CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Preservation and conservation of Cross River Monoliths for tourism development

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Abstract: Heritage and conservation have gained currency in academic and professional discourses on tourism and resource preservation across the globe. Today, many developed and some developing economies regard heritage as a very significant component of tourism. Literary documents on studies conducted in Gambia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and UK are cases in point. In southeastern Nigeria, there are numerous unique heritage sites that can be harnessed for tourism development. Although they showcase universally accepted cultural expressions, the majority of them are poorly managed and preserved. They also lack necessary facilities that can keep tourists for an extended period. This explains why Nigeria fails to attract visitation to her heritage sites. The study adopted a descriptive design and used interviews, direct observation, focus group discussion and literary sources to examine the state of Cross River monoliths in Nigeria; their preservation and conservation practices, and how these can be harnessed for tourism development. Research results revealed that heritage sites have a lot of potentials to boost the economy if the tourism value is harnessed. The study recommends, amongst

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Heritage sites are significant components of tourism and as such, their maintenance for sustainable tourism should be encouraged. The study evaluates the place of carved stones, technically called monoliths in Tourism development in Cross River State Nigeria. It is a descriptive study which examines the state of these monoliths, the mechanisms put in place to preserve them and how they can be harnessed for tourism development. The authors approached the subject matter using qualitative research design. They delimited the study topic into three major themes that captured the research questions. This approach was adopted to make the study intelligible to the readers. The findings revealed that the monoliths have fascinating features and contents that can attract visitation, but they need to be properly preserved and harnessed to ensure sustainability. Inputs from the local communities and government officials are invaluable if the desired outcomes are to be achieved.
others, the combination of traditional and modern conservation mechanisms for the
preservation and conservation of monoliths. It also advocates that the manage-
ment plans for the monolith sites should seek to balance the interest of conserva-
tion with those of local communities living in the area.

Subjects: Tourism; Heritage Management & Conservation; Archaeology; Cultural Studies

Keywords: conservation; heritage; monoliths; preservation; tourism

1. Introduction

Following the increasing threat to cultural heritage by both the traditional causes of decay and the
changing social and economic conditions, which aggravate the situation, the world heritage
convention, adopted by UNESCO in 1972, encouraged international cooperation for the protection
of the cultural heritage of humanity. While calling on the international community to help to
identify, protect and preserve such heritage, the convention urged them to avoid measures that
might damage, directly or indirectly, the cultural and natural heritage situated in other states. This
is because, a sense of who people are as well as an essential reference point for them in the
culturally diverse world becomes more meaningful if we preserve and protect their cultural
heritage (Ekwelem et al., 2011). UNESCO has over the years tried, and very effectively too, to
identify heritage sites across the globe that are considered to be crucial human heritage.

Heritage and conservation are, therefore, increasingly becoming significant themes of current
discussions on cultural resource management and tourism. Heritage refers to that part of the past
that portrays a society’s economic, cultural, or social values. It interconnects the past and the
present and provides a platform for historical interpretation (Gunay, 2008, p. 2). Knowledge of the
past is necessary for a systematic understanding of a people’s unique present, and as a launching
pad for molding a prosperous future for themselves (Matero, 2014). Thus, the processes used to
look after a place to retain its values, including caring for its real significance and surrounding
environment, is known as conservation (ICOMOS, 1999). This task is accomplished through pre-
ventive and remedial types of intervention. For instance, some of the valuable statues in Harvard
University, including the “Chinese stele”, are wrapped with waterproof covers, every winter to
protect them from corrosion caused by acid rain (Havard Magazine, 2000). Larkham (1999) sees
conservation and preservation as being synonymous, with the latter referring to an effort to
maintain the original status or state of the heritage, while the former embraces elements of
change and enhancement. Therefore, the conservation of heritage (whether natural or cultural)
is vital for the development of peoples and society. Indeed heritage serves good purpose in the
society and it is useful for national identity, national cohesion, employment generation, education,
and for cultural and religious values (Chirikure, 2013). Heritage sites, according to Mabulla (1996),
include buildings, monuments, landscapes, and sacred places, maritime sites, buried remains, and
objects. When correctly interpreted and presented, they serve as tourist attractions.

