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TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF BENIN IN WEST AFRICA BETWEEN 1972 AND 2000

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with Benin's place in the African touristic space. Reflection is centered on the potential at the country's disposal to deal with African and West African competition. The demonstration is based on the use of statistical data from 1972 to 2000 and the opinion of foreign tourists visiting the country. The results and analyzes show modest tourist inflow and revenues: some delay related to certain factors which include the weak economy and the very low standards of living of the population. Nevertheless, when considered in its specific French context, it is experiencing a relative increase even if that increase is threatened by sociopolitical changes.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism interests both rich and poor countries, as it is a generator of foreign exchange agent and participates in various degrees, in the economic life of most least developed countries (LDCs). "It has now become a mass phenomenon that involves hundreds of millions of people." (Durand, 1994: 7). But beyond this general vision, there are several other complex factors that help or hinder its development: the economic resources of the country, the resources available for the promotion of tourism, the standard of living of the populations.

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"As we move away from industrialized and urbanized countries in Europe and North America, the tourists flow quickly weaken; so minor flows often correspond to distant destinations mainly developing countries" (Lozato-Giotart, 1987: 22). Yet it is in this context that several states of least developed countries seek to promote more even though they lack the necessary capital and conditioning that can ensure profitability. We are interested in particular in this article to one of them, Benin. Indeed, the country experienced an economic asphyxiation as a Marxist-Leninist regime in the late eighties that has hampered the emergence of the tourism on the international stage. The results are observable in number of tourists: it is only "14,000 in 1972 and 75,000 in 1988" (Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Benin and UNWTO March 2001). Not until a revival of economic activities in 1990 (context of democratic renewal) for it to have a significant change in tourist arrivals since the number of

tourists going from 110,000 in 1990 to 152,000 in 1998 (UNWTO, 2001). But this modest rebirth though its only economic activities, would it be enough for the development of this sector? In reality, the limitations and handicaps to the development of that sector exist: include a fragile economy, a very low level of life does not allow different social and professional to project profit tourist trips causing almost nonexistent national tourism based some activities on a small scale as "go on vacation," "have his leisure," a lack of products to constitute a special tourist offer different from that of other countries in the sub-region, a much reduced international demand. That is why the purpose of this article is to dwell in our analyzes on these previous points from 1990 to 1998 when the emergence of Benin relating to changes in the number of tourists has been remarkable. This choice is made based on the 70s and 80s, as revealed in Benin difficult, irrelevant in terms of the tourist destination. Thus the reference to the year 1998, which is where the vast majority of African countries are taken into account in terms of statistics to the WTO is required, while the 1999 and 2000 know more statistical inaccuracies.

Organization, the general works and those specific to the tourism of Benin between 1972 and 2000. As for the field survey we found it necessary to question foreign tourists¹; it is to have a very wide range of feedback and suggestions for, considered international visitors consume tourism products or receiving services and benefits Beninese professionals. It should be noted that this sample was a large consideration of tourism activities in Benin. So we thought it sufficiently reliable number for quantifiable results because the benefits from the expansion of our field of investigation enable us to emerge enough relevant features of the real problems related to tourism development in Benin.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Benin, a country of modest international tourist arrivals and receipts

The use of international tourist arrivals in Africa as a whole helps us really to understand the place of Benin in the other countries of the continent.

