

Uyo, Akwa Ibom State and the Challenges of Tourism Development: the case of Inappropriate Urban Development Drives

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D.O.I: 10.56201/ijgem.v9.no3.2023.pg37.42

ABSTRACT

Geographically, AkwaIbom State is divided into the coastal mangroves of Africa Central and transition areas at the southernmost point. The Imo and Cross Rivers, flow along the eastern and western borders respectively, while Kwa Ibo River crosses the state before flowing into the Bonny River. Economically, the state is the hub of crude oil and natural gas production in the country; with Ibeno, Mbo and Eastern Obolo as oil-producing local government area's key minor industries involve agriculture as the state has substantial cocoyam, yam, and plantain crops along with fishing and agriculture. Yet, the state has no substantive or reasonable convention centre. Convention centre is one of the key segments of the events industry, along with hotels, and unique shows. They are designed to host any type of event, including conferences, conventions, and exhibitions. They are mostly located in or near the urban centres or other major population centres and are designed to meet the unique needs of the gathering groups, organizers, visitors, and exhibitors. In the past, the government approaches to urban development programmes are regrettable, retrogressive and benign. As a result, adequate measures and proper administrative management of the government laws and policies are recommended for tourism development in Uyo. Hiring of poorly trained and unqualified personals should be minimized and properly and adequately trained professionals in different areas of interest hired to man and manage the facilities of the state for upwards growth. The urban players in the state should pay more and better attention to the state's tourism development hence, a sustainable convention centre.

KEYWORDS: *convention, development laws, gathering, architecture, tourism*

INTRODUCTION

A convention centre, also known as a conference centre, is a large facility designed to host events such as conferences, trade show, exhibitions, and conventions. It usually consists of several auditoriums, conference rooms, distribution rooms, exhibition halls, and other support facilities such as catering and audio visual services. A conference centre brings together representatives of a sovereign state or various institutions and societies for discussion and sometimes decision-making. A report published by the Events Industry Council, identified convention centres as one of the key segments of the events industry, along with hotels, convention centres, and unique shows(Lawson, 1981).

According to the Convention Industry Council [CIC](2011), a convention centre is defined as a permanent facility designed to host any type of event, including conferences, conventions, and exhibitions. CIC also notes that convention centres are typically located in or near urban centres or other major population centers and are designed to meet the unique needs of event organizers, visitors, and exhibitors. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the convention centres can help promote economic growth and development in host cities by attracting tourists, generating income, and creating jobs (UNCTAD, 2018).

According to an AIPC report, global convention centres generated \$325 billion in economic impact in 2019, supporting more than 3 million jobs. Convention centres play a vital role in the global meetings and events industry, which is estimated to generate billions of dollars in economic activity each year. In addition to providing venues for large events, conference centres also provide event planners with a range of services, including event planning, logistics, and marketing support.

According to the International Association of Congress Centre, convention centres typically have at least 10,000 square meters (107,639 square feet) of exhibition space. However, the size of a convention centre can vary greatly depending on location, usage, and other factors. Conference centres can range from small premises with a few thousand square meters of space to large complexes with hundreds of thousands of square meters of exhibition and conference space. Conference centres range in size from less than 50,000 square feet to more than 2 million square feet,” and the size of the conference centre is often determined by market demand in the area (Aftandilian, 2003).

Convention centres are often large, impersonal spaces where visitors may find it difficult to navigate or identify with the building. There is an important role in creating a sense of identity and purpose for such buildings. Architectural features and symbols help create a sense of identity and purpose for the building, making it easier for participants to navigate and make connections within the space. The goal is to create a sense of place that creates an emotional attachment to the building (Dripps, 2013).

Architectural features and symbols are important components of architectural design that contribute to the overall aesthetic, functional, and cultural significance of buildings and structures. However, the use and interpretation of these elements can be highly subjective and context-dependent, leading to debates and controversies in the field of architecture. Architectural features refer to the physical characteristics of a building or structure, including its size, shape, materials, and details. According to Ching (2011), a renowned architectural theorist and educator, architectural features can be organized into three categories: form, space, and order. Form refers to the overall shape and massing of a building, while space refers to the interior and exterior spaces created by the building. Order refers to the design principles and systems that govern the placement and arrangement of architectural elements, such as columns, arches, and pediments.