Many developed economies rely on heritage resources as an invaluable component of tourism
and economic development (O’Leary et al., 1998). Numerous people travel each year globally to
seek and experience places of outstanding historical values. The World Tourism Organisation notes
that approximately 50% of all international travels every year involve visits to cultural heritage
sites (Timothy, 2011). In the United Kingdom, for instance, heritage sites and visits to cultural
events are central to the tourism industry, and are estimated to account for “approximately
4.5 billion pounds a year, directly supporting 100,000 full-time jobs” (VisitBritain, 2010a in
Timothy, 2011, p. 25) It is described as “a major strength of the British market for overseas
visitors” (Markwell et al., 1997). The sector has also been identified as a significant source of
potential growth for tourism in the UK (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999). Heritage tourism in the US is
also an essential sector of domestic tourism. It achieved an annual growth rate of 13% between
1996 and 2003, with approximately 216.8 million personal trips to heritage sites in 2002. About
81% of American travellers away from home in 2002, “visited at least one heritage site or participated in a cultural tourism activity” (Timothy, 2011, p. 25). The average expenditure was $623, a figure roughly 50% higher than the expenditure of non-heritage visitors (Travel Industry Association of America and Smithsonian Magazine, 2003). It is argued that people travel to heritage places to experience something different, rejuvenate, and find ways to cope in a complex and unstable world (Timothy, 2011).

Thus, the primary purpose of heritage conservation is to protect it from damage and to communicate its essence to both the hosts and visitors (Matero, 2014). It is an attempt to keep the cultural property as original as possible. Ajake and Amalu (2012) also assert that the primary aim of managing heritage is to communicate its significance and need for conservation. Indeed, the importance of communication media in tourism development has featured in the works of several scholars. For instance, PraveenKumar (2014) rightly noted that the media contributes to activating tourist attractions (archaeological monuments inclusive), promoting growth and development of the industry. With this, tourism is expected to bring benefits to host communities and provide an essential means and motivation for them to care for and maintain their heritage and cultural practices. They further continued that the involvement and co-operation of local and indigenous community representatives, conservationists, tourism operators, property owners, policy makers, those preparing national development plans and site managers are necessary to achieve a sustainable tourism industry and enhance the protection of heritage resources for future generations.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Nigeria, tourism started formally in 1962 with the formation of Nigeria Tourist Association by a group of tourism practitioners (Ashikodi, 2010 in Oguchi, 2019). Nigeria has a diverse and rich array of heritage resources that can sustain a vibrant tourism industry. The country currently has two world heritage sites: Sukur cultural landscape and the Osun Oshogbo sacred grove. Sukur cultural landscape is an ancient hilltop with fascinating features. It is located in the Mandara Mountains, Madagali Local Government Area of Adamawa State, and was inscribed in December 1999 as the first world heritage site in Nigeria. Osun Oshogbo sacred grove, on the other hand, is the biggest and perhaps the only surviving sacred grove and rain forest in Yoruba land, which was inscribed in 2005 (Aliyu, 2013).

Presently, Cross River State has tried to develop some tourist sites across the state, including Tinapa Business Resort, Obudu Mountain Resort, Marina Resort, MarySlessor’s Residence in Creek town, Agbokim Waterfalls, Cercopan, Cross River National Park alongside Calabar Carnival and other cultural festivals. Cross River Tourism Bureau (2010 in Ajake & Amalu, 2012) records show that the number of tourists increased from 2,210 between October and December 2000 to about 8,162 tourists between October and December 2009. Consequently, Cross River State has emerged as a major point of tourist visitation in the country. The resultant effect is the increased investment in hotels and other facilities to cater to the teeming visitors. Another sector that also has high potentials to contribute to the growth of tourism in Cross River State is the historic Ikom monoliths or shaped stones sites.

