

User Needs as Key to Sustainability of Tourism Facilities

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Abstract — Economic profitability of tourism facilities is hinged on providing services which will attract and satisfy users, thereby increasing their expenditure. Many tourism facilities in Nigeria appear to have been developed without adequate market surveys in order to determine user segments and their needs and preferences. This is apparently responsible for the low patronage and resultant economic sustainability of many tourism facilities. This study therefore set out to determine the extent to which user needs and preferences were reflected in the design of two tourism facilities. These facilities are Argungu fishing village, in Kebbi state, and Trappco ranch and resort, in Kaduna state, both in Nigeria. Data was collected through visual assessment/observations, interviews and questionnaires. Obtained data were subjected to descriptive and content analysis. Results show that the design of Argungu fishing village provided for a narrow and seasonal market segment, resulting in little or no usage of the facility for most part of the year. Trappco ranch and resort on the other hand, provided for more diverse market and experienced more evenly distributed patronage. This buttresses the need for market surveys and diversification of the target market to enhance the economic sustainability of tourism facilities.

Index Terms—Market survey, sustainability, tourism facilities, user needs, user preferences.

I. INTRODUCTION

Economic sustainability occurs when development, which moves towards socio-cultural and environmental sustainability, is financially feasible (Gilbert et al., 1996 as cited in Commonwealth Association of Architects, 2006). This focuses on the viability of enterprises and assurance of viable, long-term economic operations. One of the keys to economic sustainability of tourism facilities is the ability to attract tourists, increase their expenditure, while providing them with quality services and satisfying experiences (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003, as cited in Al-Masroori, 2006). In order to achieve this, tourism facilities design should be based on study of market trends, needs, expectations and preferences of tourists, and the type of facilities which would best satisfy them. This will aid the design of facilities based on the characteristics of the destination (Western Australia Tourism Commission (WATC), 2000; Southern Australia Tourism Commission (SATC), 2007).

The Nigerian Tourism Development Masterplan noted that the desire to achieve the country's goals of tourism development is constrained by several factors among which are: Inadequate facilities at established tourist centres; and,

low level of investment (Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (GFRN) et al., 2006). The Masterplan also aims at encouraging active private sector participation in tourism development. At the same time a number of existing facilities ones are either closed down, or experiencing great challenges to their sustainability. These challenges are reflected in their low patronage, poor state of maintenance among others. It is in this light that this study set out to determine the extent to which user needs and preferences were reflected in the design of two tourism facilities - Argungu fishing village and Trappco ranch and resort.

The objectives of the study are:

- i. To determine the nature of facilities provided at Argungu Fishing Village and Trappco Ranch and Resort.
- ii. To determine the needs and preferences of users of the two tourism facilities.
- iii. To compare the provided facilities and the needs of users.

II. USER NEEDS AND TOURISM FACILITIES DESIGN

The architectural design of tourism facilities can enhance and add value to the characteristics of a tourism destination, thereby enriching the tourist experience, invoking emotional response, and contributing to the attraction and satisfaction of tourists (Mai, 2007; International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), 1999; SATC, 2007). In concurrence to this, Mai (2007) described architecture as a powerful marketing tool in the tourism industry and listed its sphere of influence to include the; creation of significant brand touch and the augmentation of product value. Porter (1990, as cited in Dwyer & Kim, 2003) noted tourism facilities can overcome weaknesses in other aspects of a destination thereby enhancing their competitiveness. This could benefit the creation of destination brand, image and identity, and the enhancement of 'sense of place' (Mai, 2007; SATC, 2007). Also, tourism facilities design should exhibit a clear sense of uniqueness and difference from other competing destinations and provide alternative experiences. This is can be achieved through the identification of unique natural and cultural attributes of the site and surrounding environment and using this as the basis for facilities design in order to create experiential products designed to appeal to important target markets.

