

RIVER ÒLÙWÀ'S WATER-FRONT: A TOURIST ATTRACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: River Òlùwà flows through many human settlements in both Ondo State's southerly and riverine axis - consisting of Okitipupa, Ese-Odo, and Ilaje Local Government Areas (LGAs), constituting an integral part of the State's Southern Senatorial District. Its water-front in Okitipupa Town - the headquarters of Okitipupa LGA - has long been identified as a potential tourist-centre, in Ondo State, if properly developed because of its scenic landscape and serene surroundings. The Òlùwà River is just not a veritable source of livelihood for many along its banks and other local communities; but, also, a very viable asset/resource for sustainable development. The study, therefore, explores the possibility of the River's water-front, in Okitipupa Town, becoming a prominently sustainable tourist-centre for Ondo State. The study's methodological approach adopts an all-inclusive analysis of the River's cultural and environmental significance e.g., traditional/indigenous beliefs and practices associated with it and location - while, also, assessing the bio-diversity and ecological integrity of the area. Furthermore, the study duly examines the current situation of tourism within Ondo State as well as identifying challenges to and highlighting opportunities for sustainable development. Findings reveal that modernizing the waterfront will produce significant socio-economic benefits for the area and the entire state, including: eenterprise development, creation of new jobs,

improvement of infrastructure, alternative sources of income for local communities, increased internally generated revenue (IGR) for the state and significant contributions to the sustainable development of Ondo State's tourist industry. Based on these findings, it is strongly recommended that the waterfront be extensively modernized to become a viable tourist centre.

Keywords: Sustainable Development; River Òlùwà; Tourist-Centre, Tourism Industry.

Introduction

Rivers are one of the ubiquitous resources of the earth, found unevenly in almost every geographical location and constitute many wetlands (Omosulu, Akinrinmade & Sogbon, 2023). The river is fresh water that flows from high to low place and endures to the biggest river, lake or sea (Fachrudin & Lubis, 2016). A river is a source of fresh water that must be managed comprehensively and sustainably to ensure the well-being of the people (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 7 Tahun 2004 in Maryono, 2009).

Rivers are used for agricultural production, transportation, recreation, industrial process, fishing and domestic uses. Rivers also influence the typology and morphology of settlements. For instance, London, New York, Cairo, Lokoja and to mention a few are great cities whose growth and development are influenced by their uniqueness of locations along river courses (Omosulu, Akinrinmade & Sogbon, 2023). Rivers are foundations of life and livelihoods, and are keys to sustainable development (Guppy & Anderson, 2017). Rivers serve as the primary source of renewable freshwater for humans and hold in some of the highest levels of biodiversity on Earth.

Rivers represent a major tourism resource, providing spectacular settings, recreation facilities, a means of transport, a sense of heritage and adventure, and links with the environment and natural world. River tourism accounts for an important proportion of the world's tourism consumption, with activities such as Nile cruises and rafting holidays making it an economically important area of tourism (Prideaux, Timothy & Cooper, 2009).

Òlùwàriver runs through many human settlements in Okitipupa and Ilaje Local Government Area, Southern part of Ondo State. The river lies between 40.40°N – 60.00°E and 50.00°N – 60.20°E. This river is used for silicamining, artisanal fishing and domestic purposes. It has tributaries that empty into the coast with length of approximately 80 Km and run through 50 human settlements (Olaniyan, Ugwumba, & Ayoade, 2019). The unique location and breathtaking beauty of ÒlùwàRiver inform this research.

Statement of the Problem

Rivers are an important but surprisingly neglected aspect of the global tourism industry. Yet rivers form the basis for many of the ecosystems that underpin ecotourism and other recreational activities, in addition to providing water to sustain urban growth, farming, agriculture-related experiences such as viticulture and the transport of goods and people. Compared to the research and industry attention that ocean cruising has attracted recently (Dowling, 2006), rivers have apparently been of little interest to tourism academics, although the same cannot be said for leisure and recreation scholars, who have demonstrated considerable in fluvial systems as outdoor recreation resources in recent years (Herrick and McDonald, 1992; Adams, 1993; Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; McKean et al., 2005). ÒlùwàRiver serves multiple purposes; however, due to inactive economic activities, the river has become overrun with water hyacinths. This paper, therefore, examines the possibility of the Òlùwàriver's water-front in Okitipupatown, becoming a prominently sustainable tourist-centre for OndoState and also assessing the bio-diversity and ecological integrity of the area.

