative impact

of tourism (Bac, 2012). Tourists easily interfere into host culture, as a result, difference are easily noticed in the usual behaviour, attitude, dress, foods, arts, songs and even social relationship of host (McKercher, 1993 in Shatizalel, 2016).

b. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theories used to explain host community-tourist and environmental and socio-cultural impacts are Social exchange theory, behavioural theories and environmental theories.

Social exchange theory is defined as the exchange of activity tangible or intangible and more or less rewarding or costly at least between two persons (Homans, 1961). Social exchange theory involves a series of interactions that generate obligations, the interactions are usually seen as interdependent and contingent on the actions of another party or person (Blau, 1964 in Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Social exchange theory is considered an appropriate framework for developing an understanding of hosts' perception of tourism impact (Allen, Long, Perdue & Dieselbach, 1993). Social exchange theory posits that individual will engage in exchange if the resulting rewards are valued and when perceived cost does not exceed perceived rewards (Brunt & Courtney, 1999).

Behavioural theories are anchored in behavioural ethics and see the absence of environmental ethics as main reason for environmental damage. Behavioural ethics deals with the issue of right and wrong and moral obligations, while environmental ethics refers to the standard and principle regulating the behaviour of individual or group of individuals (Rue & Byars 1996 in Okpoko, 2006). The behavioural theories argue that human being possesses the will to react in an environmentally friendly manner if appropriate environmental information is available (Miller & Flugel, 1999). These theories also posit that

there is human ignorance because there are insufficient environmental research, education and information.

Environmental theories comprises of diminishing destination yield and property right theory. The law of diminishing yield theory helps in setting development limit. The limits are used in different kinds of capacities of physical, economic, social and cultural environments. The law of diminishing destination yield is important in two aspects, first it provides the enabling instrument for calculating and reading congestion in destination areas and secondly, it helps to prolong the tourism season by encouraging more regular and constant distributions of tourism demand throughout the whole year. Property right theorist believes that property right is invaluable where environmental goods appear to be relatively scarce and that well defined right is pre-condition for market oriented solution to environment problem (Harley et al, 1997 in Okpoko, 2006). The property right theory consists of two variants, the first variant is that the polluter has right to pollute while the second variant is the affected party has a right to non-pollution. Thus, the polluter pays or bears the cost which comes in the form of taxes like over-night tax, taxes on disposable packaging etc; this theory gave rise to formulation of taxes for package tours on the basis of the environmental damage caused (Mihalic; ndOkpoko, 2006). These theories have helped in issues of environmental problem of high crowd on destination that bringing undue pressure not only on the destination but also on municipal service, thus the concept of carrying capacity to help determine the limit of visitors and also development for the destination and optimum utilization of the tourism resources (Okpoko, 2006).

This study was anchored on environmental theories, because it emphasizes the behavioural ethics of the environment. If the host communities and stakeholders have adequate

behavioural ethics on environmental damage, there will be proper preservation and conservation of the natural, social and cultural environments of the destination due to using the theory of law of diminishing destination yield to help set development limit on the environment to avoid congestion of the destination and prolonging the usage of the destination.

c. **EMPIRICAL LITERATURE**

Priyanka *et al.* (2013) studied “Pilgrimage and the environment: Challenges in a pilgrimage centre in Maharashtra, India”. The research posits that significant changes in scale, frequency and character of visitation of pilgrims over the few decades reflect pressures on the environment of sacred sites in Maharashtra, India. The objective of the study was to explore causal linkages between different factors that shape the environment in a pilgrimage centre. The research used an exploratory case study approach, using face-to-face interviews with local community and agencies that manage pilgrimage, then structured questionnaires and informal meetings were used to study the environmental issues of the destination. Observations were also made by the researcher by participating in pilgrimage and its rituals. The finding of the study shows that there is an increase in consumption of resources of the environment when the pilgrims undergo site seeing in three interrelated processes which stressed basic services, increased pollution and degradation of natural resources. There is stress on basic water supply, as the supply of water is inadequate during the peak occasion. Also the disposal of waste water is an issue because it finds its way into the natural ecosystem of the hills, especially during peak visitation due to malfunctioning of the sewage treatment plants. It was observed that the solid waste from religious offering and functions contains organic waste, flowers, food items, households and commercial waste like paper,

plastic, bags, sand, stones etc. from street sweeping and drain cleaning activities are dumped at landfill site which poses a high risk of contamination of the surface. Lastly, the heightened visitation and resulting economic opportunities drive the inevitable rapid urbanization of pilgrimage center.

