TRADITIONS AND BAMILÉKÉ CULTURAL RITES: TOURIST STAKES AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract. According to the World Travel Tourism Council, tourism is the first income-generating activity in the world. This activity provides opportunities for export and development in many emerging countries, thus contributing to 5.751 trillion dollars into the global economy. In 2010, tourism contributed up to 9.45% of the world GDP. This trend will continue for the next 10 years and tourism will be the leading source of employment in the world. While many African countries (Morocco, Gabon etc.) are parties to benefit from this growth, Cameroon, despite its huge touristic potential, seems ill-equipped to take advantage of this alternative activity. In Cameroon, tourism is growing slowly and is little known by the local communities which depend on agro-pastoral resources. The Bamiléké of Cameroon is an example faced with this situation. Nowadays in this region located in the western highlands of Cameroon, villages rich in natural, traditional or socio-cultural resources, are less affected by tourist traffic. This is probably due to the fact that tourism in Cameroon is sinking deeper and deeper into a slump, with the degradation of heritages, reception facilities and the lack of planning. In this country known as "Africa in miniature", tourism has remained locked in certain areas (northern part), although the tourist sites of Cameroon are not as limited as one may imagine. Due to this stagnant vision, Cameroon in general and the Bamiléké region in particular, run the risk of losing her tourist identity, thereby forcing local actors to limit their income only to the exploitation of biological resources (forest, local fauna), agriculture and handicraft. Faced to such a situation, the central interest of this article is to present the tourism heritage of the Bamiléké people, likely to support the development of sustainable tourism in this community. In addition to this, the paper aims to develop cultural tourism, this with a real involvement of local communities.

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Introduction

For the Bamiléké people who depend mostly on farming, tourism remains a luxury and sometimes is accused to be a fanciful or unreliable activity. This activity, which had grown in Europe at the turn of the 18th and 19th century, has experienced a spectacular boom in many parts of the world. To illustrate this growth, the World Tourism Organization (1997) has estimated the number of international tourist arrivals at 612 million, five times more than it was 30 years ago (112.8 million in 1965). Cameroon is recurrently lauded for its touristic potential but tourism only contributes 1.5% of the GDP in this country and the volume of jobs created is only about 48,000 for a population of nearly 19 million inhabitants. These data render dumb the real possibility of Cameroon coming out from this slump tourism. In Bamiléké region dilapidated by the degradation of agricultural soils on the slopes, by the discontinuity and decline of the enclosure landscape formerly with an attractive originality, and even more by the mass exodus of its young population in quest for wellbeing or facilities present in the cities; tourism especially ecotourism can best offer the opportunities to supplement or replace the faulty practices for local or regional development.

The certainty or near certainty of such a postulate, is that nowadays, science raises awareness and raises the real problems of society. Research have been done and showed that western Cameroon in general and the Bamiléké region in particular, replete with an impressive heritage, enabling to respond distinctively to the criteria and the needs of thousands of tourists in the world. By connecting the Bamiléké tourism potential and development of the region, this contribution aims to present the Bamiléké heritage as a pledge or stakes to support the activities of conservation, sustainable management and development of local tourism. The final idea is to exploit the Bamiléké tourist richness, for a concerted and sustainable development.

1. The Bamiléké region: background and touristic resources

1.1. A brief historical point

According to Barbier (1976), the term Bamiléké is born of historical contingencies related to colonial penetration and applies to all populations of the entire plateau with the same name. Indeed, the German settlers ascending through the crest and by the Ridge of the Bamboutos mountains discovered the bowl of Dschang (Upper Nkam basin). The interpreter who accompanied them designated populations of the area as "Ba mbu leke" which means people of the valley. This term has been applied to the entire geographical area and the first German text that mentions the term Bamiléké is from 1905 through the narrative of the expedition of
mount Manengouba. The Bamiléké region was very early distinguished from other mountainous regions by several elements among which 6 are most important:

- The importance of farmland that characterized the peasantry
- very high densities
- social organization in the kingdom
- resistance to French colonization that affected the entire plateau
- the building style, which contrasted sharply with that of other regions
- dynamism and integration to the market economy from coffee farming

The word "Bamiléké" thus refers to the inhabitants of this west region which stretches between 700 and 2740 meters of altitude. Before the Germans arrived, this people were warriors. Despite the recurring disputes, they are paradoxically united by a tradition, a culture and probably common rites. With an area of 6196
Traditions and Bamiléké cultural rites: tourist stakes and sustainability

75 km², the Bamiléké region is located between 5°-5°45N and 10°-11°E. Administratively, it is bounded to the north by the Grass fields (North West region), to the South by the Coastal region, to the West by the South West region and to the East by the Bamoun country (Fig. 1).

