

Cultural tourism and sustainable development practices in the Central Sahel

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Abstract

Cultural and heritage tourism- along with agricultural tourism (Ag-tourism), culinary tourism, voluntourism, coastal tourism, and cultural tourism- is an essential component of sustainable tourism. Cultural tourism, promoting learning from each other, supporting environmental protection and conservation, and sustaining the livelihood of local communities via eco-friendly traveling falls in the scope of the 2030 sustainable development agenda. This study explores the current challenges of hard insecurity (e.g., insurgency, cattle-rustling, dormant rebellion, trafficking), ecological insecurity (e.g., land degradation, hydrological cycle disruption events, over-exploitation of natural resources), and human insecurity (e.g., food insecurity, economic insecurity, livelihood insecurity, migration, and Covid-19). In addition, the subregion encounters declining spiritual systems and beliefs, a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of local and indigenous knowledge (e.g., disappearing traditional sustainable agro-sylva-pastoral practices), rapid urbanization and modernization, all of which lead to a desuetude of cultures and traditions in the community level. This case study focuses on the lessons learned from sustainable development practices countering the previously enumerated challenges in the sub-region to propose recommendations for the future opportunities of promoting cultural tourism: a) reviving cultures and traditions (e.g., empowering the local tribes, conserving their identity, and promoting their human rights; b) transferring knowledge (e.g., involvement of local communities, responsibility for ownership, contextualization of the sustainable development goals, community-led nature-based adaptation and mitigation, and sustaining their environment) in conflict-prone or post-conflict zones in the Central Sahel. Based on the review of primary and secondary sources, this paper explores the circumstances under which such projects- as a growing tool for sustainable development- may drive social inclusion, economic opportunities, and environmental sustainability. The premises of such efforts to localize the agenda 2030 for sustainable development via cultural heritage reside already in the UNESCO BIOPALT (Biosphere and Heritage of Lake Chad) project, which aims at tackling the interlinking security, humanitarian and environmental challenges in five countries (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Niger, Nigeria, and Tchad). Hence this research hypothesizes that advancing cultural tourism will contribute to poverty reduction (SDG 1), promote peace (SDG 16), conduct hydrological programs (SDG 6), improve the local biosphere protection and ecosystem restoration (SDGs 15 and 13), consolidate the cultural heritages (SDGs 11 and 15), enforce climate actions (SDG 13), encourage transboundary and cross border cooperation in the area (SDG 17), carry on the existing water security projects (SDG 6), promote green economy businesses and local entrepreneurship (SDG 8 and 9), and include youth, women, and other socially and economically marginalized in the projects related to cultural tourism (SDG 10). Hence, this study may pave the way for future research on contextualizing the sustainable development 2030 agenda and other dynamics relevant to the evolving understanding and approaches to sustainability.

1. Introduction, scope and main objectives

1.1 background to the topic

These wetlands of international importance consist of the Inner Niger Delta, Lakes Magui and Wegnia, and the Sourou Valley. In short, it is an enriching immersion in the heart of this country, the cradle of the great empires and kingdoms of West Africa. Public and private initiatives are emerging in the Sahel. By illustration, Niger mobilizes cultural actors to revive local tourism, as in

Agadez. This domestic tourism promotes the revival of the national economy, especially for the actors involved in the sector. In Niger, emblematic figures push the Nigerien youth to know its identity, culture, and traditions. Mali believes that it is as hard as iron. The country views tourism promotion as an act of patriotism. Tourism agencies, with the help of the state, are increasing focus on introducing Malians to the history of the capital, but also to the sometimes-unknown places such as the falls of Gounia, Woroni, Farako, or the elephants of Gourma or Ramsar sites. Hence how could cultural tourism contribute to stability in the Sahel?

