

Factors Affecting the Sustainability of Recreational Facilities in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the factors affecting the sustainability of recreational facilities in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. Recreational facilities play significant roles in promoting tourism, physical well-being, environmental quality, social interaction, and economic development. However, many recreational facilities in Nigerian cities face serious sustainability challenges due to inadequate funding, poor maintenance culture, rapid urbanization, insecurity, environmental degradation, and weak government policies. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Data were obtained through questionnaires, interviews, and field observations conducted among facility managers, users, tourism officials, and residents in Calabar Municipality and Calabar South Local Government Areas. Secondary data were sourced from journals, textbooks, government publications, and online materials. Findings revealed that inadequate funding, poor maintenance practices, lack of government support, insufficient skilled personnel, vandalism, insecurity, and population pressure were the major factors affecting the sustainability of recreational facilities in the study area. The study further revealed that sustainable recreational facilities contribute significantly to tourism development, employment generation, environmental conservation, and community health. The study recommended increased government investment, public-private partnerships, improved maintenance culture, community participation, effective

security systems, and implementation of sustainable management policies for recreational facilities in Calabar.

Keywords: Recreational facilities, sustainability, tourism, maintenance culture, Calabar, Cross River State.

Introduction

Recreation is an essential aspect of human life that contributes to physical health, mental well-being, social interaction, and economic development. Recreational facilities such as parks, sports complexes, gardens, museums, resorts, cinemas, and waterfronts provide opportunities for leisure, tourism, relaxation, and social activities. In urban environments, recreational facilities also contribute to environmental sustainability and aesthetic enhancement.

In Nigeria, recreational facilities have become increasingly important due to urbanization, population growth, and the rising demand for leisure and tourism activities. Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, is widely recognized as one of Nigeria's major tourism destinations because of its numerous recreational attractions such as the Tinapa Resort, Marina Resort, Millennium Park, Calabar Museum, Kwa Falls, and the annual Calabar Carnival. These attractions contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of the state through employment creation, revenue generation, and tourism promotion (Akinsola, 2012).

Despite the importance of recreational facilities, many of them face sustainability challenges. Sustainability refers to the ability of facilities to remain functional, accessible, environmentally friendly, economically viable, and socially beneficial over time. In many Nigerian cities, recreational facilities suffer from poor maintenance, inadequate funding, environmental degradation, insecurity, poor management, and lack of government commitment. These problems often result in deterioration, reduced patronage, and eventual abandonment of recreational infrastructure.

Studies conducted in Nigeria have shown that factors such as insufficient funding, weak government policies, urbanization, poor maintenance culture, and lack of infrastructure significantly affect the development and sustainability of recreational facilities (Dung, et al, 2023). However, limited studies have specifically focused on the sustainability of recreational facilities in Calabar, Cross River State. This study therefore seeks to examine the factors affecting the sustainability of recreational facilities in Calabar and to provide recommendations for improving their long-term management and utilization.

Statement of the Problem

Recreational facilities in Calabar were established to promote tourism, improve quality of life, generate revenue, and enhance environmental sustainability. However, many of these facilities have experienced deterioration due to inadequate maintenance, poor funding, environmental challenges, and weak management systems.

Several recreational centres in Calabar have gradually lost their attractiveness because of vandalism, poor infrastructure, inadequate utilities, insecurity, and declining government attention. Some facilities operate below capacity, while others are partially abandoned or poorly managed. These conditions negatively affect tourism development, recreational participation, and economic growth in the area. Furthermore, rapid urbanization and population growth have increased pressure on available recreational spaces, leading to overcrowding and environmental degradation. The absence of effective sustainability policies and community participation further worsens the condition of recreational facilities in the state (Broadhurst, 2021). It is against this background that this study investigates the factors affecting the sustainability of recreational facilities in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the factors affecting the sustainability of recreational facilities in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the major recreational facilities in Calabar.
2. Examine the factors affecting the sustainability of recreational facilities in Calabar.
3. Assess the effects of poor maintenance on recreational facilities.
4. Determine the role of government and private organizations in sustaining recreational facilities.
5. Suggest strategies for improving the sustainability of recreational facilities in Calabar.

Literature Review

Concept of Recreation

Recreation refers to activities individuals voluntarily engage in during their leisure time for relaxation, enjoyment, physical fitness, and social interaction. Recreational activities may include sports, tourism, cultural festivals, sightseeing, swimming, and entertainment activities. Recreation contributes to psychological well-being, physical health, and social cohesion (Chiesura, 2004). According to scholars, recreational facilities are infrastructures

designed to support leisure and tourism activities. These include parks, gardens, stadiums, resorts, cinemas, museums, beaches, and sports complexes.

