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Tourism Event Centres and Socio-Economic Development in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigated the role of tourism event centers in fostering socio-economic development in the Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study determined the major types of tourism events staged at these centers, examined their socio-economic impacts on local dwellers, and evaluated supporting tourism services which has sprung around the facility centers. A descriptive survey research design was employed through using primary and secondary sources of data. This study targeted a study population of 2,250, while a sample size of 751 respondents was drawn and 730 out of 751 questionnaires were obtained and analyzed with descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product Moment correlation (PPMC) using the aid of SPSS. Results indicates that the event centers staged events such as weddings (20.14%), conferences and seminars (17.26%), cultural festivals and carnivals (15.34%), exhibition and trade fairs (12.33%), music concerts (9.72%). This had created employment opportunity, enhanced business operations, patronages to catering services, hotels and transport firms, increased the level of small-scale entrepreneurial businesses, as well as enhancement of tourist inflow. Support businesses that evolved around the event centers include event planning firms, decoration businesses, photographers, caterers, security firms, entertainment services, car hire services. PPMC showed that there is a high degree positive relationship between the type of tourism events hosted and socio-economic development in the study area ($r=0.784$, $p=0.001$), but there are many constraints that has impeded the performance of these event centers to include poor infrastructural development, unstable electricity supply, security problems and high costs of operation. The study concluded that these tourism event centers serve as catalyst for employment generation, entrepreneurial growth, tourism enhancement and socio-economic development in Calabar Metropolis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, events centers play a substantial role both directly and indirectly in National and local economies through revenues generated, hospitality development, infrastructure upgrading and community development. Countries such as USA, UK, Germany and Singapore has integrated exhibition and convention centers as a strategy to encourage regeneration in city economy and promote global competition. The Las Vegas Convention Center, USA, ExCeL London, UK are examples of internationally renowned exhibition and convention centers that attract huge number of tourist each year and generates enormous multipliers in form of spending by tourist through lodging, transport, shopping, and trade. Likewise, Messe Frankfurt in Germany and the Marina Bay Sands Convention Center in Singapore are examples of how event tourism can improve international branding and networking while fostering trade between countries and supporting innovation and diplomacy between peoples of diverse cultures. Such event centers in developed countries are perceived as economic contributors, both to GDP and employment as well as catalysts for urban regeneration.

Developed countries have developed comprehensive policies and institutions to facilitate the fullest realization of socio-economic benefits of event centers. Canada and Australia for example; work in collaboration with investors and destination management organizations in the creation of world-class event venues for international conferences, sporting events and festivals while Japan have utilized events in enhancing their national cultural heritage, technological innovation and regional economic development strategies in tourism. These countries make substantial investment in transporting networks, technology, environment, and security for enhanced competence of event centers and economic sustainability. Increasingly, a sustainable approach in managing events centers have been embraced in developed countries, through 'green building' strategies, environmental waste management policies, and use of renewable resources and reduced energy consumption (Mair and Smith, 2021). Integration of tourism events centers into the wider development policies in developed nations signify the role event centers play in creativity, employment and enhancing destination competitiveness.

In contrast to the developed nations, developing and under-developed countries tend to face problems that undermine the full extent of the contribution of event centers to socio-economic development. Although countries in Asia, Latin America and parts of the Middle East are becoming increasingly interested in investing in convention centers and cultural complexes; there is still lack of development in terms of infrastructure, implementation, finance, and institutions as well as political stability. In countries like India, Brazil and Indonesia, event centers has become a major avenue in contributing to cultural dissemination and enhancing urban tourism although consistency of maintenance, transport facilities and governance remains a problem that hinder its full realization and sustainability (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2022). Furthermore, there is usually a skewed development distribution, whereby benefits are concentrated on investors in event facilities while ordinary citizens receive only negligible part of the socio-economic rewards, this reduces the development effectiveness despite growing global demand for recreational, tourist and congress events.

In the African context, events centers are recognized as powerful tools to diversity economy, promoting cultures and for urban development. Countries like Rwanda, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa and Egypt, are keen in establishing their image as competitive conference and exhibitions centers and as centers for culture and tourism events. Rwanda for instance has made enormous investment in Kigali Conference Center to

foster tourism and MICE in Africa, so does South Africa with her convention centers like the Cape Town International Convention Center with events such as conferences, international sports events, hospitality sector etc. Kenya and Ghana has equally developed strategies that includes promoting their countries as destinations that can enhance investment flows, diplomatic relationships and regional competition through events tourism. Nevertheless, many of these African nations face lack of proper infrastructures, unstable security, uncertain policy directions, limited financial resources, and weaknesses in destination marketing, which hinder events centers to contribute effectively towards inclusive socio-economic development across the continent (Ndlovu and Rogerson, 2021).

In Nigeria events centers has increasingly been established and utilized to improve the economy, urban development and tourism promotion with great impact on business-related events (conference, exhibitions etc), festivals and concerts etc. Numerous event centers have been developed in all major cities including Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt and Calabar. Nigerian tourism and hospitality industry embraces event tourism more than ever due to its potentials of creating jobs, fostering entrepreneurship and branding the nation's tourism. Recent institutional reforms, such as the enactment of Nigerian Tourism Development Authority (NTDA) act in 2022 have helped to regulate event centers and tourism service providers, which in turn increase service delivery and international competence. Holding international tourism and culture events also increase Nigeria's global exposure and attract investors to the hospitality sector (BusinessDay, 2025).

However, Nigeria's tourism event centers still face numerous challenges of deficient transport infrastructure, irregular power supply, insecurity, poor urban planning, low level of maintenance and inconsistent policies. The challenges limit efficient and sustainable functioning of event centers. Despite challenges some cities have exhibited a greater tendency towards using tourism event centers for social and economic improvement. Calabar metropolis for example has been a tourist destination recognized globally as a land of great culture and wonderful hospitality and known for hosting International Calabar Carnival. In the recent years, the city had witness huge developments of tourist infrastructure, including, Calabar International Convention Center (CICC), Tinapa resort, Metropolitan Hotel Conference Hall, Channel view event marquee and other convention and events centers which aims at turning the city to major business events destination in West Africa.