Table 1. Arrivals in Thousands, Revenue (\$ million) and growth rate

Countries	Arrivals in thousands and growth rate			Revenues (US \$ million) and growth rate ¹		
	1990	1998	% 90-98	1990	1998	% 90-98
North Africa	8 164	7.305	-10,52	7 248	8 077	11,43
Morocco	4 024	3 242	-19,43	1259	1712	35,98
<i>Tunisia</i>	<i>3 204</i>	<i>4 718</i>	<i>47,25</i>	<i>948</i>	<i>1557</i>	<i>64,24</i>
East Africa	2 852	5 536	94,10	1 092	2 331	113,46
Kenya	814	857	5,28	443	290	-34,53
Maurice	292	558	91,09	244	503	106,14
Seychelles	104	128	23,07	126	111	-91,26
<i>Zimbabwe</i>	<i>605</i>	<i>1 986</i>	<i>228,26</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>177</i>	<i>195,00</i>
Central Africa	372	513	37,90	98	087	-11,22
Cameroon	89	135	51,68	53	40	-24,00
<i>Gabon</i>	<i>109</i>	<i>195</i>	<i>78,89</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>166,66</i>
West Africa	1 352	2626	94,23	575	964	067,65
Bénin	110	152	38,18	28	33	17,85
Burkina	74	160	116,21	11	42	281,81
Cape Verde	24	044	83,33	6	20	233,33
Ivory Coast	196	301	53,57	51	108	111,76
Gambia	100	091	- 9,00	26	49	88,46
Ghana	146	348	138,35	81	284	250,61
Mali	44	83	88,63	47	50	6,38
Niger	21	42	100,00	17	18	5,88
<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>739</i>	<i>288,94</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>142</i>	<i>468,00</i>
Sénégal	246	352	043,08	167	178	6,58
Sierra Leone	98	6	- 93,87	19	8	- 57,89
Togo	103	69	33,00	58	11	- 81,03
Southern Africa	2 006	7731	285,39	1241	3256	162,36
Botswana	543	750	38,39	117	175	49,57
<i>South Africa</i>	<i>1 029</i>	<i>4684</i>	<i>355,19</i>	<i>992</i>	<i>2738</i>	<i>176,00</i>
TOTAL						
AFRICA	14 746	23 711	60,79 %	10 254	14 715	43,50 %

This will allow us to take first overall support of Benin's situation in all the different African tourist areas in order to compare it to some countries. Then it comes to determining the factors for the delay while to see if the resources available could face the Saharan and sub-regional competition.

METHODS

Our research was based on a literature review and fieldwork. The review draws its sources on a plurality of information collected on tourism in Africa and in the world, from official statistics documents received from the World Tourism

¹ These are the Europeans, Americans, Africans, Asians ... all nationalities: the questionnaire is developed in three versions (English, French, and German) based on the Francophone character of Benin, the widest knowledge of the English language on internationally and the presence of a large embassy of Germany prompting many projects on the territory of Benin, creating thereby a visit by German.)