Convention centres are often located in urban areas and are surrounded by other large buildings or structures. Architectural elements and symbols help the convention centre stand

out from its surroundings and create visual interest. These architectural features and symbols help break the monotony of the urban landscape and create excitement and energy (Darling, 2017). They are designed to accommodate a variety of events, from business meetings to music festivals. Architectural features and symbols help communicate the purpose of a building and the types of events for which it is best suited. As Susan Goltzman, a leading expert in environmental graphic design, points out, architectural features and symbols are used to communicate a building's purpose and create a visual language that helps visitors navigate the space (Goltzman, 2011).

Symbols, on the other hand, are visual images or symbols that represent ideas. Using and recognizing symbols enriches our lives. Symbolism as a visual language is widely used in art. The symbols included in the latest modern art do not always mean anything to the viewer, but they have a deep resonance for the artist. While much of the symbolism associated with mythology, religion, folklore, art, and culture has remained unchanged for thousands of years, a new form of symbolism has evolved. Designers around the world today, use symbolism in their designs to make them more meaningful and recognizable (Hirst, 2000).

Throughout history, the aspirations of all cultures and societies have been reflected through architecture. From the ancient Greek and Roman buildings that symbolized imperial power, to the celestial symbols embodied in the vaulted arches and towers of majestic Gothic cathedrals and mosques, architects shaped their work to create a universal visual language. Simple buildings may seem relatively purely functional, but they are also associated with deep beliefs (Milward, 1987).

The public face of the building offers another aspect of its symbolism. It represents how a person wants to appear in the world. An open facade with many windows suggests openness and honesty, while a windowless facade with an enclosed courtyard suggests privacy. Luxury flowers represent status and power (Rodrik, 2003). In today's developing world economy, a new type of symbol is forming. This is a unique expression around the world. This icon has a unique architectural term that reveals the different meanings and interpretations of people in modern society. The icon opens a new debate about its relevance and contribution to the society and culture in the global arena of international cities (Jenks, 2007).

Buildings of different shapes represent different symbolic ideals. Tall buildings can represent status and achievement, while environmentally conscious buildings demonstrate a connection to both nature and natural forms. People held strongly to the beliefs and meanings of the symbols and they were not just expressions to form a common belief system. It brought communities and cultures together. These symbols were the unspoken language of society and a common visual language in which they communicated. However, in the ever-changing modern society, this commonality and unity is under threat. Certain forms used in the design of a building floor plans, elevations, and decorations attached to it make sense to us immediately by association (Hall, 2006). Therefore, it is important to create cities with structures and processes that inspire discussions about meaning, identity, and relationships with nature (Zukin, 2004).

Zoning and orientation of spaces especially in large floor area designs like a convention centre is a prominent problem in the designs of Convention centre which according to the

study carried out by Lee et al. (2016), observed that the lack of signs and clear signage of spaces in convention centres can cause confusion and disorientation among visitors, making it difficult to find their way to their desired location. This can lead to wasted time, frustration, and an overall unpleasant experience.

Akwabom State is a state in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria, bordered by Cross River State to the east, Rivers State and Abia State to the west and the Atlantic Ocean, to the south. The province takes its name from the Kwa Ibo River, which crosses the province before flowing into the Bonny River. Akwabom was separated from Cross River State in 1987 into 31 local government districts with the capital at Uyo.

Among the 36 states, Akwabom is the 30th in area and 15th in population, with a population of about 5.5 million in 2016. Geographically, the state is divided into the coastal mangroves of Africa Central and transition areas at the southernmost point. Forests between Niger and the rest of the states. Other key geographical features include the Imo and Cross Rivers, which flow along the eastern and western borders of Akwabom respectively, while the Kwa Ibo River crosses the state before flowing into the Bonny River. In the southeast corner of the state is the Stub Creek Forest Preserve, a sanctuary for endangered wildlife. The reserve is experiencing declining populations of crocodile, howler monkey, red-headed mangabey and guenon skatter, as well as declining populations of African and Nigerian leopards. The offshore state is biologically diverse, with large populations of fish and several species of cetaceans, including bottlenose dolphins, pantropical dolphins, humpback whales and killer whales.