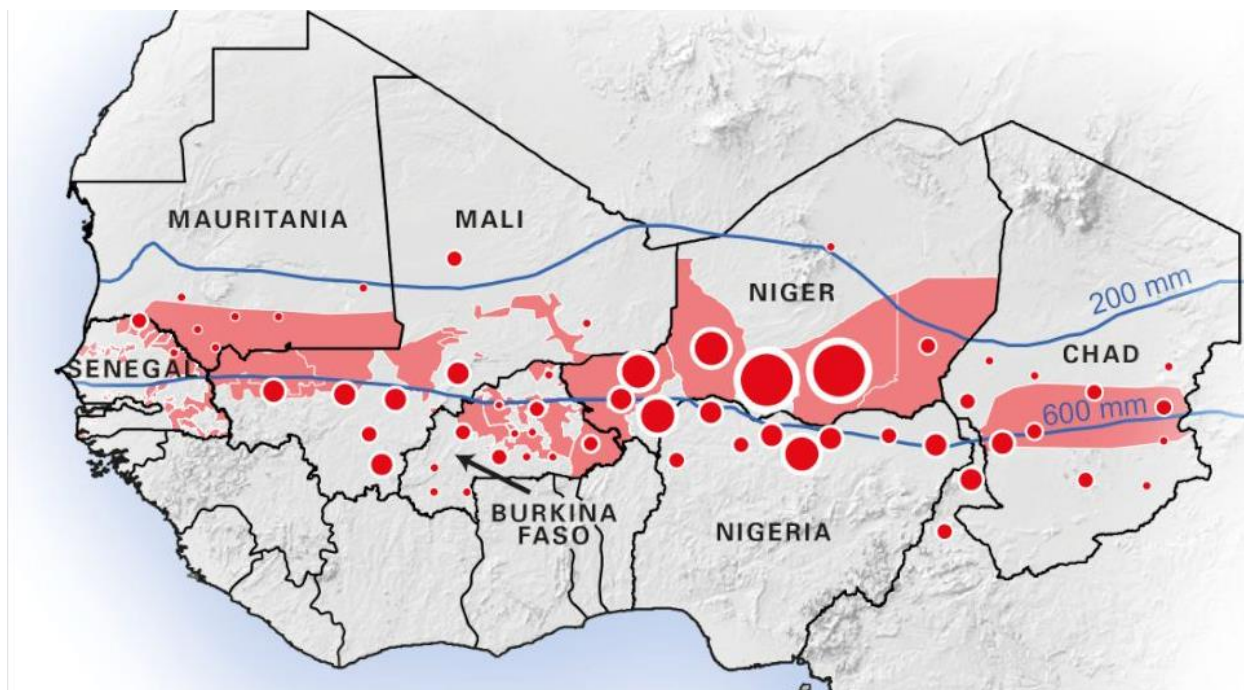


Fig. 1: Source: humanitarian.worldconcern.org: Map presenting the configuration of the Central Sahel: <https://humanitarian.worldconcern.org/2012/04/03/crisis-is-brewing-in-the-sahel/>

1.2 Brief review of current knowledge

According to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change-IPCC (2022), climate change and ecological unsustainability englobe geopolitical and geoeconomic dimensions, as individuals, societies, and states are increasingly exposed to severe climate change events such as floods, wildfires, droughts, and extreme temperatures, and are experiencing their impacts in diverse and uneven ways, including a rise in food insecurity, the spread of diseases, and water shortages. Many scholars explore the correlation between the variable cultural tourism and the variable sustainable development goals. Cultural tourism has the potential to help attain the targets of the SDGs (Kruger, 2005; Fischer, 2007). Other researchers, based on issues such as cultural appropriation and insecurity, call on the unwanted results of relation between cultural tourism and the SDGs (Sabbioni et al., 2008; Gertner, 2021)

Nonetheless, Cultural tourism, as part of ecological tourism, is becoming a profitable strategy to disseminate the brand image of Mali or Niger both inside and outside the country, in a context of economic, security, humanitarian, and health challenges. Hence cultural tourism is elevating the domestic tourism industry as an axis of strategic sustainable development diplomacy (Hale 2016; Sénit, Biermann, & Kalfagianni 2017).

1.3 The gap in knowledge and aim

While there is significant research on culture, heritage, and ecotourism, the literature review as part of this research discovers mince literature on the utilization of cultural tourism for the

localization of sustainable development research. This paper aims to address the gap by using the particular case of the Sahel despite the current uncertainties in the region.

1.4 Hypotheses

This research assumes that cultural tourism, 1) if well managed, would be a promising tool for sustainable development goals at the local levels; 2) cultural tourism would not affect the achievement of sustainable development goals, especially in the humanitarian hotspot, the Sahel.

2. Methodology/approach

This inquiry is a qualitative illustrative case study based on the literature review consisting of conducting a systemic review of the published studies on ecotourism, cultural tourism, and sustainable development. As part of this review, keywords such as “ecotourism,” “cultural tourism,” “heritage,” “Central Sahel,” “Appropriation,” and “conservation sites” were used to search for relevant data. It is essential to highlight that this research approaches African knowledge as socio-ecological and economic thinking and practices rooted in the pre-slavery era.