This study is related to the present study as pilgrimage activities in the area had effect on the natural and physical environments of host community, the host community was undergoing degradation due to environmental pollution by tourists and scarcity of resource due to the increased consumption by the tourist.

Rizzello and Trono (2013) also carried a research on “The Pilgrimage to The San Nicola Shrine in Bari and its Impact”. The aim of this research was to study pilgrimage flows associated with the cult of Saint Nicholas (San Nicola) in Bari and the significant impacts of pilgrimage activities on the host community. The study followed a mixed approach that includes participant observation, use of archival documents and empirical evaluation of the material landscape and observed practices. The results of this study show that the flows activated by the “relics of the Saint” affect the local and regional economy to a minimal degree, this is because the city of Bari and Puglia Regional Administration have not activated policies to encourage longer stays by the religious tourists visiting Bari. Secondly, the finding shows that the policies of the city of Bari (host community) does not encourage long stay of religious tourists because there are few services to welcome visitors. Lastly, the host community has not harnessed the potential of using the identities of their saint to attract cultural tourist or religious market. This study is related to the present study because it examines the socio-cultural transformation and impact religious activities had on the host community

Foruzan (2014) studied “The Role of Religious Tourism in the Development and Growth of Urban Metropolis: (In The Case of Mashhad, Iran)”. The objective was to examine three dimensions of development, namely, economic, environmental, and social-cultural issues caused by religious tourism in Mashhad. 288 residents’ perceptions who are settled around the Imam Reza holy shrine were used as sample size and mean and standard deviation was used to calculate the extent respondents are agreed about positive impacts of religious tourism in terms of economic, environment, and social-cultural development, while ANOVA was used to compare mean scores of economic, environment, and social-cultural dimensions by educational level, income level, and residency lengths. The results show that from the perspective of residents, development of religious tourism provides economic contribution in Mashhad and negative effects of religious tourism on the natural environment were reported by respondents. The findings of the study also show there was improvement of social-cultural lives caused by religious tourism in Mashhad.

This study is related to the present study because it examined the influences of religious activities on socio-cultural and physical environment of the host community and the perception and reaction of residents towards this influences.

Yalghouzaghaj, A. G, Shorbolagh, S.P (2013) studied on “Impact of Religious Tourism on the Economy of the Country (Case Study: Iranian Religious tourism)”. The objective was to understand the significance of religious tourism in nations’ economies and as a result its influence on social, cultural and industrial aspect. Variance analysis and Duncan method were used for data analysis. The findings show that there was large income attracted by international tourists visiting the religious centers (shrines), the development of pilgrimage tourism lead to establishment of steady occupation for young population of the country and lastly tourist

visitation behaviour is linked to tourist religion and their level of religious belief.

Rot, Mikinac& Bogdan (2014) studied on “General characteristic of Religious Tourism in Croatia”. The objective was to examine socio-demographic profile of the pilgrims, the motives and visitors satisfaction they derive and to ascertain the characteristic of the visitors, their needs and requirements. Empirical analysis were used to investigate the segment of tourism in Croatia. The finding of the study shows that the available tourist facilities was not adequate to satisfy the basic travel needs, also the catering facilities were seen to be inadequate to meet the visitor’s needs. Observation showed that positive changes were evident in the growing number of souvenir makers, the people who partake in the religious activities were majorly indigenes of the community and the motives of pilgrims were for spiritual renewal and lastly the visitors were satisfied with the element of tourism in the area studied.

This study is related to the present study as the socio-cultural environment of the area studied were discovered to have an increase in job opportunities and trade in souvenir making by residents in the host community.