Calabar Metropolis provides a good vantage point from which to examine the interplay between tourism event centers and socio-economic development because it is the administrative and tourism, cultural capital of Cross River State and tourists, investors, business travelers and cultural visitors throng the city from different regions of Nigeria and other parts of the world. As the host of a multitude of tourism destinations such as the Marina Resort, the Slave History Museum, the Cultural Centre Complex and the Carnival Calabar that runs yearly, the tourism attractions of the city have indeed boosted tourism. There is demand for event services due to these features of Calabar Metropolis. As tourism event centers are within Calabar Metropolis there are jobs generated in such places, expanded hospitality services, and provision of transportation services, catering services and entertainment services, amongst others. Event centers promote social cohesion and reinforce social identity, foster entrepreneurship, support the growth of micro and small enterprises through increased demand, but event centers in Calabar Metropolis suffer from operational and infrastructural problems that might limit their developmental impacts.

Most studies conducted in Nigeria concerning tourism have concentrated on tourism development, cultural festival and hospitality growth within the context of different locations without a specific empirical focus

on tourism event centers' impact on the socio-economic development of the Calabar Metropolis in Nigeria. This is evidenced by the extensive literature on the Carnival Calabar, destination marketing and potentials of Nigeria but without sufficient emphasis on the socio-economic impacts of tourism event centers, specifically, employment generation, micro and small business growth, infrastructure, neighborhood livelihoods and development of related support services with the presence of tourism event centers or their structural shortcomings. Therefore, there is a vacuum on the magnitude and dimension of tourism event centers' contribution to socio-economic development of Calabar Metropolis that should be addressed through empirical investigation to inform and guide investors, policymakers, planning professionals and other stakeholders.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper is to appraise the impacts of tourism event centers on the socio-economic development of Calabar Metropolis in Cross River State, Nigeria. Objectives include: identify tourism activities that occur at various tourism event centers in Calabar Metropolis, determine the impacts of tourism event centers on the socio-economic lives of residents of Calabar Metropolis and identify tourism-supporting businesses and activities emerging around the location and operation of tourism event centers within the Metropolis. Through this paper, a thorough overview of the role and shortcomings of tourism event centers will be established.

2. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

2.1 Activities and Services Carried Out in Event Centres

The establishment and growth of event centres are crucial features of the current tourism and hospitality sector, as event centres serve as multi-purpose venues for a variety of events ranging from conferences and exhibitions to weddings and festivals, as well as religious ceremonies, concerts, festivals, and corporate functions. Their impact on the tourism industry and other economic activities, far beyond leisure and fun, goes as far as destination marketing, city planning, heritage protection, and promotion of economic growth (Bladen, Kennell, Abson, & Wilde, 2022). Across the globe, event centres play an indispensable role in fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing between and among countries through major events, trade fairs and academic conferences. These events usually bring together participants from different social and cultural backgrounds (Schofield, Crowther, Jago, Heeley, & Taylor, 2018). Getz and Page (2019) have described event centres as “knowledge hubs” to promote business transactions and collaborations and encourage innovation among visitors from different corners of the world. Reflecting changing tastes and demand of tourism consumers, the nature of event activities has shifted toward more experiential and thematic forms, utilizing interactive technologies, local performances, and individualized services for greater customer involvement (Adewole & Olagunju, 2019). The advent of COVID-19 accelerated the integration of the internet into the event sector to provide an opportunity for hybrid and virtual events, consequently making it more convenient and global (Nykolaiszyn, 2022). These trends of service delivery in events through virtual interactions, digital ticketing, and live-streaming redefined service provisions within event management (Dwyer, 2021). From an economic viewpoint, event centres also create multiplier effects that can be of benefit to the hotels, transport services, catering firms, and retail businesses, generating employment and strengthening the economic viability of communities (Page & Connell, 2020; Forson, 2023). Furthermore, event centres support community engagement and encourage investments. They enhance social unity and cultural identities through interactions, collaborations and International expos (Akwa & Femi, 2018; Hall & Williams, 2020). However, concerns over disparities in benefit distribution

persist as local communities receive little financial benefit from event related business investments, mainly due to inequalities within the socio-economic structure of the host country, and dominated by the elite (Connell & Rugendyke, 2021).

In West Africa and specifically Nigeria, event centres have been identified as crucial for socio-economic exchanges, as they are used to stage weddings, political and religious ceremonies, seminars and trade exhibitions as well as entertainment activities that epitomise West African cultural diversity and social dynamics (Akwa & Femi, 2018; Adegbite & Okorie, 2019). Recent studies confirm that changes in lifestyle have led to the rise of theme and experiential events in West Africa to cater for young people and the new middle class (Adewole & Olagunju, 2019), whereas the pandemic prompted hybrid event formats throughout the region (Njoku, 2020). Event centres have a key role in stimulating SMEs by generating employments in areas such as event planning, decoration, security services, photography, catering, Ushering and transportation services (Adegbite & Okorie, 2019; Ekechukwu & Adanikin, 2022). In Nigeria, event centers are now expected to integrate services such as catering, audiovisual services, decoration, security, parking space, and hospitality services as clients' demands become higher, prompting more professionalism in event industry (Okafor, 2021). Nevertheless, there are significant limitations such as power outages, poor security conditions and infrastructure, and escalating operational costs in the sector, and this inhibits their efficiency and competitive potential at the global market (Adu-Ampong, 2021; Akinola, 2023). There has been an increase in focus on sustainability, inclusivity and environmental friendliness within the event industry, leading to greater use of renewable energy, adoption of greener practices and efforts to curb waste as well as make events accessible for the disabled (Jones, 2021; Seyfi et al., 2023). In Cross River State, events centres such as the Calabar International Conference Centre, Marina Resort and U.J. Esuene Stadium have transformed the state into a top tourism and cultural center in Nigeria (CRS-IPB, 2022; Anwuri & Odor, 2022). The popular world class Calabar Carnival draws many people and generates revenue for the state and numerous employment opportunities for the locals and other participants (Pulse Nigeria, 2025; Nairametrics, 2025; Kluemedia, 2025; Forson, 2023). The major obstacles to the growth of event centers within Cross River State include security issues, power supply challenges and increasing operating costs (Olawale & Fashina, 2020), but a significant potential for hybrid and virtual events and for sustainable event management still exists to enhance the position of Cross River State as a renowned tourist and hospitality hub within Nigeria (Cross River State Government, 2025).