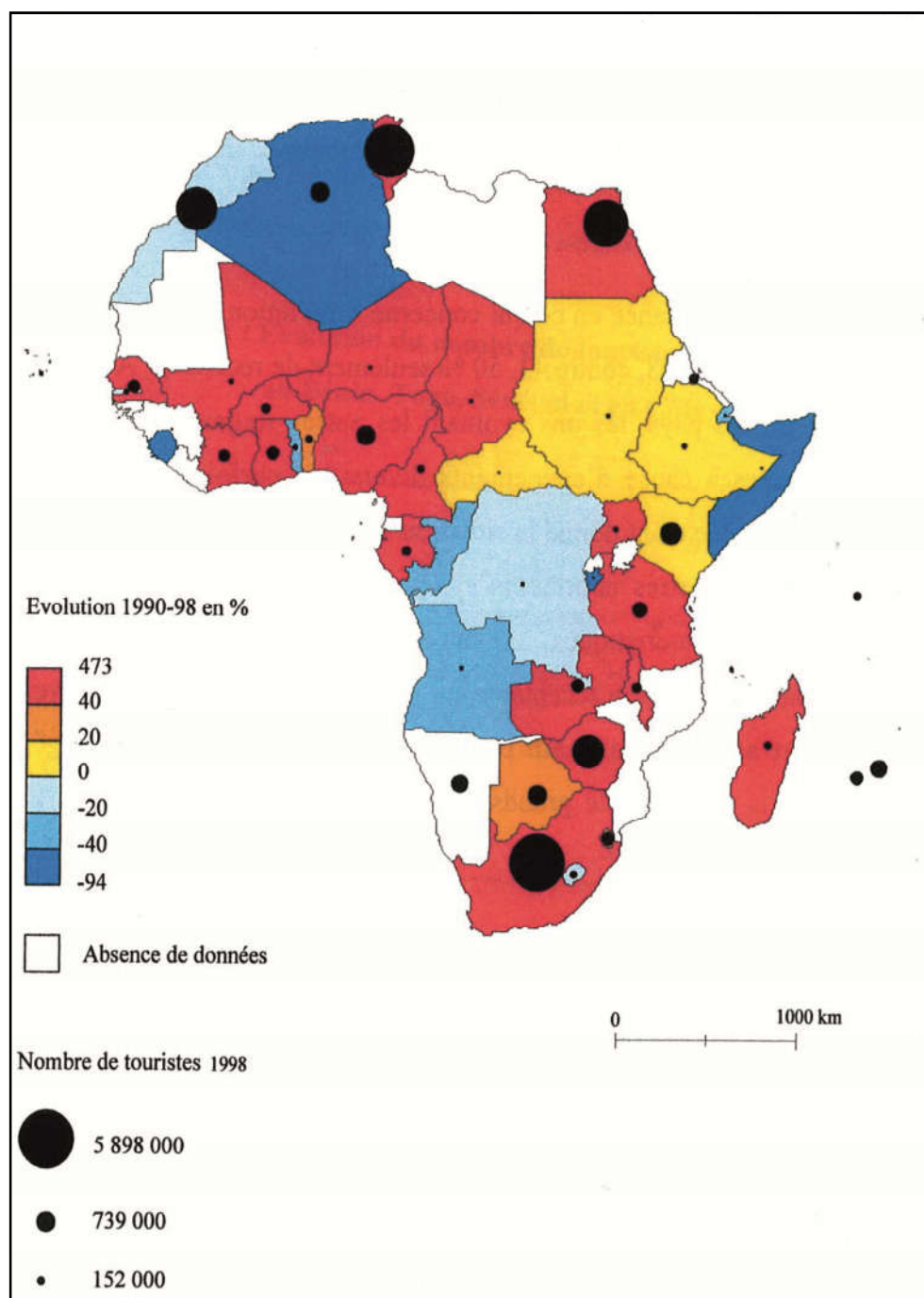


Figure 1. Changes in the number of tourists from 1990 to 1998 compared to the flow of the last year

To get there, we first introduced five tourist subsets (Northern Africa, Eastern, Central, Western and Southern) where we recorded the first two countries that were most frequented by tourists in a consideration of the number arrivals. Then we took into account all the countries of West Africa as it is the tourist subset of which Benin. This allows us to place it in a context more specific sub-regional, to better analyze the average growth in arrivals and receipts of international tourists. Thus, on the basis of Table 1, we have Tunisia in North Africa, Zimbabwe in Eastern Africa, Gabon in Central Africa, Nigeria in West Africa and South Africa in Southern Africa. Benin is presented in italics to mark its visibility. The factors that favored a privileged position of one country over another in terms of tourist flows, depends on several

parameters specific to each of them: these include all or sub-tourist of belonging instead to the sector in a policy of national economic development. Thus, by observing the overall average growth in international tourist arrivals in Benin over nine years, that is to say from 1990 to 1998, we obtained 38.12%. Compared to the whole of Africa (60.79%) and in the new context of economic and social development, we can consider it as changing even if the increase is lower than the continental average. Referring to the countries listed on our table, its modest provision presents it as a weak link next to the three giants Saharan Africa, South Africa (355.19%), Nigeria (288.94%) and Zimbabwe (228%). Placed in its subset tourist West Africa, sometimes in ninth place out of twelve countries even if it is ahead of Gambia -9%, -33% on Togo,

and Sierra Leone -93.87%. It comes after Nigeria (first), Ghana (second with 138.35%), Ivory Coast (third totaling 53.57%), Burkina Faso (fourth with 116.25%).... It is therefore useful to highlight the importance of tourism earnings do not always depend on the number of tourist arrivals; Evidence in 1998, Benin displays 152,000 arrivals for \$ 33 million US in revenue against 128 000 and 111 for the Seychelles. This is a situation that appears to be linked to several parameters including the customer profile and importance of benefits in each country: we can speak of "the disparity and the existing differences between some countries and others in the field of arrivals and receipts from international tourists." (Duhamel and Sacareau, 1998: 31). Regarding the Benin is its recent opening, which raises more curious visitors to discover. But this is not enough. "Its position is still favorable compared to what is common to find in the directly competitive sub-Saharan countries in the region ...". (Principaud, 2004: 191-216). Secondly, an overview assessment of Figure 1 showing how the number of tourists between 1990 and 1998, we reveals more insistently some disparity of growth through tourism subset. South Africa confirms its strong growth with a very high number of tourists, such as Tunisia and Egypt in the north, Zimbabwe in East Africa and Nigeria in West Africa. Just those we consider as intermediate which includes Benin and Botswana. Appear destinations unpopular, the end of which, Rwanda, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Algeria... To highlight the specific growth of each country we introduced the arrivals of 1998; automatically, the data changes and make us see that despite the presence of Mali and Niger in West Africa in the growth zone [40-473], these countries rise, fewer tourists than the Benin in West Africa [20 to 40] and Kenya in East Africa [0-20] ...; Morocco, with slower growth, however, has a high number of tourists compared to Madagascar ...