1.2. Current state of the premises

Early studies in Bamiléké area (Hurault, 1966, Dongmo, 1981, Barbier, 1983) highlighted the knowhow of the Bamiléké people, presenting them as "mountain dweller entrepreneurs". No doubt those at the time, the Bamiléké whose dynamism is not doubted had established an excellent knowledge and agrarian civilization, allowing taming their environment which is a complex of highlands with irregular shapes. In this parts of Cameroon where lived about 770,627 inhabitants in 1976 (Census 1976), dynamic men rich in cultures have shaped their environment, by adopting and sharing their knowledge for the future.

Nowadays with over 1,264,964 inhabitants (3rd RGPH, 2010), the dynamism claimed, is misinterpreted and remains questionable if we stick to the comments and surveys done in this Bamiléké region. It must be said that the current Bamiléké region is less attractive. The panoramic view of landscape described as unique in tropical zone (Hurault, 1966), reveals the bare slopes dotted with luxurious buildings, visually with the contours which mask the groves, sacred forest and some relics of discontinuous enclosures that resist degradation with time.

Given the realities observed in the villages, those who bet on the stability of Bamiléké landscape, are poorly rewarded. The situation becomes more complicated when in agriculture; some villages (Bangou, Batié, Baham ...) locally present alarming signs of degradation leading to poverty. Concerning the
degradation of arable land of Bamiléké mountains, studies conducted by Fotsing (1993), Tchindjang (1999) and CIPCRE (2001) on the processes of erosion in the highlands of western Cameroon, permit to evaluate and say that the Bamiléké farmland have lost about 50% of their fertility on the slopes, 35% in the Dry Valleys and 15% in hydromorphic valleys.

After the outstanding success, we are talking increasingly of failure, disappointment or "tragedy" of Bamiléké society.

Despite this confusion of a generation doomed to be equally open to a multicultural and multi-dimensional world, it is logical to say that the Bamiléké of Cameroon, have in their knowledge, a tradition and a culture that are strong revealers of hope, progress or development.

2. Methodology and presentation of the tourism resources in Bamiléké region

2.1. Methodological approach

Inspired by some observations done in other countries, we embarked in reading, seeking to identify all the tourism resources of the western highlands of Cameroon. This preliminary work was conducted in some libraries and specialized reading centers (CARPE, CIPCRE, CEW, the universities of Yaoundé I and Dschang). Regarding the collection of field data, we limited ourselves to the chiefdoms of the first degree. In these chiefdoms which occupy since about 11 millennia their current space (Tchawa, 1995), observations and interviews with resource persons (local chiefs and community leaders) helped to list the existing resources and make the typology of tourism heritage. These data compiled and analyzed statistically, permitted us to classify, to think back to a world where man by his know how, can exploit natural and socio-cultural resources for an equitable world and sustainability.

2.2. The tourism resources of the Bamiléké region

This paragraph aims at listing some natural and semi-natural heritage, the socio-cultural resources and other cultural resources with non negligible values.