2.2 Types of Employment Generation Provided in Event Centres

Event centres are now important sources of employment generation in the tourism, hospitality and creative economies sectors. They provide employment opportunities not just as venues for conferences, festivals, wedding, exhibition, sports and entertainment activities, but they create direct and indirect employment which can support both local and national economy (Getz & Page, 2024). Event centres world-wide can provide jobs for many groups of workers in areas of event managers, hospitality workers, audio visual technician, security workers, marketers and administrative workers whose functions all ensure smooth execution and guest satisfaction. Large convention and entertainment centers in USA, UK, Spain and Italy create millions of jobs for many years through hospitality, transport, retailing and tourism industry (Getz & Page, 2024). While event managers provide all kind of co-ordination between client and the location and hospitality services (including caterers, desk and housekeeping workers) that enhance visitor experience (Forson, 2023; Prescott, 2024); technical staffs like lighting technicians, stage and audiovisual engineers are necessary for execution of an event (Ong & Lockstone-Binney, 2017); security staff are essential for

effective security management (Chhabra & Sodhi, 2016); administrative workers on the other hand work on administration and marketing functions of event management business including reservations, advertising, promotion, sales, revenue generation, sponsorships (Mupashi, 2021; Ramadhan & Wibowo, 2022). In most African countries, especially countries like South Africa, Ghana and Kenya event centres have played vital role on youth employment and entrepreneurial development both in the formal and informal sector (Dowson, Albert & Lomax, 2022; Eposi, 2021). The rapid growth in event tourism in African cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Accra, Kumasi, and Nairobi has stimulated job creation in the areas of catering, transportation, entertainment, and hospitality service that produce ripple effect to allied industry (Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2019; World Bank, 2021).

In Nigeria, event centers are integral to the social-cultural and economic life in cities like Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt and Calabar. Events held in Nigeria often revolve around weddings, religious ceremonies, concerts, political rallies and corporate gatherings (Adegbite & Okorie, 2019). Popular Nigerian "owambe" cultural values have boosted jobs for many occupations in catering, decorating, music, photography, ushering and logistics businesses. Many Nigerians are engaged in formal and informal sectors because of the need for such occupations (Olawale & Fashina, 2020). Many temporary/seasonal job openings for cleaners, park attendants, event workers, security guards and other unskilled workers are created due to the organization of large conferences and entertainments events (Forson, 2023) and the application of technology to create job opportunities related to live streaming, virtual event and online promotion (Okafor, 2021). In Cross River State in particular in cities like Calabar, event centers are a key sector for job creation through conferences, carnivals, festivals and entertainments at such places like the Calabar International Conference Center, Marina resort, and the U. J. Esuene stadium (Anwuri & Odor, 2022). The 2024 Carnival is estimated to create thousands of jobs in hospitality, transport, security, catering, costume design, entertainment, choreography, media, artisanal and retail sectors (Pulse Nigeria, 2025; Nairametrics, 2025; CRS-IPB, 2022). Additionally, The 2024 Calabar Carnival attracted extensive media attention which created work for marketers and media professions (Kluemedia, 2025). Informal activities like street vending, and transport by tricycle also increase significantly during such mega events (Forson, 2023). Nonetheless, operational challenges and issues of infrastructural deficiency (unstable power, cost of operation and insecurity) remain limiting factors to job creation in event centers in Nigeria and Cross River State (Olawale & Fashina, 2020). However, innovations such as hybrid event technology and practice, green event operations are now creating opportunities related to information and technology sector and Green/sustainable event business with emphasis on efficiency, waste management and energy sector (Nykolaiszyn, 2022; Seyfi et al., 2023; Cross River State Government, 2025).

2.3 Socio-economic Impact of Tourism Event Centers in Destinations

Tourism event centers have a substantial socio-economic impact globally, as they provide jobs, foster tourism development and urban renewal, promote cultures, and shape destinations (Prescott, 2024). Economic factors significantly shape the number of people who utilize event centers; while prosperous periods tend to be associated with higher expenditure in the wedding, business, exhibition, and entertainment sectors, periods of economic recession negatively affect event usage and operational income (Prescott, 2024). Advances in technology such as AR and VR systems, combined with digital ticketing and hybrid event formats, have helped to create more engaging experiences for users and expand access to events globally (Webb, Hibbard, Dawson, van Dam, Asher, & Parker, 2023; Fisher, 2021). In India for

