

MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM RESOURCES AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF CAMEROON

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Abstract

Cameroon is a Country located in Central Africa, within the Gulf of Guinea. Made up of 10 Regions, and the Southwest Region happens to be one of the two-anglophone regions in the Country. Often considered as Africa in miniature, due mainly to its extraordinary natural and cultural endowments, but however the Southwest Region as a whole, is most often referred as the touristic ‘eldorado’ of Cameroon, given the Region and especially Fako Division has all what can be found in Cameroon in regards to tourism resources. This study examined why despite huge tourism resources’ investment, annual tourist arrivals to Cameroon keep dropping, and ecotourism seems to be the only surviving form of tourism in the Division. Much emphasis will be laid on museum institutions in the Division, their role, practices and possible effect on diversifying touristic offers, and transforming the Region into a veritable sustainable tourism destination. A mixed research approach was adopted for this study, qualitative data was gotten through filed visits, interviews and exchanges in the field, while quantitative was obtained by compiling statistics in some museum establishments and tourism institutions.

Keywords: *Museums, Sustainable Cultural tourism, Eco-tourism, Cultural Resources.*

1.0. Introduction

Cameroon, is a Country located in Central Africa, within the Gulf of Guinea. It is made up of 10 Regions, and the Southwest Region happens to be one of the two-anglophone Regions in the Country, and Fako Division, which happens to be the focus area for this study, is located within the Southwest Region. Cameroon is often considered as Africa in miniature, due mainly to its extraordinary natural and cultural endowments. In 2010, she was able to receive above 10,000 visitors annually, and as such was considered a tourist’s destination by excellence by the UNWTO rating.

In this light, Fako Division in the Southwest Region, happens to be a veritable eco-tourism destination, due to its enormous inherent eco-tourism attractions, like; the Mount Cameroon National Park, with its enormous fauna and flora species, the Limbe wild life centre harboring diverse endemic fauna species, the Limbe botanical garden and the black sandy beaches, just to cite these few. These eco-tourism attractions have been able to pull huge numbers of visitors into the Division over the years. As such, the multiplier effect of tourism in the Region cannot be undermined from the socio-economic, environmental and cultural perspective.

With the above mentioned, this study delves into the paradox as to why despite these huge eco-tourism resources, annual tourist arrivals keep dwindling (Mintoul, 2023), and ecotourism tourism seems to be the only surviving form of tourism in the Division. We are beckoned to ask the following questions; Has eco-tourism become monotonous to potential

guests? Are there other forms of tourism which can be promoted to change the tourist gaze of the destination, and reverse the present narrative? With this in mind, this article therefore has as objective, to examine the role museum practice in Fako Division play in diversifying touristic offers and transform the Southwest Region as a whole into a veritable tourist destination. The scarcity of such institutions, leaves much to wonder viz a vis the essential role they play in acquiring, conserving, communicating and exhibition of heritage with the motive to education, enjoyment and research (ICOM).