The table above shows the importance of tourism resources of the Bamiléké region. His analysis allows us to measure the weight of cultural heritages in the villages. Given these data, statements and any local observation, the proportion of traditional and socio-cultural resources is a good indicator of tourist capacities in the region with a good proportion of 57.89%. This proportion is in very good position, although some natural heritage (waterfalls, lakes, rocks, mountains, etc...) assessed at 26.31% are more noticeable. Divided into four main groups (Figure 2), the tourism resources of the Bamiléké region has an obvious diversity.
Table 1: some tourism resources in the Bamiléké region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural Heritage</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Sociocultural Values</th>
<th>Touristic Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caldera.</td>
<td>Bamboutos Mountain</td>
<td>Living space, escape, meditation</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountainous massifs</td>
<td>Bangou, Batié, Bapa etc.</td>
<td>Living space, escape, meditation</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred rock</td>
<td>Baham (fovu) Bapa etc.</td>
<td>Place of worship and meditation</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakes</td>
<td>Baleng, Dschang</td>
<td>Living space, escape, meditation</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waterfalls</td>
<td>Metche, mami water etc.</td>
<td>Place of worship and meditation</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semi-natural heritage</th>
<th>location</th>
<th>sociocultural Values</th>
<th>Touristic Values</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enclosures</td>
<td>Relics grove throughout the Bamiléké region</td>
<td>identity, education and jurisdictional</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred forest</td>
<td>Within the whole Bamiléké area</td>
<td>identity, place of worship, contemplation and meditation</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio cultural heritage</th>
<th>location</th>
<th>sociocultural Values</th>
<th>Touristic Values</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sully cult</td>
<td>Within the whole Bamiléké area</td>
<td>cultural and ritual element of communication between the living and the dead ancestors</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funerals</td>
<td>Within the whole Bamiléké area</td>
<td>cultural element using their last respects to the Fallen</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural festivals</td>
<td>throughout the Bamiléké region</td>
<td>identity element of social hierarchy</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional ceremonial dress</td>
<td>throughout the Bamiléké region</td>
<td>element of social hierarchy</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Specific to each group</td>
<td>identity element</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art and cultural monument</td>
<td>throughout the Bamiléké region</td>
<td>identity element</td>
<td>Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree of peace</td>
<td>throughout the Bamiléké region</td>
<td>symbol of peace to the attention of all foreigners</td>
<td>Ecotourism value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jujube</td>
<td>throughout the Bamiléké region</td>
<td>Used as a symbol of peace and has emollient properties</td>
<td>Ecotouristic and food value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kola nuts</td>
<td>throughout the Bamiléké region</td>
<td>Used as a symbol of peace, nutritional value and food value sales</td>
<td>-Ecotouristic commercial food value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphial palm wine</td>
<td>Extraction in raffia valleys</td>
<td>Used as a symbol of peace and has emollient properties</td>
<td>-Ecotouristic - food value.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other cultural heritage</th>
<th>location</th>
<th>sociocultural Values</th>
<th>Touristic Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural heritage</td>
<td>location</td>
<td>sociocultural Values</td>
<td>Touristic Values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land / living space</td>
<td>Bamiléké country</td>
<td>Living space and worship</td>
<td>financial value “priceless”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Njombissie Petcheu, field survey (August 2010 to February 2012)
The figure above, presents the major types of resources available. Their understanding is genuinely possible if specific analyzes are made.

2.2.1. The Natural Touristic Resources
Visiting the Bamiléké villages, one can see the natural landscape mainly consisting of rocks, caves, peaks, lakes and waterfalls that are reminiscent geomorpho sites. These elements of the natural milieu that are easily exploited for tourism still keep a certain cultural value.

- Rocks and caves in Bamiléké region
  The most famous are: the cave of Fovu (Baham), meuhgam (Baleng), the three large rocks of Bapa, the rocks of "tournant Z" in Bangou. Sometimes qualified as "death rock" (*Loung gwou in Bapa language*), these wonders of nature, give pleasure to all visitors who approach them. Culturally, they are places of meditation, escape, purification and other animist cults.

- The waterfall
  As in the caves, waterfalls with around 20 to 30m of height, are places of worship and other rituals (*Métré, Lingang, Tchui...*). Here, waters breaking span
of boulders that make up great jets of cascades in all seasons. These places called "sacred", as the lakes keep a high cultural and aesthetic values.

- Hill and Lakes

Resort areas and leisure facilities, these Bamiléké hills are places of collective memories and privileged sites for ecotourism. Located mostly over 1500m (Bamboutos 2740m, Bangou 1924m, Bangam 1700m, Bandjoun 1669m etc.), the access is by hiking. Each of the sites mentioned here, offers a picturesque setting that varies with the seasons. Some peaks have crater lakes, located more than 1000 m altitude; this is the case of the famous Baleng Lake (photo 5).