Water Tourism

Water tourism area is developed with complete facilities and services, both for leisure and trans-formative experiences. And there are some elements of the tourism plan, namely: the natural and socio-economic environment; attractiveness and tourist activities; accommodation; transportation; institutional elements; other infrastructure; facilities, utilities and other travel services; domestic and international tourism market as well as the use of tourism infrastructure by local residents (Inskoop, 1991 in Agnes, 2005). According Soemarwoto (2001 in I Made, 2002), tourism is an industry that sells the physical and social environment existing culture to domestic and foreign tourists. Tourism consists of three basic elements, namely:

- a. Mechanical elements--the issue of living to the selected destination or destination.
- b. Elements of statistics-the issue of living in the goal area.
- c. Elements consequence--the results of the above two elements related to their effects on ecosystems and social.

According to Fandeli (2001 in I Made, 2002), tourism object is the embodiment of human creation, way of life, art and culture and history of the place and the nation or the state of nature that has been attractive to tourists. Water is the main focus of tourism in nature or open space. The setting is unplanned or natural. Water tourism is usually supported by facilities and tourist activities related to the water fun or entertainment while enjoying the scenery or activity tourist attractions water. By leveraging water tourism, the Ondo State government can invest in the required infrastructure.

Benefits of River and Water Tourism

Tourism gives water resources great potential, combining their protection with respectful use. From an environmental perspective, river tourism provides opportunities to develop and implement new sustainable model of water resource management. Major excitement activities that can be done through the river include water adventure tourism which comprises water-rafting, river-cruise, fishing, river exploration, boating, kayaking and leisure that could be interesting parts to attracts the tourist thus could potentially develop the selected area. Water sports and hikes are also a part of adventure along the riverside. This will help the area develop a high-quality residential environment, quality of health and leisure. The number of tourists also brings economic income growth, making the government pay more attention to the economic benefits and ignore environmental protection. The development of tourism in cities will increase job creation and job diversification and create jobs that are highly dependent on tourism (Earth5r, n.d.).

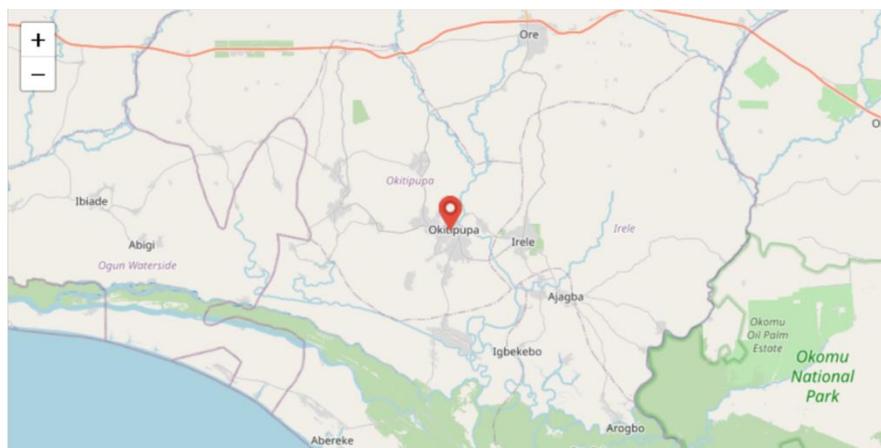
Negative Impacts of River Tourism

The water environment in the natural environment is relatively easier to be affected by human activities. Once the water environment is polluted, the aquatic

organisms are the first to be involved. Then, the land environment near the water environment watershed will affect the growth of surface organisms. If not prevented, the unsustainable development of tourist attractions will eventually lead to exhaustion of tourism resources and stagnation of tourism development. In this regard, the government must take proactive measures during planning phase (Earth5r, n.d.).

The Study Area

The study was conducted at Okitipupa Local Government Area (OLGA), Ondo State, Nigeria with a population of 234,138 and a land area of 803 km². They are Ikales-speaking people (Salami, 2023). The Òlùwà River is located in the coastal region of Ondo State, Nigeria, and flows through the Okitipupa area. Okitipupa is a central town in the Ondo South senatorial district, which includes other riverine areas like Ese-Odo and Irele. Òlùwà river is one of the major rivers in this region, along with others like the Arun River, Ipeluriver, and Ipororiver (Olaniyan, Ugwumba, & Ayoade, 2019).