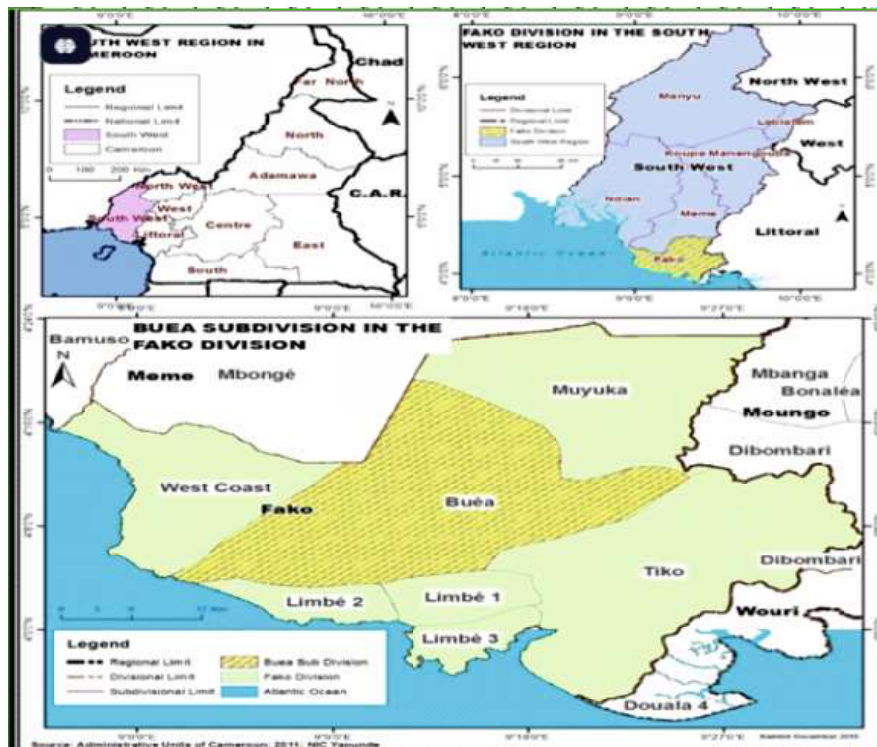


Fig 1: Geographical Map of Fako Division in Cameroon

1.1. Problem Statement

This study is based on the premise that Fako Division has for several decades been gazed by tourist as an eco-tourism destination. It is worth understanding that eco-tourism still remains the most practiced and marketed form of tourism in the Division. On like other Regions of the country; for instance, the West Region of Cameroon, where eco-tourism is practice concomitantly with other forms of tourism. This is not the case in Fako Division of the Southwest Region of Cameroon. The Region has observed some major setbacks in annual tourists' arrivals over the years, added to the fact that the existing ecotourism attractions are gradually losing their attractiveness, and very little value has been added to it over time.

More still, museums as cultural institutions that preserve the material and immaterial cultural heritage of humanity barely function in Fako Division. The two existing structures one can refer to as museum in the Division are: the LIFABA MUSEUM at Mukunda village, and the Regional Museum, situated at the premises of the Regional Delegation for Arts and Culture Southwest Region. Both structures do host collections emanating from the different cultural zones of Cameroon. Worth noting is that the full operationalization of these cultural institutions in the Division will definitely diversify touristic offers in the Region and thus reversing the present narrative.

1.2. Main Objective of Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the role museum practice in Fako Division play in enhancing tourism promotion in Cameroon. The specific objectives of study are as follows:

- To increase tourist visits into the Division by 30%, through engaging exhibitions;
- To diversify touristic offers in Fako Division through heritage tourism;
- To enhance visitors satisfaction through professional practices in museums.

1.3. Research Hypotheses

H₀: There exists no direct relationship between effective museum exhibition and tourists' visits;

H₁: If museums exhibitions are engaging in Fako Division, then annual tourists' visits will witness an increase.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Operationalization of Museum Practice in Cameroon

Ngitir (2014), asserted that the Cameroon Museum institutions saw the light of day from the ashes of colonial rule (1944), he reported that, a colonial order created the *Centre Camerounaise de L'insitute Francaise d'afrique Noire (IFAN)*, a French research institute based in Dakar, with a satellite research centre in Douala. It is reported that in the 1960's and most particularly during the pre- independent and reunification periods, the English part of the country, with the efforts of Dr. MDW Jeffrey (then colonial administrator of the Bamenda Province), concretized the creation of the Bamenda Provincial Museum (BPM) in the 1930's to 1940's.

This was later followed by a series of Presidential decrees signed by the then President of Cameroon, Ahmadu Ahidjo, that shaped the museum landscape in Cameroon. In 1994, a Presidential decree saw the creation of museums in some regional headquarters, particularly in; Bamenda, Fouban, Douala, Bafoussam, Mokolo and Buea (VB Ngitire, 2014:45). It is purported too that the then legislation categorized Museums in Cameroon into public, private, and community (chiefdom) museums. More still, another Presidential decree in 1962 created the Federal linguistic centre in Yaounde, charged with research surveys for the acquisition and study of cultural property worth preserving (Ngigir et al, 2022). Also, other subsequent decrees reorganized the Ministries and services in charge of museums, especially the Presidential decree of 1998, that transformed the transformation of the old Presidency in Yaounde in to the National Museum of Cameroon. It is important to mention there has been an upsurge in Museum institutions across the national territory in the last decade. This has particularly been the case in the Grassfield cultural zone, where much scholars in museum studies and practice have given much attention. Other public museums founded across Cameroon were; the Douala Museum(1952-53), the Mokolo museum (1954), the Bafoussam museum (1954), the Museum of Bamum Arts and Traditions (1955), the Maroua Museum (1955), the Bamun Royal Museum in Fumban (1922), the Babungo Royal Museum (2006), the Bafut Royal Museum (2006), the Baham Royal Museum (year), the Douala Maritime Museum (1975), the Benedictine Museum (1970), (Ngitir et al. 2014). These museums have contributed in cultural tourism and heritage tourism promotion in their respective cultural zones in Cameroon to a greater extend. This because diverse guests are often seen visiting these institutions from time to time. One will not undermine the multiplier effect of such activities in the community, as there are direct, indirect and induced benefits.