One of the key elements of the development of a marketing strategy for any type of product is the development of the product strategy. A common practice is the creation of groups of related products in product lines (Dwyer & Tanner, 1999). This practice is common to producers of both physical and non-physical products offered to consumers as well as business customers. This may also be true for the development of tourist destinations, which capitalize on the local natural and cultural assets to create experiential products designed to appeal to important target market (Daniel, 2008). Tourist developments need to define their target markets from the inception of the design. This is related to the fact that different types of attractions and facilities appeal to different segments of the tourist market and attract different categories of tourists. There are two models in tourism market segmentation. The first one approaches the tourism market as an aggregation of people (Burkart & Medlik, 1981). Frank, Massy and Wind (1972) referred to this as the 'general base', and noted that this model is independent of specific products, services or circumstance faced by individual consumers. The second model divides the market into segments (Burkart & Medlik, 1981), and is related to the consumer, commodity and/or specific circumstances. This is the 'situation specific base' (Frank et al., 1972). While market aggregation results in one offer, aimed at the total market, market segregation is based on the assumption that different market segments have different needs, different levels of present or potential consumption, different levels of awareness of the product, and are exposed to different channels of communication (Burkart & Medlik, 1981).

III. METHOD OF STUDY

The paper was based on case studies of two tourism facilities – Argungu fishing village and Trappco ranch and resort. Data was collected through visual assessment/observation, questionnaire survey, and interviews. The visual survey focused on the facility's descriptive character. For the questionnaire survey, site/user survey method was adopted. This approach has the advantage of high response rate and medium cost (Veal, 2006). In order to achieve 95 per cent confidence interval, 392 and 396 questionnaires were administered at Argungu fishing village and Trappco ranch and resort, respectively. This was done through systematic random sampling. This was based on a combination of respondent and interviewer completed questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered by stationary interviewers distributed around the survey site.

Analysis of visual survey was based on descriptive accounts, while data from questionnaires were subjected to descriptive statistics. Furthermore, managers and administrators of tourism facilities were interviewed and their responses were subjected to content analysis.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings at Argungu Fishing Village

Argungu Fishing Village is the venue of the annual Argungu fishing and cultural festival which is one of the most popular cultural tourist attractions in Nigeria. The facility lies along Sokoto road in Argungu, Kebbi state. The development and evolution of Argungu fishing village spanned from the colonial era to the present Kebbi state government. Some structures were constructed by the Northern Nigeria Government, others by the Sokoto state government, and later ones by the Kebbi state government.

Existing Facilities:

Argungu fishing village contains large numbers of accommodation facilities, administrative and auxiliary facilities, a restaurant and bar, cultural performance spaces, viewing pavilion, and a few outdoor spaces which include a garden, badminton courts and a swimming pool which was in a state of dilapidation at the time of this survey. Apart from the festival activities and its associated spaces, little provision was made for sports and recreational, conference and other facilities which could attract users after the festival period (see Fig. 1). This limited the use of the facility to the one-week festival season, leaving it largely dormant for the rest of the year.

Challenges to Sustenance of Facility

Key informants revealed that Argungu fishing village was faced with the problem of low utilization. This in turn contributed to lack of economic sustainability and reflected in poor state of maintenance since it generated little income. According to one of the respondents "people are not patronizing the fishing village that is why they are finding it very difficult to maintain the facilities. Look at the round huts, most of them are not occupied. So the situation where some of them remain vacant for a long period makes it difficult to maintain them". This problem was attributed to the fact that the facility appeared to have focused on the fishing and cultural festival alone with no consideration for other market segments which could keep it in use and generate income after the festival season.

Respondents revealed that once the fishing festival was over most of the facilities were not used until the next fishing festival. Maintenance of the facility in the past was solely by the state government - from the North-Western state government, to the Sokoto state government, then the Kebbi state government. Recently however, the facility was leased to all states Travel and Tours Limited (a private tour operator) for a period of five years between 2004 and 2009.

Various sponsors assisted through donations to the state government, and advertise their products in return. Recent sponsors include MTN, Coscharis motors, and Maltina. Also, car manufacturers such as Mercedes Benz and Toyota participated in the last motor rally.

