

# Tourism as a driver for sustainable urban development: A global case study

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As civilisation evolves, cities have become the driving force of the global economy, contributing more than 85% of the global GDP. From Shanghai to New York to London, megacities have become global hubs for technology, culture, fashion, financial services, and innovation, attracting capital and talent from all over the world.



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Cities, especially urban environments, are the drivers of innovation and economic development. As the world becomes wealthier and more technologically advanced, the importance of cities to the economy is increasing even further. This is because people living close together in these environments have been the driving force behind these developments since the beginning of civilisation.

Future growth, however, is expected to come from emerging markets. With the majority of the populations of Asia and Africa still living in rural locations, the forecast is that we can expect to see up to two billion new urban citizens by 2040. Therefore, there is a pressing need to build modern cities across these regions.

## Benefits of building modern cities

Building modern cities brings a plethora of benefits. First, cities attract more businesses, thereby boosting their economies and reducing unemployment. This is because businesses tend to flock to cities due to the availability of resources and infrastructures needed to thrive.

Second, cities serve as the bedrock of industrialisation. Historically, cities grew because of the influx of people who desired to take advantage of the factory jobs available in urban areas. This extended industrialisation as more industries were established to cater to the growing population's needs.

Furthermore, cities play multifaceted roles in all societies. They are drivers of economic growth and development. Additionally, cities tend to attract the best talents due to improved public transport, a mix of cultures, job opportunities, and easy access to shops and amenities.

## **Building sustainable cities**

**The case of Dubai:** Dubai provides an excellent case study of how tourism can contribute to building a sustainable city. Within two and a half decades, Dubai has emerged as the most influential and popular destination in the tourism industry.

Structures like the Burj Khalifa and Burj Al Arab, coupled with gorgeous beaches, high-end hotels, and a robust transportation system, have made Dubai a favoured destination for tourists. The city has also invested heavily in infrastructure to encourage more visitors. In 2019 alone, Dubai hosted 14.9 million overnight visitors, contributing significantly to its revenue.

**The case of Cross River State:** Cross River State in Nigeria, for example, has been involved in the tourism business since the pre-colonial era. Despite several strides and developments, it has also receded in growth in the last few years. However, the state remains a preferred destination due to its alluring green canopies of trees, excellent hotels, great food, diverse culture, and hospitable people.

One of the key drivers of tourism in Cross River State is the Carnival Calabar, which serves as a catalyst for the state's economic growth and development.

## **Repositioning the Carnival Calabar**

The Calabar Carnival is a yearly celebration held in Cross River State, Nigeria, in December. It was established by the former governor of Cross River State, Donald Duke, as a way to celebrate Christmas.

Considering the economic impact of the Carnival, there is a need to reposition the brand to deliver more value. The current content of the Carnival Calabar and festivals, for example, has the capacity to meet this target, but some gaps need to be addressed.

Some of the strategies to be adopted include:

- Identifying revenue areas of the event,
- Positioning the event as an international event held in the state,
- Getting strategic partnerships in the private sector by ensuring their ROI and
- Designing programs for events to deliver quality presentations that can attract an international audience.

## **Investing in carnivals and festivals**

Investing in carnivals like Carnival Calabar and its festivals, for example, is a strategic move towards promising returns. With an estimated asset worth a staggering 2 billion dollars, the carnival offers a secure foundation for investments. It has demonstrated consistent growth and success over the years, attracting both local and international audiences.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Ephraim Egbas is a budding entrepreneur, innovator-in-chief and seasoned broadcaster. She attended the University of Calabar and graduated with a degree in English and literary studies.

Bristling with a passionate love for creativity, innovation, and ideas/product optimisation, she began a marketing consulting firm (Okhna Consult) and brand development, which currently is the marketing company in charge of one of Africa's biggest tourism events - Carnival Calabar amongst other event and tourism brands. She is also vice president of White-busePR- one of Nigeria's leading public relations companies.

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