Thus, cultural tourism and heritage tourism though slightly different but similar forms of tourism has become common the emerging, and common forms of tourism being practiced recently, and is gradually gaining grounds in the recent decades. Barry Lords (2002), asserts that major economies across the globe have identified cultural tourism as a lucrative sector.

Museums and Cultural Tourism Promotion

Ibunkun et al. (2024) hold that museums are institutions that showcases collections in their holdings like artefacts and other objects of historical, ethical, artistic or technological importance. In the same vein, Mugobi and MLODI (2021) claimed that ‘visitors are drawn to locations that present rich cultural experiences, such as iconic landmarks, World Heritage Sites, Museums and ancient ruins and cultural festivals. This claim is further supported by the emphasis that cultural heritage acts as a magnet for tourists, enticing them to explore and engaged with unique history and traditions of a place. This form of tourism that relates to people traveling for cultural motivations is called cultural tourism. Thus, cultural tourist, who are interested in discovering and experiencing civilizations, traditions and believes can do so by visiting museums. This enables cultural exchange and camaraderie between museum institutions visited; thereby fostering tolerance, appreciation, respect for diverse cultures, and identities (Igbokwe et al,2022). If one were to narrow down the role of museums to just three points, they will be; preserve, exhibit, and educate. Once such roles are understood and fully implemented by museums, repeat visit are abound, and daily frequencies will improve. As at now, the Regional Museum and the Lifafa Museum all found within the Buea municipality, still finds it difficult to fulfil these three missions.

From the preservation perspective, collections in both museums are confronted with all sorts of natural and anthropogenic factors like; humidity, temperature, pest infections, air cleanliness, light levels and even the state of the building hosting both museums in Fako Division have greatly impacted the state of collections in these museums. Majority of the objects in these two museums are found in an advanced stage of degradation, and thus needs urgent attention because of the factors raised above. From the exhibition point of view, it is important to note too that museum exhibitions are usually segmented, with objects treating similar thematic, grouped in one area to permit smooth flow of cultural mediation between curators and guest. Curiously, we have observed with a lot of dismay that at the Regional Museum, and the Lifafa Museums, some collections are even kept on bare floors, exposed to agents of degradation, then, the wooden shelves used for the display of objects are not treated and degrading as well. Objects exhibition in both museum is done without a clearcut exhibition plan, making it very difficult for museum guest identify the various exhibition thematic that both museums cover.

Situation Analysis of Collections at the Buea Regional Museum and the Lifafa Museum

The fundamental idea behind preventive conservation in museums is to maintain museum objects in their authentic form, without having to resort to treatment from time to time (Cassar, 1994). To achieve this, museums do develop routine programmes of inspections, as well as elaboration of strategic management manuals and frameworks, guiding daily practices in museums. A keen look in the manner in which objects in both museums are preserved, leaves much to wonder about. It should be known that both museums are ethnographic museums, and as such majority of their objects are wooden objects (kitchen utensils, farming tool, hunting objects, ceremonial mask, musical instruments, sculptures, farming tool, traditional war weapon, ceramics, ancient coins, etc) that depicts the true history and civilizations of people of the Southwest Region and Cameroon in general. These rich material and immaterial heritage are predisposed to all sorts of endangerment. In this vein, the

buildings hosting both museums are not adequately adapted to host such collect. For instance, most of the wooden objects have fissures (cracks) due mainly to permanent exposure to inadequate temperatures and humidity. Additionally, fragile objects and those considered as valuables (very scarce collections) are not exhibited in class boxes, some museum objects can even keep direct on bare floors (as seen in fig 1.). Besides there exist no signals to guide visitors as to know their dos and ‘don’ts’. For instance, some exhibited objects on shelves have started deteriorating from certain corners, which clearly indicates that visitors do touch them with their hands, leaving oil substances for bacteria to act on. The proximity of both museums to the road site equally predisposes their collections car vibrations and other risk.