Map of Okitipupa showing other communities along the coastline

Source: <https://nz.maptons.com/2901231>

Data Collection Methods

Out of the administered questionnaire schedules, two hundred (200) copies were retrieved from purposively selected residents in Okitipupa community. Nine (9) complementary focus group-discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with

residents to gain more insight in the subject matter. Data generated with questionnaire were presented in simple percentage and frequency distribution tables. Data generated from the FGDs, which were conducted in local language, were recorded in both audiotapes and notebooks was subsequently transcribed and translated and presented in content analysis form. And snapshots of phonographs during the research were presented in plates.

Results and Discussion of Findings

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
	Gender		
	Male	94	47%
	Female	106	53%
2	Occupation		
	Trader	40	20%
	Civil Servants	80	40%
	Entrepreneur	30	15%
	Fishing	10	5%
	Students	22	11%
	Others	18	9%
3	Number of Years in the Community		
	1-5 years	25	12.5%
	6-10years	35	17.5%
	11-15years	40	20%
	16-20years	45	22.5%
	21 and above years	55	27.5%
4	Educational Qualifications		
	No Formal Education	-	-
	Primary School Qualifications	20	10%
	Secondary School Education/OND	70	35%
	HND/BSc Qualifications	80	40%

	MSc and above	30	15%
Total		200	100

Socio-Economic Impacts of River Tourism

S/N	Socio-Economic Impacts of Tourism	SA	A	U	D	SD
5	The modernization of the water-front will make a significant contribution to the economic growth of the area, both directly and indirectly, by facilitating the supply of goods and services that cater to tourist activities. This will help alleviate poverty in Okitipupa and its surrounding communities	120(60%)	70(35%)	10(5%)	-	-
6	IF river Òlùwà river-front, becomes a well developed tourist centre it will produce social benefits to the area and the entire State	130(65%)	65(32.5%)	5(2.5%)	-	-

	like; enterprises' development, creation of new jobs, improvement of infrastructure etc. Many unemployed youths will have jobs.					
7	Tourism is considered as an element of community development; if this river-front tourist centre is well advertised, Okitipupa community will become a place of relaxation and tourist centre for both local and international tourists.	135(67.5%)	55(27.5%)	5(2.5%)	5(2.5%)	-
8	Tourism can positively contribute to the maintenance of natural environment by protecting, creating or maintaining the river. And when the river-front becomes developed	85(42.5%)	60(30%)	30(15%)	10(5%)	15(7.5%)

	and known, it will attract foreign investors.					
9	When the river-front is well cleaned it will even increase fishing activities and tourists can engage in fishing, boat cruising and it can increase the population of the area and enhance women's participation in economic activities.	100(50%)	50(25%)	20(10%)	15(7.5%)	15(7.5%)
S/N	Effects of Tourism					
10	Through this innovation, people in Okitipupa can mix with other people from diverse backgrounds with different lifestyles which through 'demonstration effect' may lead to the development of improved lifestyles and practices from the tourists'	80(40%)	60(30%)	20(10%)	20(10%)	20(10%)

11	Improvement in lifestyle of the people, increase in population can lead to increase in crime rate and affect the indigenous culture and tradition of the people negatively	95(47.5%)	30(15%)	15(7.5%)	20(10%)	40(20%)
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Social Characteristics

Item one from the table indicates that 94(47.0%) of the respondents are males and 106(53.0%) are females. Item two from the table revealed that 40(20%) were traders, the majority of the respondents 80(40%) were civil servants which indicates that the residents in the study area are mainly civil servants, 30(15%) were entrepreneurs, and only 10(5%) were into fishing which indicates that fishing business is going into extinction in the study area. While 22(11%) of the respondents were students, this may due to the establishment of a university in the area. And 18(9%) were in the category of others. Item three from the table reveals that, 25(12.5%) of the respondents have lived between 1-5 years in the communities, 35(17.5%) have lived up to 6-10years, 40(20%) have lived between 11-15years, 45(22.5%) have lived between 16-20years while the majority 55(27.5%) have live in the communities for 21 and above years. Item four from the table, further shows that none of the respondents have no formal education, 20(10%) have primary school qualifications, 70(35%), Secondary School Education/OND, 80(40%) Higher National Diploma and BSc. and 30(15%) of the respondents are with higher degrees.