Shaped stones, according to Diminyi (2014), have high visitor appeal, especially when they are developed and managed sustainably. As Nwankwo et al. (2018) averred, “the unique nature of these monoliths attracts the attention of different sections of the public including the government, and therefore has the potentialities to attract tourists and generate revenue for the host communities and the state”. Esu and Ukata (2012) observed that the stone circles of Kerr in the Gambia along with a museum containing information about the people and their culture provide considerable economic benefits to the government and the people. The carving on stones to which human features have been added is believed to have originated independently in extensively dispersed localities around the globe. Instances of this development are found in the hard-crystalline rock at Ife, Igbajo and Eshure in Yorubaland and the naturalistic soapstone carvings among the Esie in Yorubaland, and Bakongo and Nomoli of Sierra Leone (Diminyi, 2014). Others are the ancient stone
carvings in Corsica, Caribbean, and the Pacific, all of which closely resemble Ikom monoliths. Ikom monoliths are also comparable to the rock arts of Tanzania and Senegal based on their geometric inscriptions. They are similar in arrangement to stone circles of the Gambia and could provide an answer to the Stonehenge of the United Kingdom (Admin, 2012). Indeed, shaped stones have been described from the Gambia, Senegal, Ethiopia, and the Niger Bend (Desplagnes, 1907; Mauny, 1961). Crawford (1957) illustrates a cylindrical column with a rounded top and two raised bosses, which occur among groups of worked stones at Tondidara on the Niger Bend, which is reminiscent of some of the Agba stones. A domed stone carved with a shield-shaped face from Tabelbalet in Southern Sahara with features like the Akwanshi (Bakor monoliths) is also illustrated in his work.

Some of these resources are being destroyed at an alarming rate despite the fact that heritage sites, like the natural environment, represent finite non-renewable resources. The factors that contribute to this deterioration range from neglect and poor management to increased visitation, vandalism, unsuitable pest treatments, and deferred maintenance. Indeed, following the increasing communication and mobility of people, many sites unprepared for development and visitation have suffered undue pressures and damage occasioned by development activities and the desire to harness the economic benefits from tourism (Matero, 2014).

Scholars (Enor et al., 2019; Esu & Ukata, 2012; Nwankwo et al., 2018) have recommended the continued preservation and conservation of these cultural materials for posterity through awareness creation. The Trust for African Rock Art (TARA) in Edet et al. (2016) has advocated for the rescue of monoliths from further destruction using awareness creation and enlightenment programmes among the local communities. They developed conservation posters as a model for achieving the purpose. For Nwankwo et al. (2018), the establishment of open-air museums, the assembling of monoliths from different localities in unique and central locations, and their enlistment by UNESCO as world heritage sites, etc. will provide a veritable platform for their conservation for heritage tourism promotion. Proper management of these tourism products and their promotion can offer good opportunities to create economic benefits for the communities concerned (Ibeanu, 2006).

It is in this vein that this study seeks to examine the current state of monoliths or carved stone sites in Ikom to evaluate their potential contributions to tourism development. The study examines the preservation and conservation status of Ikom monoliths and how they can be harnessed for tourism. The following questions guided our understanding of the subject. (1) What is the state of the Monolith sites? (2) What are the preservation and conservation practices? (3) How can these sites be harnessed for tourism development?

2. Study area
The monolith sites are situated in Cross River State (see Figure 1), southeast of Nigeria. It lies within latitude 5°45’N, 8°30’E and Longitude 5.75°N, 8.5°E. Ikom Local Government Area is the home of the monoliths, which were declared a National monument on 19 March 1963, and National heritage site in 1968 (Allison, 1968). An early ethnographic study by Philip Allison suggested that the monoliths dated back to the 16th or 17th century. Onor (1994) noted that the latest archaeological dating conducted on the monoliths yielded a date of 1780 + 50, which is around 200AD.