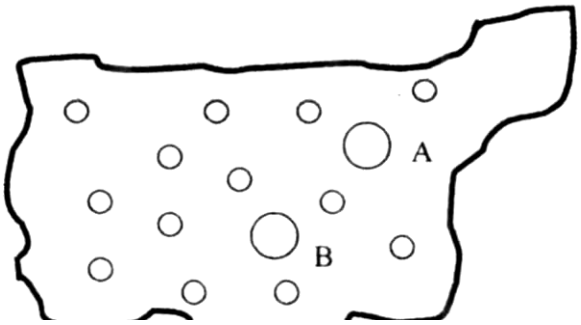
example, the trend towards destination weddings and increased numbers of international conferences has fueled a greater demand for convention and banquet centers, while concerns for environmental protection are making for a more conscious movement towards green event practices such as the use of organic food providers, effective waste management practices, and the adoption of energy saving measures in event centers (Srinivasan, 2020; Bunlueng & Butcher, 2022). Socially, culturally, and economically, events centers in West Africa are sites where a range of events, from weddings and parties to conferences, concerts, and trade fairs are held (Adejumobi, 2020). Increasing levels of urbanization, economic growth, and disposable incomes have led to demand for modern event venues in these cities while cultural traditional norms drive event participation in places such as Nigeria and Ghana (Akande, 2019; Adeyemi, 2017; Ajayi, 2018). Growing international trade has increased the need for well-managed and globally-recognized event venues in this part of the world (Ojo, 2020) and technology is having an increasingly important impact on the planning of events through online ticketing systems and integrated planning tools, as well as with the use of hybrid event format to increase accessibility and improve operational efficiency (Kusi, 2021). Several studies have also noted that accessibility, hygiene standards, good quality facilities, security, and pricing are critical factors affecting event center competitiveness (Agyeman & Asiedu, 2019; Mensah, 2018; Nkanga, 2019). Globally, thousands of jobs and billions in revenue has been generated through event centers such as the Las Vegas Convention Center and the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Center by tourism expenditures, shopping, use of transportation, and accommodation services (Nolan, 2020; Victorian Government, 2016; Dwyer, 2022; Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, 2019).Urban transformation and increased tax revenue are also reported impacts of event infrastructure such as ExCeL London (Dall'Orso, 2023; Deloitte, 2015). Event centers may also promote local identities, encouragesocial interaction, and ensure cultural heritage conservation by hosting cultural events, festivals, and exhibition; this also helps promote understanding and dialogue between cultures and enhances pride in a host community (Stevenson, 2022; Allen, Harris & Jago, 2022; King, Shipway, Lee, & Brown, 2021; Micallef, 2020). Major international event venues such as the Olympics and the World Expo raise the profile of host cities internationally and create opportunities for diplomatic engagements and development of international tourism (Greenwell, Danzey-Bussell & Shonk, 2024; Gold & Gold, 2024; Vancouver Convention Centre, 2021).

Event centers in Nigeria, just as across West Africa in general, remain important drivers of local economies, regional tourism development, and cross-cultural interaction. Several studies confirm the stimulation of local businesses within the hospitality, retail, transport and entertainment sectors while creating new jobs and investment opportunities through spending by visitors to the events held at these venues (Abubakar et al., 2022; Adeniyi & Ojo, 2018). Cultural and economic exchange between West African nations is strengthened by conferences, festivals and trade fairs that are hosted at the country's events centers (Okorie & Okenwa, 2021; Adedokun & Ibe, 2020). In Nigeria event centers are key to the development and branding of host cities and many, such as the ones that hosted music festivals, trade fairs, conferences, weddings and cultural displays, have placed Nigeria at the forefront as a cultural and business destination in the region (Klinmalai & Kaewlai, 2023; Akintunde & Ojo, 2021; Okoro & Eze, 2019). Similarly, in Cross River state event centers such as the Calabar International Conference Center (CICC) and the venues that are used during the annual Calabar carnival, contribute immensely to state-generated revenue, growth in the tourism industry and job creation (Okon & Etim, 2018). An increase in visitors means higher spending in hotels, food services, transportation and shopping, thus spurring economic growth in local areas (Eze et al., 2019). Event centers in Cross River State are not only providers of employment opportunities but are also drivers

of the development of both direct and indirect employment for people working in fields such as event planning, security, decoration, entertainment and food services, with particular advantages for the employment of young people and women (Orok et al., 2020). Moreover, tourism events such as the Calabar Carnival are responsible for bringing thousands of Nigerian and international visitors to the state every year and for solidifying its status as one of Nigeria's key tourism destinations (Essien & Ekpenyong, 2017). As well as an economic boost, events centers enhance cultural identity, promote cultural exchange, facilitate social interaction and ensure the preservation of local traditions through events and functions hosted in these communal areas. As is common with large infrastructure development, construction and operation often involve upgrades to local infrastructure, including roadways, security and lighting systems (Ibanga, 2021). Nonetheless, constraints such as poor existing infrastructure, high operational costs and security concerns often continue to hinder the sustainability of events centers in Nigeria and other less developed parts of the world.

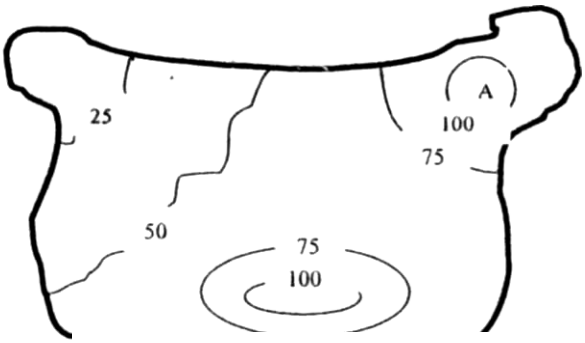
2.5 The growth pole theory

The Growth Pole Theory is a concept which was created by Franois Perroux (1950) to justify how economic development proceeds from the existence of specific "poles" and extends to nearby regions through a network of interdependent economic actions. The theory argues that the whole nation is not going to be equally developed; instead, some propulsive industries which have a lot of linkage with other industries have to take precedence and act as catalyst centers for the whole economy to develop. According to Boudeville (1966), the poles of growth usually concentrate on major centers where expanding industries provoke further economic development in their periphery and sphere of influence, andDarwent (1975) describes the propulsive industries as industries characterized by a high scale of production, growing at high rates and with intensive connections to other parts of the economy. Also,appalraju and Safier (1976) argue that high growth rate, innovation and concentration of capital invest ments and urbanization are necessary elements for the growth pole theory to be successfully implemented and the theory is used here to justify thattourism event centers in the Calabar Metropolis may beconsidered a growth pole because it attracts visitors, investments, hotels, transport systems, shopping outlets, recreation and financial institutions. Such activities consequently create jobs, stimulate the economy and foster economic development across surrounding communities.