Socio-Economic Impacts of River Tourism

Item five from the table reveals that majority 120(60%) strongly agreed that the modernization of the water-front will make a significant contribution to the economic growth of the area, both directly and indirectly, by facilitating the supply of goods and services that cater to tourist activities. This will help alleviate poverty in Okitipupa and its surrounding communities. 70 (35%) of the respondents agreed to the idea, and 10(5%) were undecided.

Furthermore, during the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) on the socio-economic impacts of river tourism in Okitipupa area of Ondo State, Kuye claimed that:

if this idea of river-front tourism becomes true and standardized, it will bring about tremendous development to the people and the communities around and this can also spark creativity among the unemployed youths and create more jobs. And if this is properly developed it can bring the Okitipupa community into limelight for foreign investors and it can further enhance women's economic participation and empowerment by increasing buying and selling (Kuye, oral interview, 2025).

Moreover, in an oral interview (2025), Ara, a retired head teacher, revealed that during festive periods like Easter and New Year holiday, people around here do not have modern places for picnic but if these kinds of water-front tourist become standardized, people will turn in for more leisure activities like fishing, water-rafting, boating, river-cruise, river exploration, kayaking, water sports and other meaningful adventure along the riverside that can improve quality of life. This can also help develop the communities and support sustainable development capable of fixing unstable economies and, essentially, incorporating members with their communities for sustainable development. And if this is done in partnership with external change-agents, such as intervention agencies - e.g., private individuals, State and Local governments & advocacy groups for community development, especially, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). It can enhance sustainability and also help restrain the negative effects of river tourism such as pollution of the environment.

In another oral interview, Jale (2025), an entrepreneur opines during the FGDs that if the river-front of Òlùwà River is developed and modernized with the typical beautiful water-side and terrain, the development of tourism in the area can build people's skills towards community development, and it can be a vital source to economic survival for both the communities in Okitipupa and the entire state. According to Jale, the tourist attraction that will be birthed, can raise necessary funds for community development, create jobs, enhance community-pride, and promote indigenous culture.

Item six from the table reveals that majority 130(65%) of the respondents strongly agreed that if the Òlùwà river-front becomes a well-developed tourist centre, it will produce social benefits to the area and the entire state. It will foster development, creation of new jobs, improvement of infrastructure etc. Many unemployed youths will have jobs. 65(32.5%) of the respondents agreed to the idea, and 5(2.5%) of the respondents were undecided about the idea.

One of the interviewees, Alli (2025) a trader, during the FGDs, claimed that if the tourist centre is well-developed with the numerous economic prospects, it will help boost the standard of living of the people in the area, and, it will also enhance the quality of life of the people and their families. Similarly, Igbe (2025) a civil servant, during the FGDs argued that tourism development will also help in the spread of enlightenment and literacy of the people. And this will help us to strengthen our mental attitude by interacting with various people with different languages and cultures.

Item seven from the table shows that majority 135(67.5%) strongly agreed that tourism is considered as an element of community development. If this river-front tourist centre is well advertised, Okitipupa community will become a place of relaxation and tourist centre for both local and international tourists. 55(27.5%) of the respondents agreed to the claim 5(2.5%) of respondents were undecided and 5(2.5%) disagreed to the claim. Those who were undecided and disagreed to the claim are probably those with low formal education and possibly have little or no exposure.

Item eight from the table shows that majority 85(42.5%) strongly agreed that tourism can positively contribute to the maintenance of natural environment by protecting, creating or maintaining the river. They maintained that when the river area becomes well-developed and known, it will attract foreign investors. 60(30%) of the respondents agreed to the idea, 30(15%) of the respondents were undecided, 10(5%) disagreed to the idea, while were 15(7.5%) strongly disagreed to the idea.

Furthermore, Oke (oral interview, 2025) during the FGDs claimed that a well modernized tourist center cannot discontinue the serenity and equanimity of this area; it will only beautify it, although, there could be increase in population and social crime, the government's has a role to play to remedy such situations. Item nine from the table shows that majority, 100(50%) of the respondents strongly

agreed that when the river is well cleaned it will even increase fishing activities and tourists can engage in fishing, boat cruising and it can increase the population of the area, which will also enhance women's participation in economic activities. While 50(25%) of the respondents agreed to the claim, 20(10%) were undecided, 15(7.5%) disagreed and 15(7.5%) of the respondents strongly disagreed to the claim.