Ikom Local Government Area lies between latitude 6° 30’ North and longitudes 8°20’ and 8° 40’ East. Ikom has a landmass of 1,961 square kilometers and a population of 163,691 using the 2006 census (City Population, 2017). It shares boundaries with Ogoja on the North, Boki on the North-East, Etung Local Government on the East, and Obubra Local Government Area on the South. Ikom area is popular with shaped stones often carved in an assortment of human figures. In Alok, one of the famous monolith sites in the area, an annual cultural festival is held in the village square at the end of every dry season to commemorate the monoliths. These ancient stones (monoliths) have attracted the attention of some culturally-oriented individuals and groups over the years. They are
located in Nta and Nselle on the east, Abanjom and Nde on the south and Ekajuk and Nnam on the north. Of all these sites, Nnam which hosts Alok, Emaghebe, and Agba, has the most significant spread of Cross River Monoliths. The vegetation of Alok consists of scattered trees with grasses and herbs, while Emanghebe is open grassland. At Agba site there is a heavy concentration of thick shrubs with creepers and grasses.

3. Methodology
The study adopted a descriptive design. Three communities (Agba, Alok and Emaghabe) in Ikom Local Government Area were purposively selected for the study using three significant reasons. Firstly, they are accessible to municipal areas like Calabar, Ikom, Obudu, etc. Secondly, they offer opportunities for the study of heritage sites and their implications on the culture and history of the people. Thirdly, they have high potentials for heritage tourism development and unique features that can absorb visitation. A preliminary survey of the monolith sites in the study area was done to identify the monolith sites in Ikom and to become familiar with the host communities.

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents at the initial stage of the research. The selection began by first obtaining permission from the village heads, leaders and elders of the study communities. Subsequent respondents were selected using snowball sampling method. This enabled the researchers to identify members of each group of interest in the target population in collaboration with the research subjects. They included elderly people, civil servants, farmers, and petty traders. These people were believed to have relevant knowledge of the subject matter. Through in-depth interview, direct observation, and focus group discussion data were collected using a tape recorder and field notes. The interview guide and questioning route comprised a list of items that addressed the research questions, while direct observation was used for on-the-spot assessment of the monoliths and sites. In-depth interviews were conducted among the
government officials and community members. The government officials were drawn from National Museum, Calabar and Cross River Tourism Bureau. A total of 47 interviews were conducted. Fourteen (14) government officials and 33 community members who ranged between the ages of 35 and 92 years (see Table 1) were interviewed. The main criterion for their selection was their knowledgeable of tourism and heritage conservation. Men constituted the majority of the respondents for two main reasons. First, they were directly involved in the management of the monolith sites. Secondly, they were the clan heads and youth leaders of the host communities as well as custodians of their culture. Thus, they represented the clans on community issues. Five out the eight women chosen were the heads of women associations involved in the painting of the monoliths. The remaining three women were government officials. Finally, three focus group discussion sessions were held in the three communities selected for the study. The aim was to capture group thought processes on the subject matter. Alok had 8 people in their group, while Emaghabe and Agba had 7 members each.

### Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

| Group of Informants | Number of males | Number of females | Total | Age Range |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------|-----------|
| Government Officials| 11              | 3                 | 14    | 35–60 years |
| Community Members   | 28              | 5                 | 33    | 35–60 years |

Data collected were transcribed and analysed thematically. Each theme represented a research question. Thus, three main themes formed the focus of our findings and discussion. The presentation was purely descriptive, interlaced and buttressed with direct quotes from respondents. Supportive secondary data were obtained from journals, websites, and written documents from Cross River Tourism Bureau and National Museum Calabar.