Kavita, Swratz& Green (2017) carried a research on “Sustainable cultural and Religious Tourism in Nambia: Issues and challenge”. The study revealed the challenges and issues faced by the local communities through their participation in tourism and the nature of cultural heritage tourism and the challenges and benefits that cultural heritage tourism has on the host community as a tourism offering. Review of policies and framework for cultural heritage initiatives was used to analyse the data collected. The results of this study show that the development of cultural heritage tourism were encouraged by the tourist’s demand for new travel destination and products, successful cultural heritage tourism will occur when tourism value chain is aligned with basic ideas

of community-based tourism development. This study is related to the present study because it examines the sustainability of socio-cultural environment of the host community.

Petroman, Petroman, Buzata, Marin, Dumitresu, Constantin, Rus (2011) studied on “A Religious and Ethnic tourism profile of Europe”. The objective of the study was to determine the profile of the most important religious and ethnic tourism market in Europe and to analyze the tourist flow from Europe. The finding of the study showed that the European cultural tourism were favoured by the tourist, the rural religious site ranked the highest visited after museums and historical sites and monument, the natives benefits by increase in their incomes and the tourism activities affect the behaviour, clothing and traditional practices of the host communities.

This study is related to the present study as the socio-cultural environment of the host communities were discovered to have an indication of changes in their clothing, behaviour and practice. Also socio-cultural lives of the host community were seen to be improved through job opportunity and trade.

Vorzak& Gut (2009) studied “A strategic Diagnosis of Religious Tourism in Romania”. The aim of the study was to assess the state and issues of religious tourism in Romania, the extent the resource available were exploited and the perspective of development envisaged. SWOT analysis was used to analyze data collected. The findings showed the strength, weakness, opportunity and threat analysis. The strength analysis showed there is richness and diversity of religious tourism patrimony, while the weakness analysis showed there was low number and relatively poor training of tourist goods, lack of envisaging religious sight as supplementary source of income, lack of awareness and education of what religious patrimony means and its importance, lack of

cooperation between local authorities and civil society and insufficiency of tourist infrastructure. The opportunity analysis showed that there is growth interest for religious tourism and extension of the geographic space. The threat analysis showed that urbanization of rural population directly involving loss of religious patrimony. This study is related to the present study as natural and socio-cultural environment were studied and were discovered that the available resource was exploited and the socio-cultural environment was indicated to be losing religious patrimony and urbanization.

Gedecho (2014) studied on “Challenges of Religious Tourism development; the case of Gishen Miriam, Ethopia”. The aim of the study was to identity the challenge of religious tourism development in Gishen Marian. In-depth interview, questionnaire and informal discussion were used for data analysis. The findings show that there is poor transportation infrastructural development, absence of government attention, unsuitable church administrative structure, environmental pollution and poor quality of road and absence of transportation service. This study is related to the present study because it examined the physical and socio-cultural environment of the host community.

The various studies by these scholars had reviewed the various influences of religious tourism on various aspects of the environment. Priyanka *et al* (2013) posited that there is greater influence on the religious activities on the natural environment of the host communities, while Rizzello and Trono (2013) posited that the socio-cultural lives of the residents are transformed as a result of economic impact of religious activities on the host community, Foruzan (2014) posited that religious activities have impact on economic, environment and socio-cultural dimensions of the community. Rot *et al* (2014) proposed that the resources of the host communities were not adequate to satisfy

the basic travel needs of religious tourists, as the natural resources were scarce for the host communities, Kavita *et al* (2017) posited that sustainability of socio-cultural environment of host community can be achieved through cultural heritage tourism, while Petromanet *al* (2011) postulated that host communities benefit economically from religious and ethnic tourism and also the socio-cultural lives were improved, Vorzsak & Gut (2009) proposed that religious tourism has led to exploitation of resources in natural environment and loss of religious patrimony of host community and Gedecho (2014) postulated that physical environment of

host community was negatively impacted by religious tourism.

However, this study has identified the gap on the influence of religious tourism on the cultural environment as well as the social and natural environment of the host community within south eastern part of Nigeria and wished to contribute towards filling the identified gaps.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study areas were Umuopara in Umuahia, Abia State, Uke in Anambra State, UmuchigboIje-nikeEmene in Enugu State, Ugwuachara Abakaliki in Ebonyi State and Arondizogu in Imo State. Umuopara is located in Umuahia South Local Government Area of Abia State.