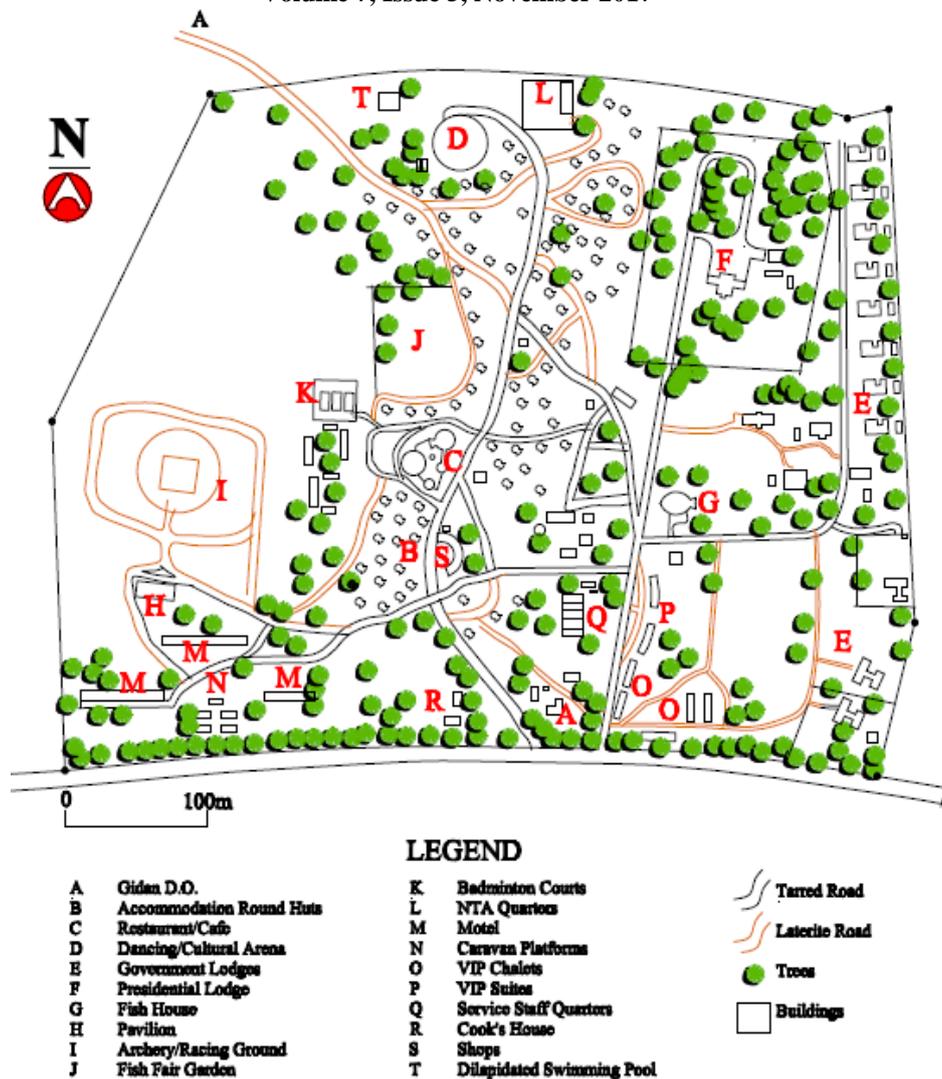


Fig. 1: Site Plan of Argungu Fishing Village. Source: Authors' Fieldwork (2011)

User Needs and Preferences

Responses revealed that the fishing village was "...just meant for the fishing festival. That is why immediately after the festival you realize that there is no other activity so it is only during the festival that people patronize the facility". However, all the respondents buttressed the need for the facility to provide for alternative activities and experiences which will cater for other tourism market segments and motivations. Suggestions in this direction include provisions for conferences and addition of sports and recreational facilities based on natural features such as the river. Key findings of interview on Argungu fishing village are that:

- i. Majority of the accommodation facilities were for non-paying government guests;
- ii. Poor maintenance of facility;
- iii. Village is dormant after festival;
- iv. Inadequate sports and recreational facilities;
- v. No provision for conferences;
- vi. Village lacked facilities required to attract usage after annual festival.