### 4. Findings and discussion

#### 4.1. Description and state of the monoliths

The Cross River Monoliths are made up of shaped and decorated basalt boulders of varying sizes and shapes. A number of them are 30 centimeters long and weigh between 20 and 30 kg, but some of the specific columns are over 1-m high and more than 500 kg in weight (Edet, 1997). Statistically, Alok has 33 monoliths, Emaghabe 17 and Agba 27. Our observation shows that most of the monoliths are the products of basalt rock that were subjected to weathering and erosion, but which turned out in columns due to imperfect joining and fracture. The rock size, shape and the skill of the carvers appear to have informed the extent of modification on the monoliths in the three sites as partly shaped boulders are found side by side with well carved and decorated stones. The carved features were observed to appear mainly on the front (see Figure 2); although facial features, breast, and navel were prominent.

Carving and decoration usually stop at the navel. However, there are occasions where a circular or figure-eight decoration appears below the navel. The breasts are depicted in a circular form with very little or no effort to differentiate the sex of the figures. Nevertheless, all the figures have fairly obvious beards, which suggest that they all represent men. Some of the different decorations on the figures, including tribal marks, tattooing, and body painting are found in the body painting among the Bako sub-group. A patterned inscription suggestive of a form of writing was found on the monoliths across the three sites. As observed by one of the respondents:
Our monoliths have special features that distinguish them from the carvings of other Bako clans. This special inscription is called ‘Nsibidi’, and it is used among the Ekpe cult group as a major means of communication. Nsibidi is a sign language and a form of writing that carries a codified set of information about their makers and usage.

Although the monoliths share almost the same general features, they vary from each other in design and execution (Diminyi, 2014). The “Nsibidi” sign suggests that the producers of the monoliths were either members of the Ekpe cult group or that they enjoyed their patronage. Ekpe fraternity is a secret cult found among southern Igbo and Cross River peoples. The geometric images on the stones along with the numerical computations indicate that the carvers have a rudimentary knowledge of mathematics.

Many monolith sites are distributed across the three communities in Ikom Local Government Area. Given the considerable sizes of the monoliths and the type of rock used in their production, one is inclined to believe the carvers must have been active people who used sophisticated technology to execute their trade. Initially, stone was said to have been used and after that, metals to facilitate the production of the monoliths. This observation was buttressed by the existence of iron slag heaps and deposits in Alok. Slag lumps were also collected from Alok and Emaghabe sites. A cursory view of the pattern of designs on the monoliths also revealed the likely impact of iron on stone.

The Alok monolith is located 30 min from Ogoja when driving from Vandeikya in Benue State, north central Nigeria. It has a signboard at the gateway to Alok village near the Alok market. The site is about 200 m from the Alok village playground and has a diameter of 45.72 m, arranged in a semi-circle. Although found within the grassland, there are large silk-cotton canopies and mango tree near some of the monoliths and an active shrine, locally called Nyamamgbe on the west side of the site. One could see the blood of a sacrificial animal sprinkled on it. Other cultural materials found in Alok site are potsherd, slag, Manila, copper rod, and grinding stone. Emaghabe site is located 1-km east of Alok village behind Emaghabe Health Centre, about 100meters from Ikom/
Ogoja road. The arrangement of the stones suggests that some monoliths were brought from other sites within the area. This was corroborated by the museum attendant, Moses Nnang, who noted that some of the monoliths were brought from different locations. Some parts of the fence have collapsed while the gate is dilapidated. The cultural materials found in the site are potsherds, slag, upper and lower grinding stone. A mango tree on the western side of the site creates a shade for visitors. The forms cultivated at the periphery of the site have reduced the space for future development. Agba site is in an abandoned village that is at Akajú land, within the rain forest. It has a shrine called Atal. The Agba stones were in the village playground before the people relocated to Emaghabe 2 in Ekañuk village, about 200 meters away. The community offers sacrifice to the monoliths annually. The Agba monolith site harbours a lot of economic trees and medicinal plants. There are nearby hotel and market that can host tourists, although they have limited or no security outfits. Interaction with the people revealed that the carved objects have a metaphysical undertone, and this could be deduced from the inscriptions and other features. Some of the objects also had drops of blood, stains, and feathers during our field visit, indicating that they are still being worshipped. In the words of one respondent:

Our monoliths are not just stone as perceived by visitors; they represent different deities, which are generally called ‘Atal’. We worship and make sacrifices to them annually and at times when we need their urgent assistance to avert tragic occurrences in the land. They are our treasures; they protect us, while carrying out their primary intermediary duties between the supreme God and the living.

Research results reveal that the immediate challenges facing these sites will limit their tourism value if they are not adequately handled. The three sites are unkempt and exposed to the risk of vandalism and annual bush fire, despite the fence put up at Alok and Emaghabe by National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) to safeguard them. The monoliths are presently deteriorating due to prolonged exposure to damp conditions. The changes in appearance and surface deterioration are caused by continual exposure to moisture and other physicochemical and biological reactions. Most monoliths rock surface has been removed, especially at Agba site. Blueish green algae are found on every monolith in Agba site. Fungi infestation is very obvious at Alok site, where dust-like and whitish microorganisms grow on the stone objects. During the rainy season, fern, lichen, and grasses take over the three monoliths sites and their surroundings. These micro growths obscure the colour, carved features and other details on the monoliths. When combined with the vagaries of the alternating dry and rainy seasons in the region, they also affect the stability and durability of the monoliths, resulting in surface abrasion and erosion, micro cracks and splitting in some cases. These assertions are in tandem with the views of Edet (1997).

Close observation revealed that cracks, flakes/scale, spill, missing part and dents and black and whitish stain discolouration caused by bush fires or climatic change is commonplace in the three sites. Therefore, the annual bush burning for farming activities, seasonal changes, and human neglect contribute to enormous distortion, alteration, and loss of the monoliths. This is in consonance with the study on Archaeology, History and the Monoliths Heritage ... published by Enor et al. (2019, p. 251), which reported that monoliths sites “have suffered from neglect, degradation, theft, unfavourable weather conditions, farming and bush burning activities.” Thus, the ecosystem has long been under assault, and the artifacts themselves are increasingly threatened.

Apart from fungal infestation, bush fires, and physicochemical reactions, looters have over the years laid siege on these sites due to the inadequate workforce to manage the sites and their antiquities. At Alok Open Air Museum, only seven workers are posted there, thus making it very difficult to maintain and secure the site adequately. The fact that several priceless pieces of antiquities have been stolen from the zone is a direct pointer to this reality and therefore, more hands are required in these sites. However, in an attempt to secure the sites, the state government under Mr. Donald Duke’s led administration built a perimeter fence around the Alok site. While that of Emanghebe is still far from completion, Agba site is entirely without any fence.
4.2. Preservation and conservation practices

Generally, the conservation of monoliths in the study area is largely dependent on the traditional methods of resource conservation. Local residents respect traditional laws, practices and institutions. They revered the invocation of taboos, traditional sanctions and fines imposed on irresponsible and unacceptable actions considered to be detrimental to their heritage resources. As argued by Diminyi and Okpoko (2017), local communities in the middle of Cross River State are known by their aged-long tradition of resource conservation, which is often shaped around traditional rules and regulation enshrined in their religious and cultural belief system.

Findings revealed that traditional laws, practices, and institutions were dutifully employed in the past to conserve the monolith sites under the auspices of an indigenous institution called Eyama Mgbe. They enacted laws that guided the sites and punished defaulters. For example, the sites were regularly used, cleaned, and maintained by the communities and women in their menstrual cycle did not visit the areas. People were also not allowed to cultivate in and around the sites. Furthermore, they were forbidden to fetch firewood, pluck, or collect fruits in the places without permission. Hunting was also prohibited on Mgbe day called Ofudibu. Defaulters were penalized and made to pay a fine in the form of a goat or some tubers of yam, bunches of plantain or four bottles of native gin or one jar of palm wine as the case may be. Some offenders, particularly women, were made to go to an evil forest for a specified time, to deter them after which they pay a fine.