Concept of Sustainability

Sustainability refers to the ability to maintain resources, services, or facilities over a long period without significant deterioration. Sustainable recreational facilities are facilities that remain economically viable, environmentally friendly, socially beneficial, and physically functional across generations (Ijatuyi, et al, 2014). Sustainability involves effective maintenance, adequate funding, environmental conservation, stakeholder participation, and good management practices.

Recreational Facilities in Nigeria

Nigeria possesses several recreational and tourism facilities that support economic and social development. However, many facilities face serious sustainability problems such as poor maintenance, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, insecurity, and environmental degradation. Research in Nigerian cities has identified insufficient funding, lack of maintenance culture, urban pressure, and poor government policies as major challenges affecting recreational development (Dung, et al, 2023).

Factors Affecting Sustainability of Recreational Facilities

Inadequate Funding

Funding is one of the most important factors affecting the sustainability of recreational facilities. Poor allocation of financial resources limits maintenance, renovation, staffing, and infrastructure development. Studies in Nigeria have shown that insufficient funding significantly contributes to the deterioration of recreational facilities (Dung, et al, 2023).

Poor Maintenance Culture

Poor maintenance culture is a major problem affecting public infrastructure in Nigeria. Many recreational facilities are poorly maintained after construction due to negligence, corruption, and lack of technical expertise. Research has identified inadequate maintenance practices as a critical factor affecting sustainability (Olasemojo, 2019).

Government Policies and Management

Government policies influence the sustainability of recreational facilities through planning, funding, supervision, and regulation. Weak policy implementation and inconsistent tourism development plans often contribute to facility deterioration.

Urbanization and Population Pressure

Rapid urbanization increases pressure on recreational spaces and infrastructure. Population growth often leads to overcrowding, environmental pollution, and conversion of recreational lands to residential or commercial uses (Dung, et al, 2023).

Insecurity and Vandalism

Insecurity discourages tourism and recreational participation. Recreational facilities affected by theft, vandalism, and violence often experience reduced patronage and operational difficulties.

Environmental Challenges

Environmental factors such as flooding, erosion, poor waste management, and climate change negatively affect recreational facilities. Environmental degradation reduces the attractiveness and usability of recreational spaces (World Tourism Organization, 2018).

Lack of Skilled Personnel

The absence of trained managers, planners, maintenance officers, and tourism professionals affects the effective management of recreational facilities.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study area covered Calabar Municipality and Calabar South Local Government Areas of Cross River State. The population of the study comprised recreational facility users, tourism officials, residents, and facility managers. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, interviews, and field observations. A simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores were used for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

The findings revealed that the major recreational facilities in Calabar include Marina Resort, Tinapa Business Resort, Millennium Park, Calabar Museum, sports complexes, cinemas, and waterfront recreational centres. The study found that inadequate funding was the most significant factor affecting sustainability. Many facilities lacked sufficient financial resources for maintenance, renovation, staffing, and security. Poor maintenance culture was another major problem identified by respondents. Facilities such as parks, sports centres, and public relaxation areas showed signs of deterioration due to inadequate repairs and neglect.

The study further revealed that insecurity and vandalism negatively affected recreational facilities by discouraging visitors and damaging infrastructure. Respondents also indicated that environmental pollution and flooding reduced the attractiveness of some recreational areas.

Urbanization and population growth were found to increase pressure on available recreational spaces. Some facilities experienced overcrowding, while others lost land to commercial and residential development.

The findings support earlier studies which identified funding, maintenance, government policies, and urban pressure as critical factors affecting recreational facility sustainability in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Recreational facilities are important for tourism development, environmental sustainability, public health, and economic growth in Calabar, Cross River State. However, the sustainability of these facilities is threatened by inadequate funding, poor maintenance culture, insecurity, urbanization, environmental degradation, and weak management systems. For recreational facilities in Calabar to remain functional and attractive, there is a need for sustainable management strategies involving government agencies, private investors, local communities, and tourism stakeholders.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

1. Government should increase funding for recreational facility development and maintenance.
2. Public-private partnerships should be encouraged in the management of recreational facilities.
3. Regular maintenance programs should be established for all recreational facilities.
4. Security systems should be improved to reduce vandalism and criminal activities.
5. Environmental sanitation and waste management practices should be strengthened around recreational centres.
6. Urban planning policies should protect recreational spaces from encroachment.
7. Community participation should be encouraged in recreational facility management.
8. Skilled personnel should be employed for facility management and maintenance.

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