Questionnaire survey result showed that outlets for

souvenirs/local arts and crafts were of key priority with a mean score of 4.69 on a five-point Likert scale. This was followed by symbolic or unique design 4.61; outdoor relaxation spaces 4.60; high quality accommodation facilities 4.52; outlets for food and drink 4.51; indigenous performance spaces 4.36; sports facilities 4.00; conference facilities 3.50; modern performance spaces 3.00; and, modern shopping facilities 2.52 (see Fig. 2).

Also, user evaluation result showed the quality of accommodation facilities were low (357 representing 91.1%); there was low level of provision of outdoor recreation/relaxation spaces (286 representing 73%); there was low level of provision of sports facilities (358 representing 91.3%); there was high level of provision of performance spaces (220 representing 56.1%); there was no provision for conferences (333 representing 84.9%); there was low level provision of outlets for food and drink (379 representing 96.7%); there was low level provision of shopping facilities (372 representing 94.9%); the facility's uniqueness was low (198 representing 50.5%). Details of this are given in Table 1 below.

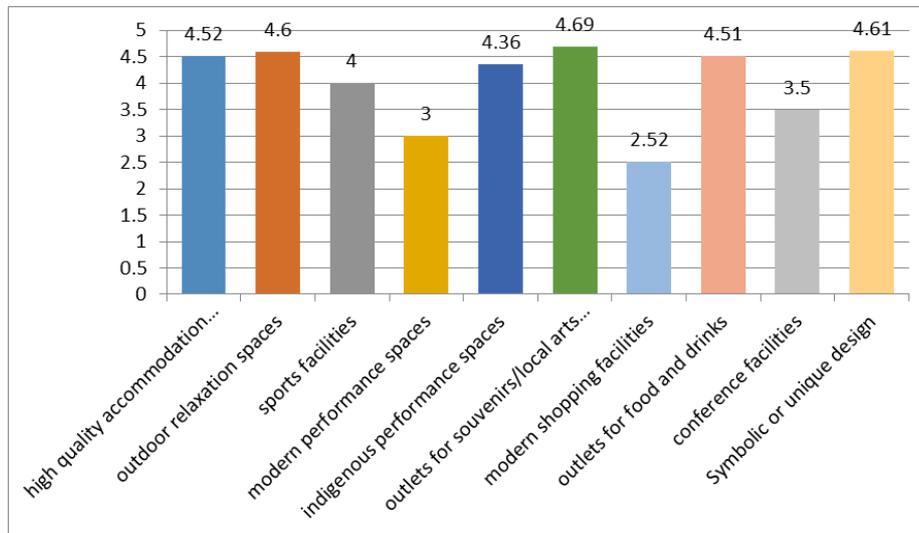


Fig. 2: User Needs and Preferences at Argungu Fishing Village

Table 1: Frequencies of Scores of User Evaluation of Argungu Fishing village

| PARAMETERS | RATING | | | | | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|------|-----------|
| | Absent 0 | Low 1 | Moderat e 2 | High 3 | Very high 4 | | |
| Quality of accommodation facilities | 0 0% | 357 91.1% | 35 8.9% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 1.09 | .286 |
| Outdoor recreation/relaxation spaces | 0 0% | 286 73% | 98 25% | 8 2% | 0 0% | 1.29 | .498 |
| Sports facilities | 0 0% | 358 91.3% | 33 8.4% | 1 0.3% | 0 0% | 1.09 | .294 |
| Performance spaces | 0 0% | 6 1.5% | 147 37.55 | 220 56.1% | 19 4.8% | 2.64 | .598 |
| Provision for conferences | 333 84.9% | 59 15.1% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 0.15 | .358 |
| Outlets for food and drink | 0 0% | 379 96.7% | 12 3.1% | 1 0.3% | 0 0% | 1.04 | .199 |
| Shopping facilities | 0 0% | 372 94.9% | 20 5.1% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 1.05 | .220 |
| Uniqueness of design | 0 0% | 198 50.5% | 180 45.9% | 14 3.6% | 0 0% | 1.53 | .567 |