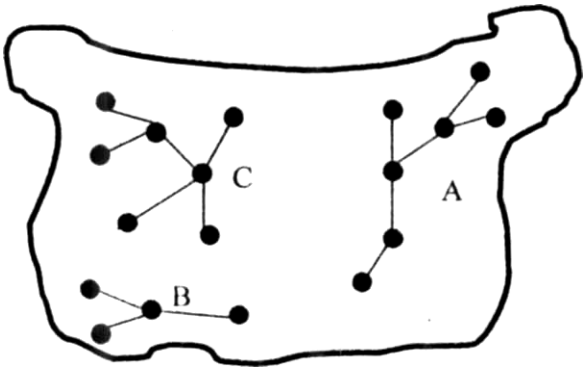


Central Place

Function size of circle indicates number of

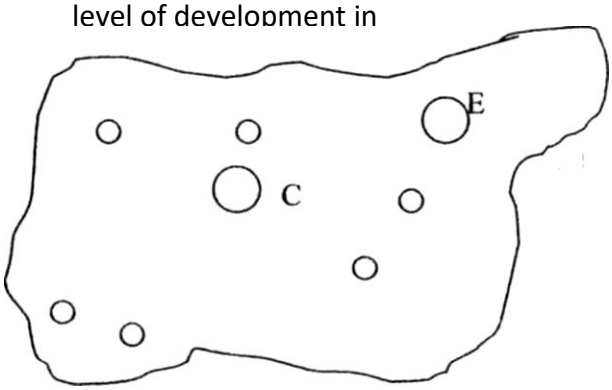


Location on the development surface isoclines show the level of development in



Model location

Lines indicate predominant



Population growth rate size of circle indicates population

FIG 2: Growth centres

Source: Moseley, M. J. (1974:90)

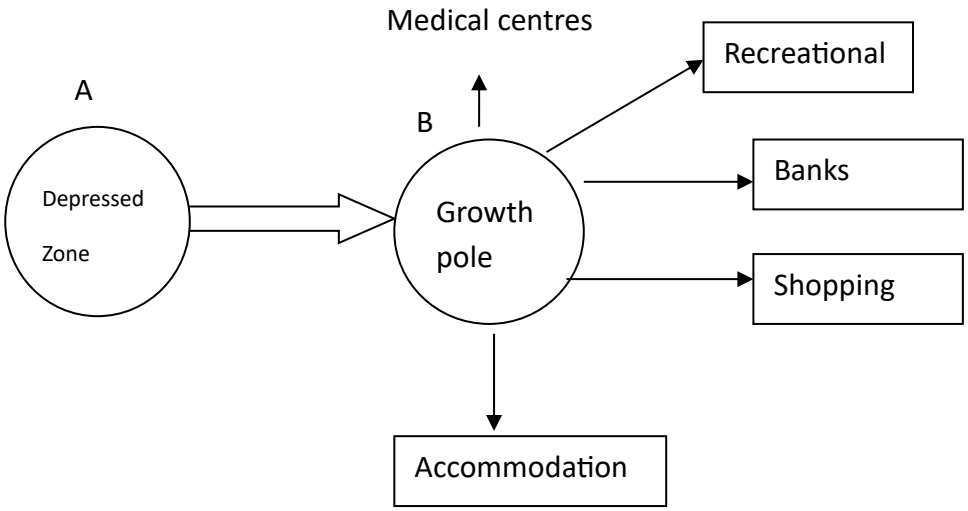


FIG. 3: The phenomenon of growth pole development

Source: Perroux (1950:56)

2.6 Model of spatial interaction

The Spatial Interaction Theory was developed by Ullmann (1956) to explain how people, goods, and services move between places and based on the principles of complementarity, intervening opportunity, and transferability. The theory states that an interaction can take place if one place can serve the demands of the other, which is known as complementarity. The complementarity is derived from natural, cultural, and economic differences between regions and forms the basis of transportation and exchange systems (Plane, 2020). Ullmann further elaborates that, for a two-places interaction, interaction may be constrained by intervening opportunities which implies that the existence of an alternative closer and having a similar service/commodity can weaken the desirability of the more distant place. This implies that the volume of interaction will be proportional to the opportunities at the destination and inversely proportional to the number of alternative opportunities en route (Al-Khudairy, 2024). Transferability is the extent to which an interaction between two points is influenced by the distance and the costs involved in transportation and implies that even with the presence of complementarity between two places, high transportation cost or a long distance may restrain interaction and consequently a substitute will be sought. Derudder and Taylor (2018) point out that this theory largely deals with the physical movement of goods and people, whilst Haynes and Fotheringham (2020) relate the theory to the Gravity Model whose idea is that interaction is inversely proportional to distance and directly proportional to the size of the population. In relation to this paper, Spatial Interaction Theory indicates that the attraction of visitors, business, and investment to the tourism event centers in the Calabar Metropolis is due to the availability of complementary tourism services and facilities there and interaction between visitor and event centers is facilitated or constrained by access to the event centers through transportation infrastructure, services (e.g., hotels, restaurants, and leisure activities).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State Nigeria, made up of Calabar Municipality and Calabar South Local Government Areas. The metropolis was chosen for this research as a tourism and cultural center and a venue that host major tourism event centers like Monty Suites Calabar, Channel View Event Marquee and Metropolitan Hotel Calabar, which facilitate major conference, exhibition, festival and social-economic events in the region. The descriptive survey research design was employed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from respondents on the aspects of tourism activities, socio-economic effects on the neighborhood, emerging tourism services to support event centers, opportunities for employment, promotion of culture and other factors that affect the efficacy of the tourism event centers. Both primary and secondary data sources were employed for this research. Primary data was collected from survey questionnaires, which were administered to visitors to the event centers, business operators and residents within the locality while secondary data was collected from the event center managers records, books, magazines and other related materials concerning tourism and social-economic effects of the locality.