Ara (oral interview, 2025) suggested during the FGDs that for properly modernized tourist centre in this river-front, more hotels, motels, camping grounds, guest houses etc are needed, and the old neglected ones around the Oil Mill should be renovated to be in place to beautify the environment and enhance tourism development. If all these are in place that will constantly allow the government to maintain the water by occasionally cutting the water hyacinth. This will also improve our fishing activities and raise awareness among local residents about the importance of river and river-side tourism activities.

Effects of River Tourism Development

Item ten from the table shows that majority, 80(40%) of the respondents strongly agreed to opinion that through this innovation, people in Okitipupa can mix with other people from diverse backgrounds with different lifestyles which through 'demonstration effect' may lead to the development of improved lifestyles and practices from the tourists. While 60(30%) of the respondents agreed to this opinion, 20(10%) were undecided, 20(10%) of the respondents disagreed to the opinion, and 20(10%) strongly disagreed to the opinion.

Item eleven from the table shows that, majority, 95(47.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that improvement in community life of the people and increase in population can lead to increase in crime rate and affect the social, culture and tradition negatively. While 30(15%) of the respondents strongly agreed to this idea. 15(7.5%) of the respondents were undecided, 20(10%) disagreed with the idea and, 40(20%) strongly disagreed with the idea. They believe that increase in population cannot lead to increase in crime rate probably when there are enough security measures in place. Also, during the FGDs Ara (oral interview, 2025) claimed that, increase in the influx people due to migration may lead to cultural diffusion and this may erode on the indigenous culture and tradition of the people and this may affect Okitipupa culture negatively, although this will still

help preserve the river and decrease the wave of erosion and pollution affecting the river currently.

Plan of action for River Tourism in Okitipupa

During FGDs, the participants suggested the following: construction of visible attractions, personal communication, and advertising, internet marketing and promotional images as some of the plan of action to bring the river-front tourist centre into lime-light.

As suggested by one of the participants during the FGDs Mrs. Are, 27years old, female, actress that, promotional images of the river-side like clearing of the water hyacinth, construction of few cruise boats, trimming of the trees at sides of the river, construction of village huts and bush bars at the sides of the river, with all these in place, awareness can then be created on the internet and beyond.



River Òlùwà in the days of water transportation from Okitipupa to Irele and during Ogigi festival



Same River Òlùwà from Okitipupa to Irele has become overrun with water hyacinths, rendering it devoid of any functional economic value



River Òlùwà water-side (current state with small sand mining boats at the riverbank big sand mining boats)





Relaxing mode of a tourist in Burgundy

Source: <https://www.burgundy-tourism.com/discover-burgundy/along-the-canals-and-rivers/5-good-reasons-to-try-river-tourism/>



The current state of the water-side front
Okitipupa.



Waterside town and heritage sites at Burgundy in

Conclusion

Rivers represent a major tourism resource, providing spectacular settings, recreation facilities, a means of transport, a sense of heritage and adventure. They also serve as links with the environment and natural world. The tourism sector is playing an important role in the economic development of developing countries. River tourism accounts for an important proportion of the world's tourism consumption, with activities such as swimming, and sports activities, fishing, rafting, canoeing, river kayaking, etc. making it an economically important area of tourism. The host's environment will also be transformed to different degrees in the process. A total of two hundred (200) completed

questionnaire schedule were collected from the purposively selected residents in Okitipupa community, while nine (9) complementary focus group-discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with residents to gain more insight in the subject matter.

Findings reveal that modernizing the waterfront will produce significant socio-economic benefits for the area and the entire state, including: enterprise development, creation of new jobs, improvement of infrastructure, alternative sources of income for local communities, increased internally generated revenue (IGR) for the state and significant contributions to the sustainable development of Ondo State's tourist industry. Although, tourists will produce different levels of pollutants in the process of tourism. However, the paper suggests that using a self-management approach, with assistance from some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and/or other intervention agencies and private individuals, the local government authority in Okitipupa local government area should further take advantage of this naturally favored area by actively engaging in sustainable plans to create the required awareness for a achievable river-front tourist-centre.

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