B. Findings at Trappco Ranch and Resort

Trappco ranch and resort is located in Igabi Local Government Area of Kaduna state, near the Kaduna International airport. The site on which the resort is located was a base camp for Trappco, a German construction company that constructed the Kaduna international airport. This site was purchased by the owners of the resort. At the time of purchase the property had a number of accommodation units, a club house, and a few other buildings. The accommodation facilities were redeveloped into the chalets existing today, while the club house was converted into a restaurant. Other features of the site include the swimming pool, which was retained, and an artificial lake, which was believed to have been created as a result of blasting and excavation of rocks for the construction of the airport.

Existing Facilities

Visual survey revealed the provision of a variety of facilities in the resort. These include: accommodation, restaurant and bar, swimming pool, stables for horses, children's playground, tennis court, basketball/volleyball court, polo, and football pitches, and conference facilities. The resort hosts activities such as retreats, conferences, honeymoon, wedding receptions, football clubs camping, polo tournaments, picnics, horse riding, site seeing, and swimming, socialization in the bar and restaurant, leisure and relaxation among others (see Fig. 3).

Challenges to Sustenance of Facility

Interview results revealed that Trappco ranch and resort is experiencing a number of challenges. Most of these challenges were about patronage, and was not attributed to the

architectural design. According to one of the key informants "We have our challenges, but that does not say that we are not economically viable. We are employing almost fifty people, and we are able to keep them here, and we are able to manage to do some work also, on the facility. If it was not viable I don't think we will be operating till today. So we still have a very good future".

Respondents also revealed that the facility attracted people from Kaduna, all over Nigeria, expatriates and foreign visitors. Respondents also believed that most problems of tourism facilities sustainability are related to the poor state of Nigeria's economy which made it difficult for people to take time off for holidays. Culture also plays a role in this part of the country.

User Needs and Preferences

According to respondents, the design of Trappco ranch and resort attempted to provide alternative facilities and experiences for various tourism market segments. These include retreats, conferences, honeymoon, wedding receptions, football clubs camping, polo tournaments, picnics, horse riding, site seeing, and swimming, especially when it is hot, socialization in the bar and restaurant, leisure and relaxation among others. Results however indicated that the patronage of the facility was usually low in the rainy season during which patronage was mainly at weekends. The patronage was however highest between November and March.

Key findings from interviews at Trappco ranch and resort are that:

- i. Design provided for many tourism market segments;
- ii. Design provided for sports, socialization, tranquillity; and contact with nature and a bit of cultural expression.

Questionnaire survey result showed that outdoor relaxation spaces were of key priority with a mean score of 4.80 on a five-point Likert scale. This was followed by symbolic or unique design 4.62; high quality accommodation facilities 4.45; outlets for food and drink 4.42; sports facilities 4.21; modern performance spaces 3.80; conference facilities 3.78; outlets for souvenirs and local arts and crafts 3.57; indigenous performance spaces 3.37; and, modern shopping facilities 2.48 (see Fig. 4). Also, user evaluation of the facility showed the quality of accommodation facilities were moderate (348 representing 87.9%); there was high level of provision of outdoor recreation/relaxation spaces (248 representing 71.1%); there was moderate provision of sports facilities (288 representing 72.7%); there was low level of provision of performance spaces (360 representing 90.9%); there was low level of provision for conferences (362 representing 91.4%); there was moderate provision of outlets for food and drink (343 representing 86.6%); there was no provision of shopping facilities (390 representing 98.5%); the facility was moderately uniqueness (332 representing 83.8%). Details of this are given in Table 2 below.