Economically, Akwabom State is based around the production of crude oil and natural gas, and the highest oil-producing state in the country; with Ibeno, Mbo and Eastern Obolo as oil-producing local government areas. Their key minor industries involve agriculture as the state has substantial cocoyam, yam, and plantain crops along with fishing. Despite its vast oil revenues, Akwabom has the seventeenth highest Human Development Index in the country in large part due to years of systemic corruption.

Uyo, is the capital of Akwabom State, located in south-eastern part of Nigeria. Uyo lies on the road from Oron to IkotEkpene. A collecting station for palm oil and kernels, it is also a local trade centre for yams, cassava [manioc], palm produce and the area is mostly inhabited mainly by the Ibibio people. The town has a brewery and a textile mill, a tourist attraction in the area yet, with no reasonable and functional convention centre.

AIM

The primary focus of this work is to create the needed awareness that, Uyo, the capital of Akwabom, with her vast oil and economic strength, has no reasonable convention centre yet, a major tourist attraction in the region.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The authors adopted content base analysis (secondary data sources), where they carefully analyzed and interpreted works of other authors and used them in buttressing their points as

applied to the issue at hand, that Uyo, the capital of AkwaIbom State with her vast oil and economic strength, has no reasonable convention centre yet, a major tourist attraction in the region.

The topical issue of focus is the impacts of convention centres in major urban centres, the effects they have in socio-economic development and growth in cities (tourism) or better said, the economic adequacy and sustainability in the tourism industry of the area. As such, the authors laid emphasis on qualitative research method that considered previous works on the subject matter.

FINDINGS

Uyo, the capital of AkwaIbom State has been pulling positive attention especially, in economic growth and urban and rural developments resulting from the state's rich oil revenues and tourism. Yet, the state has no substantive or reasonable convention centre. Convention centre is one of the key segments of the events industry, along with hotels, and unique shows. They are designed to host any type of event, including conferences, conventions, and exhibitions and mostly located in or near urban centres or other major population centres and are designed to meet the unique needs of the gathering groups, organizers, visitors, and exhibitors. They are the major promoters of economic growth and developments in the host cities by attracting tourists, generating income, and creating jobs and incomes at different levels.

The economic and socio-economic impacts of convention centres in major urban centres, the effects they have in socio-economic development and growth in cities (tourism) or better said, the economic adequacy and sustainability in the tourism industry of the area can never be over emphasized.

Economically, AkwaIbom State is the hub of crude oil and natural gas production in the country; with Ibeno, Mbo and Eastern Obolo as oil-producing local government area's key minor industries involve agriculture as the state has substantial cocoyam, yam, and plantain crops along with fishing and agriculture. Even with all the oil production activities, AkwaIbomState has the seventeenth highest Human Development Index in the country in large part due to years of systemic corruption. With the state's renewed interest in economic activities and growth in urban and rural developments, the introduction of a functional and sustainable convention centre will help in the state's development goals, an added advantage.

CONCLUSION

Geographically, AkwaIbom State is divided into the coastal mangroves of Africa Central and transition areas at the southernmost point. The Imo and Cross Rivers, flow along the eastern and western borders of AkwaIbomState respectively, while Kwa Ibo River crosses the state before flowing into the Bonny River. In the southeast corner of the state is the Stub Creek Forest Preserve, a sanctuary for endangered wildlife. The reserve is experiencing declining populations of crocodile, howler monkey, red-headed mangabey and guenon sklatler, as well as declining populations of African and Nigerian leopards. The offshore state is biologically diverse, with large populations of fish and several species of cetaceans, including bottlenose

dolphins, pantropical dolphins, humpback whales and killer whales. With all these naturally endowed features, Akwalbom State should not lack in a sustainable and world recognized convention centre.

RECOMMENDATION

With the renewed interest in the general growth and development of Akwalbim State and particularly, at the state capital, Uyo, the urban players in the state should pay more and better attention to the state's tourism development hence, a sustainable convention centre. The employment and incomes coming from a successfully built and operated convention centre will occupy the growing and aging population of the state and help in reducing both systemic and non-systemic crimes and corruption in the state.

In the past, the government approaches to urban development programmes are regrettable, retrogressive and benign. As a result, adequate measures and proper administrative management of the government laws and policies are recommended. The hiring of poorly trained and unqualified personals should be minimized and properly and adequately trained professionals in different areas of interest hired to man and manage the facilities for upwards growth of the state and state's programmes.

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