The population of study includes the residents and indigenes of the various communities;

Table 1: Population of the study

Area of study	Population
Uke	19,551
Nkaliliachara	13,086
Iji-Nike Emene	66,459
Umuopara	19,566
Aronudizugo	20,871
Total	139,633

The sample size of 399 was determined from the population using Taro Yamane formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = the finite population

e = level of significance

I = constant

(Uzoagulu: 2007)

$$n = \frac{139,633}{1 + 139,633(0.05)^2}$$

$$\frac{139,633}{350.0825}$$

$$n = 398.86$$

$$n = 399$$

The researcher design used for the study is descriptive survey involving the questionnaire and focus group discussion administration. The sampling technique was used proportionate stratified random sampling and purposive sampling. Proportionate stratified random sampling was used to select the areas where the religious activities take place while purposive sampling was used to select the respondents who fit the purpose of the study. 399 copies of

structured questionnaire were administered to the respondents and focus group discussion was conducted with five groups consisting of

different ages of men and women. The data generated for the study were analyzed using mean and ANOVA statistical tools

Table 2: Socio-cultural influence of religious activities on identified sites

S/N	SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES	FREQUENCY	MEAN	DECISION
1.	Promotion of indigenous culture	100	2.9	Disagreed
2.	Learning of other people culture	218	3.7	Agreed
3.	Reduction of social ills	131	3.1	Agreed
4.	Preservation of culture	130	3.0	Agreed
5.	Improve quality of life	220	4.3	Agreed
6.	Disrespect for culture of the people	142	3.1	Agreed
	Total	941	20.6	
	Cluster Mean	3.4		

Table 1 reveals that the mean responses of promotion of indigenous culture, learning of other people's culture, reduction of social ills, preservation of culture, improve quality of life and disrespect for culture of the people are 2.9, 3.7, 3.1, 3.0, 4.3 and 3.1 respectively. The decision rule states that any mean from 3.0 and above is considered positive. This indicates that there are positive socio-cultural influences of religious activities on the identified sites.

Table 3: Religious tourism influences on the natural environment of the identified sites

S/N	Natural environmental Influences	Frequency	Mean	Decision
1.	Conservation of natural environment	131	2.9	Disagreed
2.	Noise pollution	187	3.4	Agreed
3.	Waste pollution	209	3.7	Agreed
4.	Exploitation of natural resources	111	3.0	Agreed
5.	Urbanization	253	3.0	Agreed
6.	Structural deformation and Graffiti	121	2.7	Disagreed
7.	Deforestation	121	2.4	Agreed
8.	Erosion	143	2.0	Disagreed
9.	Landslide	140	1.7	Disagreed
	Total	1647	24.8	
	Grand Mean	2.8		

Table 2 present that the mean responses of conservation of natural environment, noise pollution, waste pollution, exploitation of natural resources, urbanization, structural deformation and graffiti, deforestation, erosion and landslide are 2.9, 3.4, 3.7, 3.0, 3.0, 2.7, 2.4, 2.0 and 1.7 respectively. The decision rule states that any mean below 3.0 is considered as negative. This indicates that the natural environmental influences of religious activities on the identified sites were perceived as negative, with indication of natural environment not conserved, presence of waste and noise pollution, exploitation of

natural resources, urbanization of the community, deformation of structural aesthetic, deforestation, erosion and landslides.

Table 4: Perception of the host communities on the religious tourism in various communities

S/N	Perception of influence by host communities	Frequency	Mean	Decision
1.	Enjoyment of religious activities	165	4.3	Agreed
2.	Means of development	197	4.4	Agreed
3.	Source of livelihood and job opportunity	176	4.4	Agreed
4.	Way of Losing their culture and norms	87	3.5	Agreed
	Total			
	Grand Mean	635	16.6	
		4.2		

Table 3 reveals that the mean responses of the perception of host communities on enjoyment of religious activities, religious activities as means of development, as source of livelihood and, as job opportunity and ways of losing their culture and norms are of 4.3, 4.4, 4.4 and 3.5 respectively. The decision rule states that any mean from 3.0 and above is considered positive. This indicates that the residents of the host communities perceive the influences of religious tourism as positive.