The paper's target population consists of 2,250 respondents selected from different tourism event centers to include event visitors, business operators, and residents in the research area. With a decision to employ one third (1/3) of the total population size, the sample size was 751, and this number was chosen to enable an equal proportion of respondents be taken from the selected event centers. 730 valid questionnaires were successfully obtained from the field; thus, the response rate was approximately 97.2% whilst 21 were lost or incomplete and thus excluded. The methods of sampling applied are the Purposive, Convenience, and random sampling techniques. The Purposive sampling technique was used to select the event centers and other stakeholders as a result of their importance in research, Convenience sampling was used for event visitors due to their availability, and random sampling for the residents and business operators in order to promote equal opportunity to be chosen as a respondent. Open-ended questionnaires were used to gather primary data on variables that the respondents experienced and thought of when it comes to tourism activities and socio-economic activities of the research area.

The primary and secondary data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistical tools through the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The frequency and percentage measures were utilized to present and analyze respondents' demographic characteristics and other data, while the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was utilized to test the hypothesis of no significant relationship between the variables, i.e., tourism activities, socio-economic impacts of event centers and factors that militate against the effectiveness of tourism event centers in the research area.

4. RESULTS

Based on the responses in Table 1, event centers were used for a variety of socio-cultural, business and recreational events. Weddings were the dominant events occurring at the tourism event centers, constituting 20.14%. This signifies the cultural and social aspect of marriages attracting customers and enhancing tourism-related services. The occurrence of conference/seminars at 17.26% signifies the growing business, academic and professional value of event centers while cultural festivals and carnival at 15.34% signifies cultural promotion and recreational activities within the event center. Exhibitions and trade fair occur at 12.33%, signifying growing business/commercial and entrepreneurship related activities. Similarly, music

concert at 9.72%, fashion show at 7.12%, religious events at 6.16% signify entertainment/creative industry value and religious activities of tourism event centers respectively. Low responses were obtained for political meetings 5.34%, education workshop at 3.15%, sport related events at 1.51% and community social gathering at 1.23%. Lastly, "other activities" at 0.70% indicates that there are occurrences of other miscellaneous events at the center. In summary, it can be concluded that there is the presence of varied social, business and leisure activities at the paper's tourism event centers.

TABLE 1: Tourism activities carried out in event centers

S/N	Tourism activities carried out in event centers	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Weddings	147	20.14
2.	Conferences and seminars	126	17.26
3.	Cultural festivals and carnivals	112	15.34
4.	Exhibitions and trade fairs	90	12.33
5.	Music concerts	71	9.72
6.	Fashion shows	52	7.12
7.	Religious gatherings	45	6.16
8.	Political meetings/rallies	39	5.34
9.	Educational workshops	23	3.15
10.	Sports-related events	11	1.51
11.	Community social gatherings	9	1.23
12.	Any other (Event types hosted, visitor attendance)	5	0.70
	Total	730	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The responses in Table 2 indicates that the tourism event center makes an impact on the socio-economic advancement of the paper area's dwellers both directly and indirectly. Improved business opportunities made the highest contribution with 19.20%. It implies that with event center, opportunities have arise for local citizens to invest in businesses such as retail business, decoration, photography, entertainment and event planning services. Local catering services received increased patronage with 17.10%, a higher patronage for hotels and accommodations received 14.40%. Thus it implies the extent of impact the event center had on the hospitality business. Transport services gained 13.40% with increase in petty trade and hawking receiving 10.50%. This implied the high flow of tourists and people as they are facilitated in

transportation and provision for small item sales during the event center program. Increase property values also received 8.20%, followed by increased inflow of tourists (5.50%), nightlife/entertainment business (4.80%), increased profile of local businesses (3.40%), connection with diaspora (2.70%) and minimal contribution in terms of urban development (0.40%). 0.30% of residents stated that the event center had no impact on their socio-economic status.

TABLE 2: Socio-economic benefits the event centers contributed to residents in the paper area

S/N	Socio-economic benefits	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Improved business opportunities	140	19.20
2.	Growth in local catering services	125	17.10
3.	Boost to hotel and accommodation services	105	14.40
4.	Increased patronage of transport services	98	13.40
5.	Rise in small-scale vending and hawking	77	10.50
6.	Higher property values near event centers	60	8.20
7.	Increased tourism inflow	40	5.50
8.	Promotion of nightlife and entertainment	35	4.80
9.	Enhanced visibility of local businesses	25	3.40
10.	Strengthened diaspora connections	20	2.70
11.	Stimulation of urban development	3	0.40
12.	None of the above	2	0.30
	Total	730	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The new tourism-related supports that has arisen as a result of the event centers located within the metropolis (as reflected by table 3) show that these centers have an undeniable capacity to induce business and service generation around their presence like Monty Suites, Channel View Hotel, Metropolitan Hotel and many others located in Calabar. The largest support service category is that of the event planning services that constitute 18.50%. This has obviously risen due to the increased popularity of events such as wedding receptions, corporate functions, conferences and even festivals; giving rise to the demand for event planning services. Closely following at 16.40% is catering business which is directly influenced by the increase in service delivery functions such as provision of meals, beverages and guest reception during an event. Decoration/ interior design business at 14.40% is equally significant as decor firms are on demand in giving

event centers a more attractive facade to be viewed by guest and invitees, and car hire and rental service at 12.30% has grown due to the need for transportation of guests, guests of honor and even the event teams to and fro the event centers. Photography and videography business at 10.30% has risen with growing events. Emerging services that are closely behind include Entertainment agencies providing such services as provision of DJs, comedians, Masters of Ceremony (MCs) among others (7.50%), Security services (6.20%) as people worry about safety issues surrounding events, souvenir shops/ craft markets (5.50%) that profit from the presence of visitors during events, travel agency/ tour operators services (3.40%) which confirms that the event centers lure tourists into the metropolis, logistical and cleaning services (2.70%) that ensures efficient and smooth operation of event centers, online ticketing/ event promotion service (2.10%).