The above expressions revealed that traditional regulations as used by the Bakor people have been very effective in the preservation and conservation of their cultural resources. The danger of the unpleasant emotions brought by retribution from the gods prevented the local residents from defying traditional regulations guiding their heritage. At Agba site, result shows that their traditional methods of resource conservation are anchored on the people’s belief system and perception about spiritual forces. As a respondent remarked:

What people see there as stones are far beyond their thinking and perception. As for us the indigenes of this community what we see are spirits. The laws protecting them were made by them and no one can contravene them and go unpunished. This is the reason looters are unable to take away any of them.

Respondents to in-depth interview and discussants at the group sessions share the view that the monoliths began to deteriorate greatly following governments’ take over and their seeming inaction. As the group discussants put it: “When people violated the traditional rules, they were made to pay fine or sanctioned and punished by the community. However, this institutional provision that was anchored on the laws of Eyama Mgbe group and their social control instrument has been reduced since government took over the sites”.

The in-depth interviewees also averred that the handover of the sites to government has failed to produce the desired results. As one of the informants puts it: “Although the management is solely in the hands of the government currently, the monoliths sites are dilapidating by the day.”

Today, NCMM has taken over the management of all the monolith sites that have been declared as national monuments. In collaboration with clan heads/chiefs, Cross River Tourism Bureau and Old Residency Museum, it cares for and maintains the sites. Thus, people can only visit the area with permission from the chief/clan head, the Curator of Old Residency Museum, Calabar, and the Curator in charge of Open-Air Museums. The Chiefs see such visits as an opportunity for their communities to showcase their own culture and, therefore, provide a friendly atmosphere for visitors. This promotes a greater understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of the sites. Nevertheless, people are not allowed to take photographs of the monoliths without permission from appropriate bodies. As stated earlier, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments fenced Alok and Emaghabe sites to protect the monoliths from being vandalized or carted away by traffickers.
4.3. Monoliths sites and tourism development

The results of the focus group discussion revealed that the communities want the sites to be harnessed for tourism. Excerpts from the three group sessions show that there is a consensus of opinion among the discussants on the probable benefits of the monolith sites if harnessed for tourism. As they observed:

We want the monolith sites to be developed for tourism. This will help to preserve and conserve these cherished representatives of our ancestors. Tourism will bring infrastructural development to our communities. Our youth will gainfully be employed as workers in the facilities built, thereby improving our local economy while giving us national and international recognition.

Developing the monolith sites for tourism is an effective way of controlling the threats and challenges posed to the sites by traffickers on cultural property who are known to cart away precious artifacts due to lack of real protection and poor security.

Finally, we see monoliths as a mark of progress/good luck and victory within our communities.

It is important to note that although monoliths serve as valuable attractions, viable tourism development can only be achieved in the study area if they are harnessed along with other cultural practices. Hence, there is need to conserve not only the monoliths to prevent them from further deterioration, but also to identify and document other cultural practices that promote visitation. Among them are initiation ceremonies of the age grades, Bakor new yam festival, ceremonial painting of monoliths, and praying with calabash. Tourists can make out time to witness these ceremonies. Thus, the demand for such local crafts as mats, cane chairs and other woven material with which the area is associated will increase and boost the local economy if the monolith sites are developed into tourist attractions. This will bring improvement in rural infrastructural facilities, including motor-able roads, local airstrips, telecommunication, water, and electricity supply. These public utilities are usually provided or extended to the rural communities where the attractions are located. If such facilities are offered by interested private sectors such as tour operating agencies or site developers or by government agencies for the comfort of tourists, they are at the same time being made available to the local communities of the areas.