3. Results

3.1. The current challenges

3.1.1. Armed attacks in national and regional parks

The growing insecurity in the Sahel region is impacting the management and protection, and even the exiting of the heritage sites and the conservation parks. For instance, on 04 December 2020, Armed groups attacked the Tapoa base at the entrance to the W natural park in Niger; the W National Park in Niger, which is a part of the W-Arly-Pendjari Complex (Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger), was inscribed on the World Heritage list since 1996 (UNESCO 2020). W-Arly-Pendjari Complex, home to species the most endangered by biodiversity loss and poaching, is one of the most critical terrestrial, semi-aquatic, and aquatic ecosystems in the West African savannah belt.

3.1.2. Covid-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is restructuring our individual and collective behavior globally, including how we interact with each other, how and where we travel, and how we work. At the same time, concerns about the societal impact of global pandemics have been repeatedly raised in scientific and popular literature. Societal, political, economic, and zoonotic perturbations on biodiversity conservation demonstrate the complex implications of perturbation events upon conservation efforts (Thurstan et al. 2021).

3.1.3. Poaching groups destroying the conservation

Heritage in Africa is facing multiple threats, including economic development, agricultural expansion, urbanization, the direct and indirect effects of conflict, hydro-meteorological hazards, mineral, and fossil fuel exploration, looting and illicit trade in cultural materials, the impacts of tourism, vandalism, low prioritization, and neglect. Heritage is unprepared for future climate change (Sabbioni *et al.*, 2008), and there is a lack of research on how heritage management is responding to a changing climate, particularly concerning the capacity of current management systems to prepare for and deal with its consequences (Phillips 2015).

3.1.4. Physical and social environment

It is essential to highlight that only 1% of the climate change heritage literature is dedicated to the African continent, yet heritage is argued to be essential for social well-being (Adger et al., 2011). It provides communities with places of memory, ownership, and belonging and is increasingly thought to offer recognition to under-represented populations.

3.1.5. Cultural tourism and appropriation

Cultural tourism permits potential misuse, exploitation, and misrepresentation of the indigenous and local communities' values, customs, rituals, and religious objects, for example, by tourists in myriad contexts, such as art, entertainment, and tourism. Instead of being perceived as the appreciation or preservation of cultures, as claimed, they have been condemned as cultural appropriation (Gertner 2021).

3.2. The future opportunities

3.2.1. Community science

Heritage sites are crucial to bridging knowledge between local communities and modern scientific knowledge. For instance, the Culture Heritage Conventions, notably the World Heritage Center (WHC), involves UNESCO's expertise in the Science Sector (UN 2018).

3.2.2. Cultural tourism and economic opportunities.

Cultural tourism is responsible for traveling to the natural environment, and it appraises its prioritized principles to improve local economic growth while at the same time contributing to conserving biodiversity, encouraging local people's welfare, protects local culture and tradition. These define its relevance in heritage conservation sites/environs. It is developing tourism to generate national and regional earnings while at the same time contributing to climate change mitigation could be new perspectives (Kruger, 2005; Fischer, 2007).

3.2.3. Cultural tourism and environmental sustainability

As a component of cultural tourism, cultural tourism is an industry that seeks to minimize carbon emissions as it increases the environment's ability to absorb and store carbon, supporting a fundamental approach to global warming reduction. It benefits local communities regarding employment, revenue generation, entrepreneurial opportunities, biodiversity conservation, and sociocultural revitalization. Several authors have discussed cultural tourism supporting wildlife and biodiversity conservation (Kruger, 2005). However, there is a good number of Impacts of climate change on heritage sites, such as flooding, slope instability, landslides, Loss of indigenous flora/plant species, Loss of indigenous fauna/animal species, droughts, extreme heat, River bank erosion, flooding, Increased River toxicity, biological degradation by molds and insects of invasive species due to changes in atmospheric balance, and damping and degradation of built structures.

3.2.4. Heritage and cultural appreciation

Heritage sites in the Liptako Gourma regrouping Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Benin. The Dallol Bosso and the Kouré National Park on the Niger side of the Liptako Gourma both offer a lateritic landscape covered by a patchy tiger bush and a dry valet dominated by the *acacia albida*, which is among the types of acacia as indigenous species—the giraffes of Kouré as the essential elements of attraction in the area. The giraffes are protected the Association pour la sauvegarde des Giraffes du Niger (Association for the Protection of the Giraffes of Niger) (APGN). Although Kouré Park has not been placed legally as a Protected Area, APGN has succeeded in increasing the number of giraffes, counting to around 200. It is essential to mention that the giraffes in Kouré were in extinction due to the hunting in the park. APGN contributes to the surrounding villages' social and economic security by providing labor and household security; for example, by recruiting guides for tourists and protectors of the environment.