TABLE 3: Emerging tourism-support services developed due to event centers in the metropolis

(Monty suites Calabar (event attendees), Channelview, Metropolitan hotel)

S/N	Tourism-support services	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Event planning companies	135	18.50
2.	Catering businesses	120	16.40
3.	Decoration and interior design firms	105	14.40
4.	Car hire/rental services	90	12.30
5.	Photography and videography outfits	75	10.30
6.	Entertainment agencies (musicians, DJs, comedians)	55	7.50
7.	Security service providers	45	6.20
8.	Souvenir shops and craft markets	40	5.50
9.	Travel agencies and tour operators	25	3.40
10.	Logistics and cleaning services	20	2.70
11.	Online ticketing and event promotion platforms	15	2.10
12.	Others (specify	5	0.70
	Total	730	100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

To investigate the hypothesis, data gathered in the field were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Desciptive statistics of frequency tables and percentage were employed to represent the socio-demographic attributes of the respondents and the main variables of paper. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the strength and nature of relationship between the tourism activities being undertaken in the tourism event centres and the socio-economic impact of such centers on residents of the paper area, and the impediments to their effectiveness in stimulating socio-economic development in Calabar Metropolis. Hypothesis of the paper was that there is no statistically significant relationship between the tourism activities undertaken in tourism event centers, the socio-economic impact of these centers on residents, and the impediments that limit their effectiveness in the paper area. Acceptance or otherwise of the hypothesis was based on correlation coefficient (R value) and probability value (p value) at 0.05 level of significance.

The results in table 10 demonstrated that there is relationship between tourism activities undertaken in tourism event centers and their socio-economic impacts on residents of the paper area. From the Pearson product moment correlation analysis, the R value is 0.784 and p value is 0.001, which strongly suggests a very strong positive and highly statistically significant relationship exists between the variables. This implies that the more vibrant the tourism event centers the greater the benefits the residents will derive from it. Such benefits included jobs creation, business opportunities for residents, transport services and associated trade, food services and allied activities as well as tourism related incomes within the paper area. Descriptive statistics for variables of the paper showed a mean value of 39.9000 for socio economic activities and 39.3000 for tourism event activities as indicated in appendix III, both having relatively high standard deviations implying divergent opinions of the respondents in the paper area. At the 0.05 level of significance the probability value is 0.001 which is less than 0.05, meaning the relation observed is not by chance alone.

Also, table 11 show the relationship between the socio-economic impacts of tourism event centers and the impediment to the effectiveness of these tourism event centers in stimulating socio economic development in the paper area. The Pearson product moment correlation analysis showed that the R value is 0.863 and p value is 0.001, indicating a very strong and highly statistically significant relationship between the variables, which mean that despite the fact that tourism event centers contribute enormously to the socio-economic welfare of residents, impediments such as the poor state of infrastructure, unreliable power supply, insecurity, cost of operation and lack of adequate support from the government play a very big role in its limitation in stimulating socio- economic development. Appendix IV further demonstrated the mean value of 42.3222 for socio economic impact and challenges, showing that respondents highly agreed to both the positive and negative aspect of tourism event centers in the paper area. Since the p value 0.001 is less than 0.05 level of significance the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The paper however concluded that there is a significant relationship between the tourism activities undertaken in tourism event centers, their socio- economic impacts on residents and impediments to their effectiveness in Calabar Metropolis.

TABLE 4: Results of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between tourism activities carried out in the various tourism event centres and the socio-economic impact of these centres on residents in the paper area

Parameter	*N*	*r*	*p-value*
tourism activities carried out in the various tourism event centres	10		
		0.784**	0.001
Socio-economic impact of those centres	10		

Source: Data analysis, 2026

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics output for Hypotheses I

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Socio-economic activities	39.9000	28.11267	11
various tourism events	39.3000	25.82441	11

Table 5: Correlations

		Socio-economic activities	various tourism events
Socio-economic activities	Pearson Correlation	1	.784
	Sig. (2-tailed)		001
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	7223.800	2253.300
	Covariance	780.433	136.034
	N	11	11
various tourism events	Pearson Correlation	.784	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.737	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	1171.400	7113.100
	Covariance	137.044	777.800
	N	11	11

TABLE 6: Results of Pearson's Product Moment correlation analysis between socio-economic impact of tourism event centres and the challenges limiting their effectiveness

Parameter	*N*	*r*	*p-value*
socio-economic impact of tourism events centres	11		
		0.863^{ns}	0.001
Challenges limiting the effectiveness of tourism event centers	11		

Source: Data analysis, 2026

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics output

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Socio-economic impact	42.3222	24.87999	11
challenges limiting the effectiveness of tourism event centers	42.3222	26.47271	11

Table 8: Correlations

		Socio-economic impact	challenges limiting the effectiveness of tourism event centers
Socio-economic impact	Pearson Correlation	1	.863**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	4883.000	752.000
	Covariance	532.000	707.875
	N	9	11
challenges limiting the effectiveness of tourism event centers	Pearson Correlation	.863**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	4752.000	6023.00
	Covariance	707.875	763.650
	N	11	11