In addition to these natural resources specific to mountain regions, there are many other resources combining human knowledge and the wonders of nature.

2.2.2. The semi-natural Resources

On the Bamiléké plateau, are distinguished anthropic vegetation with representative functions and identity. These are the groves and sacred forests which according to the location, have a "social and educational function" (teaching, ritual or religious...). Thus, Baleng, Bandjoun, Bafoussam and many other localities, have thick green leafy sacred forests, which are quiet and mysterious. These semi-natural environments are according to Djongang (2004), the homes of the guardian
spirits of the villages. They symbolize royalty and remain with the enclosures, the main indicators of the Bamiléké Chiefdoms. These places, which usually surround the public square of the village, are equipped for major initiation ceremonies (Tso dancing in Bandjoun, Nyang Nyang in Bafoussam, cocoyam day in Bangoua, “Madzong and Kun'gang” in Bangou). By their sacred character, these places are refuge for contemplation, meditation or for sacrifices. Each village possesses at least one sacred forest surrounding the festive place. In addition, these heritages are land markers and also play food roles.

2.2.3. The traditional or socio-cultural resources. These resources are materials and immaterial.

- **The immaterial heritage**
  
  Since 1999, UNESCO has undertaken a comprehensive program for identifying, defining and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage of humanity. Among them, there is language, dances, ceremonies and traditional rites (Tchindjang et al., 2008). In Cameroon and in Bamiléké country, these immaterial heritages exist, but people are slow to take advantage of these traditional riches. If cultural identity is the foundation of life, groups of African people in general and Bamiléké in particular, should find in their traditions, language, dances and other rituals what to light up with while participating in the sustainable development of their society. It is worth mentioning that among the entire intangible cultural heritage, language remains the most complex. It is owned by anyone and it is through it that knowledge and local knowhow is transmitted. Language lies at the heart of the construction of the cultural identity (Tchindjang et al. 2008). These authors believe that "language" as heritage, is not a function of the speaking subject, but the product that the individual passively records and that “it alone can neither create nor modify it.”

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<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dances and inductions as intangible heritage in the Bamiléké region</td>
<td>Initiation to dance to the Bamiléké traditions</td>
<td>Dance Tso, a cultural ceremony organized in Bandjoun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Looking at the same direction, Humboldt once again cited by Tchindjang et al. (2008), says: "language shapes and expresses the spirit of a people." This cultural heritage has the dual characteristic of social representations and Philippe Blanchet said: "Language is not just a communication tool; it is also a way of being in the World. Every language has two basic functions, a communicative function that helps connect people and communities, an existential function that helps to differentiate them". Languages as cultural roots of people can develop and save many other intangible cultural heritages such as the oral tradition, song, dance types, rituals and festive events (photos 6abc).

These photos show the plurality of intangible cultural heritage in Bamiléké region. Without claim to go around all the riches, readers can appreciate some dignitaries of the villages, performing traditional rhythms with outfits specially made for this. These elements are an expression of the identity of this people, going with an aesthetics and tourism value.

• **Some physical heritage in Bamiléké region**

The notion of "heritage" (Latin *patrimonium*, inheritance of the father), is not limited to the strict framework of intangibles. It has also since 1972 (UNESCO) material elements like flora and fauna. In the cultural Bamiléké area, heritage is defined by extension as the set of property inherited from the family.

• **The cultural and tangible heritage**

These various heritage, make the originality of the Bamiléké people. This is a traditional and cultural variety that originated in the creation of Bamiléké chiefdoms. In this part of Cameroon, artisans of all kinds (Founders, weavers, blacksmiths, embroiderers, sculptors etc...), work for the radiation of an ancestral knowledge. To measure the cultural value of these objects, no regrets are shown attending in the monarch induction ceremonies, the funerals and festive ceremonies (photos 7 abc).
Valuables illustrated above (Zeu ndop "fabric royal ", Sa'ak-leuk "ponytail ", Kwak “necklace” and the big crown made of feathers of Turaco which is a species of rare bird), are the pride and wealth of the Bamiléké. This richness extends to collections of objects (sculpture, painting, etc...) still serving in the expression of a particular traditional and unique power (8 photos abcd)

The tourist attractions mentioned above inspired the establishment of the touristic map of the entire Bamiléké country (Figure 3).
3. Heritage, tourism issues and prospects for sustainable development in Bamiléké area

The exhibition of tourism resources of the Bamiléké area is indicative of a desire, a project and more awareness that needs to be found in many other minds. The construction of museums nowadays, reflects the leadership of conservation monitoring of these resources.