Fig. 3: Site Plan of Trappco Ranch and Resort. Source: Authors' Fieldwork (2011)

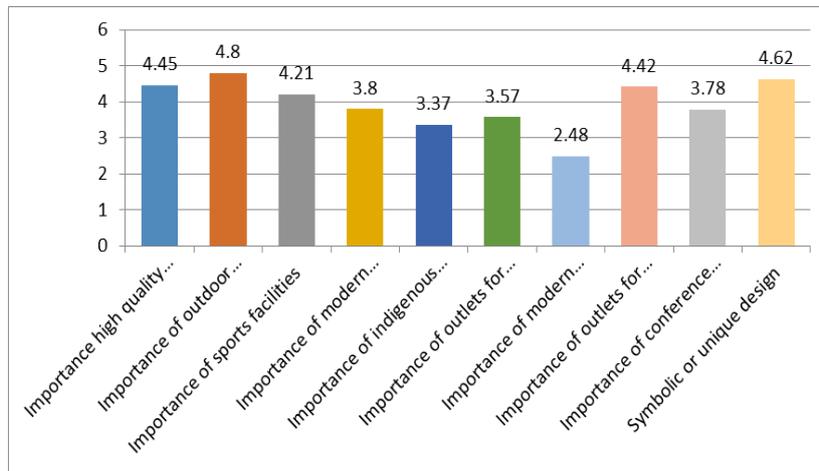


Fig. 4: User Needs and Preferences at Trappco Ranch and Resort

Table 2: Frequencies of Scores of User Evaluation of Trappco Ranch and Resort

| PARAMETERS | RATING | | | | | | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---------------------------------------|--------|-------|----------|-------|-----------|--|------|-----------|
| | Absent | Low | Moderate | High | Very high | | | |
| Quality of accommodation facilities. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | 1.92 | .339 |
| | 0% | 40 | 348 | 8 | 0 | | | |
| | 0% | 10.1% | 87.9% | 2.0% | 0% | | | |
| Outdoor recreation/relaxation spaces. | 0 | 4 | 94 | 248 | 14 | | 2.78 | .514 |
| | 0% | 1.0% | 23.7% | 71.7% | 3.5% | | | |
| Sports facilities. | 0 | 2 | 288 | 106 | 0 | | 2.26 | .452 |
| | 0% | 0.5% | 72.7% | 26.8% | 0% | | | |
| Performance spaces. | 31 | 360 | 5 | 0 | 0 | | 0.93 | .295 |
| | 7.8% | 90.9% | 1.3% | 0% | 0% | | | |
| Provision for conferences. | 0 | 362 | 34 | 0 | 0 | | 1.09 | .281 |
| | 0% | 91.4% | 8.6% | 0% | 0% | | | |
| Outlets for food and drink | 0 | 8 | 343 | 45 | 0 | | 2.09 | .354 |
| | 0% | 2% | 86.6% | 11.4% | 0% | | | |
| Shopping facilities | 390 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | 0.02 | .122 |
| | 98.5% | 1.5% | 0% | 0% | 0% | | | |
| Uniqueness of design. | 0 | 22 | 332 | 42 | 0 | | 2.05 | .399 |
| | 0% | 5.6% | 83.8% | 10.6% | 0% | | | |

V.CONCLUSION

Visual survey and interview result at Argungu fishing village revealed that the facility experienced over 100 percent occupancy during the annual fishing and cultural festival which lasted for about four days. After this, the facility was left almost vacant for most of the year. This problem was attributed to the fact that the facility appeared to have focused largely on provision of accommodation for the fishing and cultural festival with little or no consideration for other market segments which could keep it in use and generate income after the festival season. In contrast to Argungu fishing village, the range of facilities at Trappco ranch and resort suggests attempts at creating alternative experiences to cater for various market segments. This meant that the resort attracted users all year round.

Findings from this study buttresses the need for market surveys at the inception of tourism facilities design. This is to

ensure that the facility does not lie fallow after huge sums of money have been expended in its development. There is also the need for diversification of the target market and provide alternative attractions where the pull is seasonal. This will enhance the economic sustainability of tourism facilities.

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