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.3 DISCUSSIONS

The outcomes of this paper complement the existing literature on the activities and services performed at event centers as well as the employment and socio-economic opportunities generated at tourist destination sites. Tables 2, 3, and 4 show that dominant activities undertaken in the paper areas include weddings, conferences, seminars, cultural festivals, exhibitions, concerts, and religious activities; an observation that lends support to Bladen, Kennell, Abson, and Wilde (2022) on the multifunctionality of event centers as tourist attractions, including as conferencing, festival, entertainment and socio-cultural activities sites. Weddings and cultural festivals being identified as dominant activities in the paper sites is consistent with studies such as those conducted by Adegbite and Okorie (2019) and Akwa and Femi (2018) who stated that event centers in Nigeria and West Africa are key locations for celebrations, cultural events, and business activities. Event centers' roles as "knowledge hubs" that host conferences, exhibitions, business meetings and networking opportunities are further in sync with Getz and Page (2019). In addition, increased growth of supporting services like event management companies, catering services, decoration firms, photography studios, transport services, and entertainment businesses at event centers, supports the work of Page and Connell (2020) and Forson (2023) who reported that multiplier effects of event centers contribute significantly to hospitality, transport, retail and the creative sectors. Also, increased event services like catering, logistics, A/V services, security and digital marketing at event centers as stated by Ekechukwu and Adanikin (2022) and Okafor (2021) confirm the increased demand for event services in Nigeria. The presence of benefits like better business opportunities, increased hotels patronages, more business for caterers, and increase in transportation demand as well as tourism flow are consistent with Dwyer (2021) who said that event tourism spurs economic growth by attracting visitor spending and demanding more services. There is a strong and significant relationship between tourism in event centers and socio-economic benefit, and event centers contribute much in terms of job creation, business growth and economic activity (Hall & Williams, 2020).

Further support for the outcome of this paper can be found in the use of Growth Pole theory and spatial interaction theory as theoretical frames. Growth Pole theory was enunciated by Perroux (1950) and it indicates that economic growth emanates from a few selected areas called poles that induce spread effects to surrounding regions, which can either be spread to related economic sectors or spread to other spatial regions. Event centers located in the Calabar Metropolis, function as growth poles that are able to attract visitors, money, industries, and services that are closely linked to the events they host, resulting in the provision of employment opportunities and welfare gains to inhabitants of the city. The expansion of tourism support activities such as catering business, transportation companies, entertainment outfit and decor firms is a result of spread effects, both to backward and forward linkages of related sectors. The paper supports Boudeville (1966) and Darwent (1975) on the ability of a growth pole to create spread effects. The paper equally upholds Appalraju and Safier (1976) on the role of investment concentration, innovations and urbanization in stimulating development. The outcome is also supported by the Spatial interaction theory of Ullmann (1956) who developed the complementarity principle which means people and businesses move from one place to another because of the existence of specific complementary features that attract them. The increased visits of travelers for weddings, festivals, conventions, conferences and exhibitions to the events centers reflects the movement of persons and commodities within and outside a spatial unit. The findings of this paper supports Haynes and Fotheringham (2020) which shows the relationship between space interaction, accessibility and the size of cities (population distribution). Accessible areas in urban

areas, such as Calabar, with appropriate supporting facilities in proximity attract the movement of travelers and economic activity. However, in terms of transferability, poor infrastructure, unreliable electricity, security challenges, high cost of operations and poor marketing at event centers may limit the level of visitor flow and overall development benefits that could be derived from event centers as observed by Ullmann (1956).

5.3 Conclusion

Tourism event centers in Calabar Metropolis have successfully attracted diverse tourism and socio-cultural activities such as weddings, festivals, exhibitions, conventions, concerts, religious activities which has in turn created job opportunities, induced high level of tourism flow, better business activities for tourism support firms including catering services, event management companies, transport services, decor firm, entertainments and photography firms, as well as improving the welfare of local people. A strong and significant relationship was found between tourism at event centers and the well-being of local inhabitants in Calabar Metropolis, demonstrating the ability of event centers to act as major driving forces in business, economics, and urban development in general. Nonetheless, obstacles such as inadequate infrastructures, unreliable power supply, security issues, high cost of operating, and lack of government support among other things have limited their ability to fully harness their development potential. The paper has confirmed that event centers in Calabar Metropolis are indeed growth poles and centers for spatial interaction, facilitating a high level of economic activities, socio-cultural events and contributing to local and regional development.

1. The Cross River State Government (via the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, the urban development authorities, etc.), within 2-3 years, should endeavor to improve the ancillary infrastructural facilities around tourism event centers through road renovation and improvement of accessibility, ensure a regular supply of electricity and potable water as well as strengthen the security systems of the event centers in Calabar Metropolis; so as to ensure optimal performance of the event centers, tourism development and sustainable social and economic growth in the paper area.
2. Event center owners and private investors should, within 1-2 years, endeavor to upgrade the complementary services of the tourism event centers by investing in digital event platforms, hybrid event services, modern audiovisual technologies, online event ticketing and an environment-friendly event practice. This should be complemented by an inclusive engagement with entrepreneurs and stakeholders in event ancillary services, such as catering services, decoration services, event transport services, entertainment, and hospitality services in the development and improvement of these services as a way of generating employment.

3. All stakeholders involved in the tourism event centers, such as youths, event managers, caterers, entertainers, photographers, service providers, etc. (via the Federal Ministry of Tourism, State Tourism Bureau, Local Government authorities etc.) should, on a continuous basis, organize training, entrepreneurship and capacity development programs for persons and youths employed in the event centers so as to enhance their capacities and improve the delivery of event services in Calabar Metropolis

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