Indeed, the ancestors of the Bamiléké have provided guidance, traditional and cultural values that align with the needs of development. These values are references to a development or concerted management of heritage, showed landscapes, monuments, art objects, traditions and cultures as potential stakes for ecotourism and sustainable development. Also, three decades after the report of cultural erosion, the launch of the project road chiefdoms (Kamdem and Tchindjang, 2011) shows that awareness of people and elites of the Bamiléké diaspora.

3.1. Mountain societies and tourism.

Mountain societies have kept their ancestral values and traditions remain fairly strong and centralized. Leaders exercise authority recognized by their subjects into town. This authority reflects both cultural identities as a symbol of unity of nationals of the same tribe. The key lies in the traditional organization of society into the kingdom. These chiefdoms are undoubtedly of cultural tourist attractions in three ways:

- The Bamiléké kingdoms are built on a unique architectural style and very symbolic (quadrangular conical roof). This architecture is a sign of power and elitist dignity.
- Next to this architecture, we have museums that are sites of deposition and preservation of the remains of the Bamiléké tradition.
- Added to this folk art, figurines, masks and others that reflect and symbolize the cosmogony of the Bamiléké people.

Particularly in the Bamiléké region, the natural and cultural heritages are favorable for the development of tourism. We must say that despite these natural and cultural advantages, misuse and disrespect of existing resources leads to threats, hence the controversy and criticism on the emergence of local tourism.

3.2. Critical aspects and development of tourism in Bamiléké region

- Some critical aspects

One of the difficulties that the mountain region of western Cameroon must face is the threat linked to the dynamism of its population. This threat accompanied by an unbridled exploitation of resources, is already weighing on the local environment. For this, the planning of ecotourism in the region should include an
analysis of the expected volume of flow of visitors and its potential impact on the environment. As shown in Figure 4, it is certain that tourists can cause negative impacts on the environment of the territories visited.

![Figure 4: Potential Threats due to Tourism](image)

The reading of this figure does not favour the development of local tourism. It allows us, however, to use different approaches for the enhancement and mobilization of local tourism growth.

- **Prospects for development of ecotourism in Bamiléké region**

Without being exhaustive, an inventory of tourism resources sounds like an emergency for the preservation of natural and socio-cultural heritage. This is also what Tchindjang (2012) defended by stigmatizing the sub-exploitation of mountainous resource in Cameroon. Also, the Defferre law (1983) called decentralization law give more responsibilities to local governments. This responsibility facilitates the management of assets and therefore the emergence of local development. Similarly, the actors involved must develop a compliance of objects identified and classified as heritage tourism. Far from the innovations already known, the Bamiléké people must develop ecological tourism, a guarantee of stability and pronounced solution to break fragile farmland. Once developed, this alternative activity will move to the rescue campaigns nowadays abandoned to only agricultural activity. This is to rethink a world where all human activity (agriculture, farming and ecotourism today advocated), is dedicated to the environment and sustainability. In this part of Cameroon, where the relations of man to nature are very strong, ecotourism is an open door for the process of sustainability and local development (figure5).

This figure shows that through education, training and tourism communication, Bamiléké can by their know how, integrate the complexity of nature to sacredness, history, traditional medicines and many other topics now sought by various types of tourism and various forms of development.
Conclusion

Conducting a study that presents the traditions and Bamiléké cultural rites as tourism stakes, that are reasoned and sustainable, aims at supporting, or to offer to people exhausted and weakened by its main activity (agriculture), an alternative, that of ecotourism. The idea here is to draw on traditional and cultural knowledge, to cope with changes of the recent years. The challenge here is to encourage the Bamiléké people qualified by Dongmo (1981) as dynamics to explore and rediscover their culture and traditions that are little known but very rich for development and sustainability.

References
Convention pour la sauvegarde du patrimoine culturel immatériel, article 2.1, UNESCO, 2003).