Table 1: Risk Assessment of Museum Collections at the RM and LM

Observation	Location in the Museum	Potential impact	Cause
Congested objects	Entire show room	Infected objects are contaminating the uninfected	Limited space
Dust particles visible on most objects	Entire show room	Loss of objects	Open windows,
Museum objects are standing on the ground	Centre part of the show room	Loss of objects	Lack of shelves in the museums
Mould has attacked most of the objects	Entire museum	Loss of objects	No glass enclosures, open roof
Dusty floor	Entire museum	Loss of objects	Limited resources

Source (Louise Yong Tambia, 2025)



A. Museum Collections standing on the floor



B. Exhibition shelves, bearing invisible label tag

Fig 1: Current state of exhibitions at the Buea Regional Museum

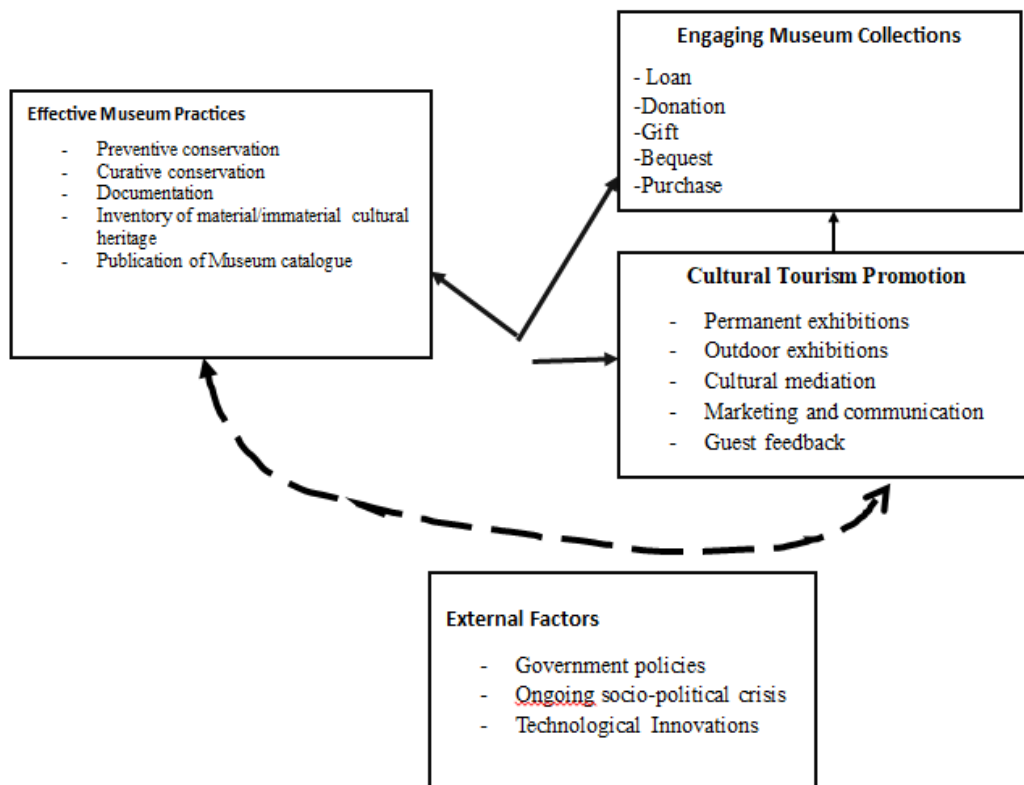


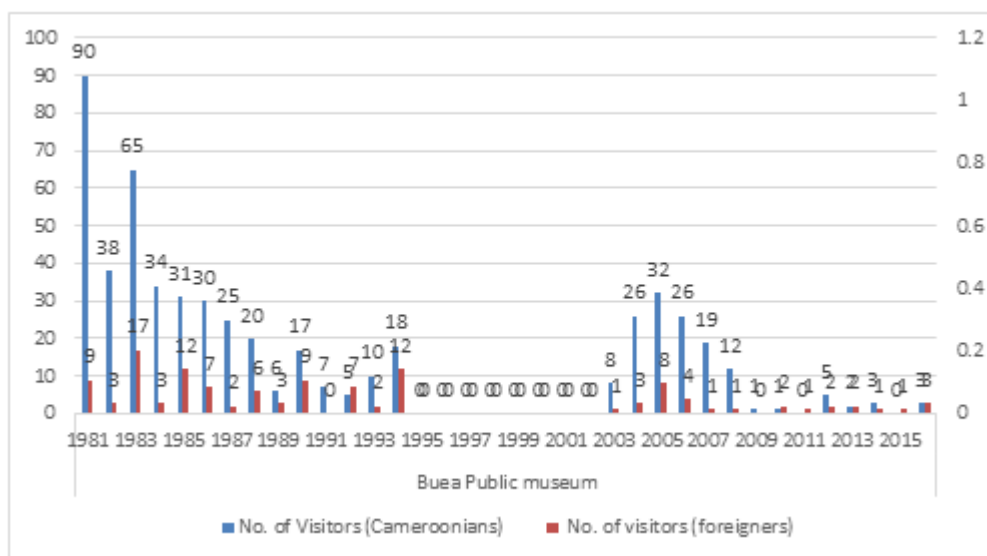
Fig 2: Conceptual Framework for Museums Practice. Source (Adapted from Ibidapo, 20

Research Methodology

The study on leveraging on museum practice in Fako Division of Cameroon for tourism promotion and development, used the Buea Regional Museum and the Lifafa Museum at Mukunda village. A mixed research approach was adopted for this study. A survey questionnaire and interview guide were used to collect data from 250 respondents (Museum visitors, staff of the Regional Delegation of Tourism and leisure, those of the Regional Delegation of Arts and Culture, and University students). Out of the 250 questionnaires administered, 175 responded, and they were selected through a purposive sampling technique. A multiple linear regression model was used to understand how multiple independent variables like; effective museum operationalization, museum professional practices, and thematic exhibitions that are engaging, can influence a dependent variable like tourists visits in Fako Division of Cameroon.

Results

Data analysis revealed the following:



Source: Regional Delegation of Arts and Culture Buea

Contrary to expectations, visitors’ frequency especially at the regional museum have witness a study decrease since 1983, and has not been any significant change in annual tourist visit till present. Very little effort is being done by government authorities in the Region to give this museum the visibility it deserves.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.083 ^a	.007	-.005	.803