Heritage sites in the Lake Chad area regrouping five countries (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Niger, Nigeria, and Tchad). The Ramsar Sites around the Lake Chad Basin are an essential biodiversity and natural and cultural heritage, including World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves, and Wetlands of International Importance (UN 2018). Biosphere and Heritage of Lake Chad" (BIOPALT), if properly pursued, can improve the implementation of regional and global sustainable development and strategies, such as Agenda 2030, Paris Agreement, CBD and Aichi targets, United Nations Federal Credit Union- UNFCCU, Agenda 2063 for Africa, Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS). This importance of heritage is increasingly through when the BIOPALT, in collaboration with The United Nations Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization -UNESCO agencies, other United Nations (UN) agencies, civil societies, and academia, work in transboundary cooperation to facilitate, among others, Natural Sciences projects (Water and Ecological Sciences) and all the Sustainable Development Goals-SDGS targets (UN 2018).

Discussion

Overview of the intersections between cultural tourism, peace, and conflict and highlight the dimensions of gender, demographics, biodiversity conservation, and others relevant to the future of climate security practices in the Sahel. Moreover, diverse and convergent angles from the patterns retracted from the two cases will help debate the plausibility of the sustainable livelihood creation around cultural tourism in the Sahel.

Wild seed banking, carbon capture and storage (CCS) via afforestation, and payment for ecosystem services are crucial adaptation strategies for heritage sites against the impacts of climate change. This is where Ecolodge comes in. Ecolodges can contribute to climate change adaptation. Creating new parks and gardens, conserving trees, and replanting trees at heritage/cultural tourism sites mean maintaining and increasing vegetation to capture and store carbon as biomass. Through photosynthesis, the vegetation in the destination could offset carbon dioxide emissions by absorbing CO₂. Forrest system acts as wind/storm breaks to help reduce the impacts of stormy solid winds and flooding on heritage structures. Ecolodge represents a typical accommodation with several characteristics: a) utilizing locally sustainable and recyclable construction materials, b) landscaping and gardening, c) using green technologies, d) employing local people at fair wages in ecolodge development and management, and as interpretive nature guides', e) thereby demonstrating that cultural tourism is a more sustainable long term way to earn income than destroying or altering habitats for short term gains. Henceforth, gardens, the principal component of Ecolodge, are designed for visitors to experience native environments. *Ecolodge* is an opportunity to educate locals and visitors on the importance and value of a healthy ecosystem and describes how to best enjoy the area without impacting it (IFC, 2004; Osland & Mackoy, 2004). Ultimately, the existence of numerous plants varieties in ecolodge environments provide a significant key to Carbon capture and storage

The stakeholders involved in heritage/cultural tourism and providing environmental services get paid for doing so. Those who benefit from environmental services pay for their provision. The payments can go to private landowners (including buffer zones and biological corridors) and Protected Area management budgets. Providers and Sellers of ecosystem services are local stakeholders such as farmers, ranchers, community residents living in the visited areas, tour guides and interpreters, heritage site managers, and the like. Buyers and Users of ecosystem services are recreational users (eco-tourists), international tour operators or airlines, private ecolodge managers, local government agencies, and water companies. Henceforth, cultural tourism is a means for sustainable development achievement involving all shareholders aiming at environmental sustainability while promoting economic inclusion and social cohesion.

Conclusions/ wider implications of findings

This study assumed and found that cultural tourism, as an essential component, despite challenges, presents opportunities to reach sustainable development goals. In the case of the Sahel, national security, human security, and ecological security are impendent to the flourishing of cultural tourism. Therefore, there is an urgent need for those concerned with and responsible for managing African heritage to consider the implications of climate security for how they undertake this task.

Thus, deliberate development of the cultural tourism sector should be recognized as a critical strategy for implementing climate adaptation's loss and damage in discourse. Henceforth, this

paper recommends, to succeed in the loss and damage, massive communication and awareness campaigns to provide financial and technical assistance, improve local governance, build trust between different stakeholders, identify common goals and strategies, and incorporate monitoring of results into participative decision-making processes.

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