There are nearby tourist facilities in and around Alok and Emaghabe sites. Alok and Emanghebe have hotels and restaurants that can take care of tourists for a moment. The hotels are neither fenced nor properly secured for highbrow or overnight visitors. There are also health centers and local markets in the areas that can cater for the temporary health and commercial needs of some tourists. The roads that lead to Alok and Emanghebe sites are good, but one needs to stop halfway and complete his/her journey on foot or with a motorcycle while visiting Agba site. Seven attendants, employed by National Commission for Museum and Monuments, work as tourist guides and help to keep the monolith sites at Alok and Emanghebe and their precincts clean. The attendants were provided with two motorcycles with which to take people around and to other sites. Two people were also posted to the sites by Cross River Tourism Bureau to provide the required services, but they were hardly seen when visitors come.

5. Recommendations and conclusion

The study revealed that the monolith sites are in a state of disrepair. Apart from deteriorating considerably due to lack of care and proper maintenance, natural and human factors such as alternating weather conditions, bush burning and vandalism constitute some of the major challenges faced by the sites. The study also showed that traditional conservation and preservation mechanisms employed by the inhabitants to maintain the monoliths have been overtaken by modern mechanisms introduced by government institutions. These have been argued to be ineffective. Indeed, improper management and conservation of the monoliths were found to have restrained tourist visit to the
sites. The lack of necessary tourism infrastructure, facilities and amenities, within the sites also deter many visitors. It must be stressed that the maintenance of such heritage sites requires adequate planning and collaboration amongst stakeholders. Consequently, there is a need not only to improve the state of available infrastructure but also to enhance their supply to attract visitation. The government needs to improve the maintenance culture of the heritage sites to achieve the conservation goal while encouraging increased utilization of the sites for tourism. Aremu (2014) averred that, with improved preservation, the tourism market would continue to expand and increase abundantly once the products and infrastructure/facilities are in place. Therefore, the provision of access road, accommodation of different sorts, water and electricity supply as well as good communication network, etc. should be given priority in the heritage sites.

A combination of traditional and modern conservation mechanisms is therefore proposed for the preservation and conservation of monoliths. Much as traditional mechanisms served the needs of the local people in the past, the demand for modern tourism will overwhelm their threshold. In the same vein, modern conservation mechanisms alone may not address the peculiarities of the local environment, thereby leaving room for conflict. This research, therefore, advocates that the management plans for the monolith sites should seek to balance the interest of conservation with those of local communities living in the area. There is also the need to educate the populace on the laws and policies establishing the sites and the benefits of abiding by such laws. This explains the need for awareness creation targeted at such critical stakeholders as the local communities, traditional owners, and custodians of these places, government authorities, tourists, and the tourism industry. Such campaigns could take the forms of workshops organized at regular intervals, public fora, interpersonal communication, and enlightenment campaigns to make them more productive. Indigenous people are knowledgeable about the culture and history of the heritage sites, and therefore, their participation in the decision making is vital.

Finally, the government and relevant stakeholders need to employ conservators and specialized tourism personnel in the sites to conserve and promote them for tourist visits. A museum should be built to house the cultural materials found in the monolith sites so that tourists will appreciate them as they visit. The cultural practices that are associated with the sites need to be documented and packaged for tourism too.

**Acknowledgements**

We appreciate the site managers and our respondents for giving us access to the sites and responding to our questions. We equally appreciate the reviewers for their constructive criticisms that helped improve the work.

**Funding**

There was no source of funding for this research.

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**Competing interests statement**

The authors declare that there are no competing or potential conflicts of interest.

**Citation information**

Cite this article as: Preservation and conservation of Cross River Monoliths for tourism development, Joy N. Ejikeme, Pat Uche Okpoko, Chinwe C. Okpoko & Christopher A. Diminyi, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2020), 7: 1812182.

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