a. Predictors: (Constant), Were the staff skillful and knowledgeable?, How informative did you find the exhibition?

b. Dependent Variable: Would you want to do a repeat visit to the Museum?

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.770	2	.385	.597	.552 ^b
	Residual	110.978	172	.645		
	Total	111.749	174			

a. Dependent Variable: Would you want to do a repeat visit to the Museum?

b. Predictors: (Constant), Were the staff skillful and knowledgeable?, How informative did you find the exhibition?

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	2.106	.412		5.109	<.001	1.292	2.919			
	How informative did you find the exhibition?	.059	.094	.049	.625	.533	-.127	.245	.031	.048	.047
	Were the staff skillful and knowledgeable?	.128	.126	.079	1.016	.311	-.121	.377	.068	.077	.077

a. Dependent Variable: Would you want to do a repeat visit to the Museum?

Discussions

These findings are consistent with previous studies by Ibunkun et al. (20240), where they concluded that the National Museum in Lagos play a significant role in the conservation of cultural heritage through its collections. This will attract visitors for different reasons. With an effective museum practice, cultural heritage is preserved and safeguarded, thus making way for cultural tourism promotion.

One possible explanation in this finding is that, the poor visitor frequency is accounted by poor museum practices, such as; unethical behaviors by museum staff, poor curating, poor exhibition plans that are not engaging, thus visitors’ expectations are not met and repeats visits are not done.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, this study has as objective to examine the role museums in Fako Division of the Southwest Region can play in diversifying touristic offers and by defect transforming the Region into a veritable tourist destination.

This study has contributed to literature by providing new evidence on the present state of museum’s collections in the Region, as well as on the nature of museum operations in Fako Division, given that previous studies as well as the attention of NGO’s were focused on museum practices in the grass field cultural zones (West/Northwest Regions).

However, further studies will have to delve into cultural mediation strategies, marketing plans, inventory and documentation of museums objects in the entire Southwest Region of Cameroon.

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