Table 5: Reduction of negative influence of religious tourism

S/N	Ways negative influence of religious tourism can be reduced	Frequency	Mean	Decision
1.	Ownership of resources by community	220	3.9	Agreed
2.	Host community participation in tourism planning/development	220	3.9	Agreed
3.	Implementation of environmental impact assessment (EIA) before development	176	3.9	Agreed
4.	Grass-root education of heritage resources/environmental resources	209	3.7	Agreed
5.	Education of tourist on the culture of the host community.	177	3.7	Agreed
	Total	969	19.1	
	Grand Mean		3.8	

Table 4 shows that the mean responses of ownership of resources by community, host community participation in tourism planning and development, implementation of Environmental Impact Assessment before development, grass-roots education of heritage resources/environmental resources, education of tourist on the culture of host community are 3.9, 3.9, 3.9, 3.7 and 3.7 respectively. The decision rule states that any mean from 3.0 and above is considered positive. This indicates that negative influence of religious tourism can be reduced if measure indicated above is put in place.

A. Testing of hypothesis

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between the mean rating of environment of communities where religious tourism takes place and the environment where there are no religious activities

Table 6: Religious tourism and the environment

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean square (variance)	F-Cal	F-critical	Decision
Between samples	942.76	3	314.25	8.04	2.60	Ho rejected
Within samples	12,737	326	39.07			

At 5% level

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between the mean rating of the socio-cultural life of communities where religious tourism takes place and the communities where there are no religious activities.

Table 7: Religious tourism and socio-cultural life of communities

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean square (variance)	F-Cal	F-critical	Decision
Between samples	3,909.8	3	1303.3	63.6	2.60	Ho rejected
Within samples	6,688.2	326	20.5			

At 5% level

4. Major Findings

The major findings drawn from the results of the data analysis were as follows:

- i. The identified religious activities that take place in the identified sites are adoration and other Christian activities. The traditional festivals of various sites were identified as prominent and Islamic activities were least identified to occur in south-eastern Nigeria.
- ii. The identified religious activities improved economic lives of host

communities with provision of job opportunities, trade and development of the community.

- iii. Religious tourism improved the socio-cultural lives of the communities as it has reduced social ills in the communities and promoted some indigenous festivals of the communities. It was seen that crime rate and robbery were reduced as the youth were gainfully employed, also the festivals of the host communities were seen to prominent as tourists export the cultural

artifices and heritage of the communities as they leave.

- iv. Religious activities in the identified sites have resulted in the degradation and destruction of the natural environment of host communities. This was evident as the majority of the responses indicated there were environmental pollution from noises and waste, structural deformation and deforestation.
- v. Religious stakeholders and tourists were disrespecting the culture of the communities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This work has attempted to evaluate the environmental and socio-cultural influences of religious tourism on the host communities of selected sites in south-east Nigeria, the major findings of the research led to the following conclusion:

There are religious activities that give room for religious tourism in the south-eastern Nigeria. They include adoration, Christian religious activities and traditional festivals.

The religious activities have socio-cultural changes in host communities, which include: changes in quality of life, reduction of social ills and social exchange of culture.

The natural environment of host communities is threatened, as the environment is becoming hazardous to the residents, if measures and policies are not developed to address these negative issues, the lives of the residents are endangered.

The traditional and cultural lifestyle of host communities is gradually getting lost to new religious practices migrating into the communities.

Religious tourism contributes to the economic improvement of host communities through the

provision of jobs, trades and structural development.

The stakeholders of religious tourism and host communities need to work in partnership to sustain the environment of the communities.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were drawn from the findings of the research work:

1. In Nigeria today, many communities are hosting religious sites in the forms of adoration grounds, prayer camps, churches and traditional centers. Religious activities has in these places bring about development of various communities. The government should partner with religious bodies to help in the planning and development of host communities concerned.
2. Policies and practices that ensure sustainability of natural and socio-cultural lives of the host communities should be developed at the early stage of development to avoid the negative effect at the maturity stage.
3. Host community should participate in the development process, to give the host communities a sense of ownership and control over the resources of the communities.
4. Government should ensure that religious stakeholders carry out environmental impact assessment (EIA) before commencing any building and development in any community.
5. Proper drainage and waste disposal system should be constructed by religious stakeholders during development process to avert pollution of the community during maturity stage.
6. Religious stakeholders should create awareness on religious practices to help in checking religious fanaticism and

give room for religious tolerance in the

host communities.

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