A gradual improvement instead of Benin influenced by economic and sociopolitical changes

Having shown one hand the place of the Benin generally in the African tourism market and secondly on that of the West African sub-region, we thought it would be interesting to situate in a more specific context for comparing changes in the number of tourists visiting that of Senegal, the Ivory Coast and Togo which we consider its direct competitors. Competition which is based on the development of tourism products (natural and cultural resources, coastal location...), proximity, membership in the "Franc Zone"². These three countries are also speaking, coastal and located at almost the same number of hours flight from Paris (about five hours); Moreover, they gained independence in the sixties, Togo April 27th, 1960, Senegal June 20th, 1960, Ivory Coast on 7th August 1960, and Benin on 1st August 1960, which would place the all the same degree of political maturity, first important condition for economic growth particularly in the field of tourism.

Thus by referring to Chart 1, we see that in general, Benin considering tourist arrivals, is the only country in 1980 from the bottom of the scale compared to the three other States, Senegal and the Ivory Coast ranging in particular to a higher

level. Almost stagnant until 1986 while its neighbors are changing saw tooth, he said in 1993 knowing the ascendancy when the three countries are falling. These substantial declines - 73.91% for Togo, -18, 04% for Côte d'Ivoire, and -09.67% for Senegal, are primarily related to the socio-political unrest in each country.

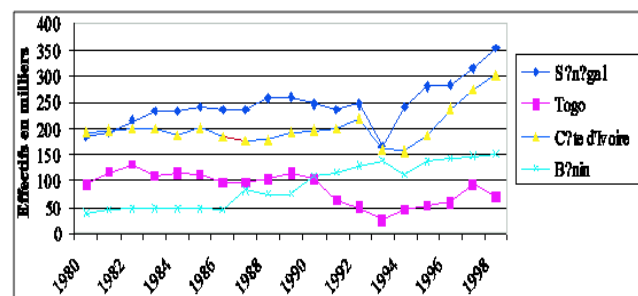


Figure 2. Evolution of the number of foreign tourists from 1980 to 1998 in Benin, Togo, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire

All the above shows that the influence of peace and social unrest in a country is evident in the evolution of tourist arrivals. In Togo, the crisis is remarkable from 1991, when the country is aggravating turbulence of the times, so that the tourism industry was the third product after phosphates and cocoa since the 70s. By contrast, if Benin scored a positive difference to other countries in 1993, it is undeniably linked to the establishment of a democratic regime fostering a climate of political stability, thus security.

A delay in the development of tourism caused by several factors

"Benin's population, about 70% farmers"³ is "illiterate to 65% against 32% for Ghana, 32% in Togo, 39% for Niger, 56% for Ivory Coast, 16% for South Africa, 32% in Tunisia"⁴ "... the country therefore has a very low percentage in terms of level of education compared to many African countries and is, therefore, in our view, away from recreational activities called modern⁵ because most of the people do not appreciate the socio-economic values and benefits; this illiteracy is more remarkable in adults (71,4% of the total), despite the initiatives taken in this direction by the Government in learning knowledge (reading and writing) main dialects of the country"⁶. "Benin is a country in Africa where the salary is the lowest" (Noudjénoumè, 1999: 47). Economically, the country faces enormous challenges in the sixties and seventies, because of the full support of the major sectors, the government resulting in the creation of a plethora of public enterprises and nationalization of the banks, banning any deployment policy in the private sector. Tourism is found in an embryonic stage and is characterized by a total lack of statistics in the sixties and by reduced arrivals in the seventy years since the number of arrivals is only "14,000 in 1972 and 40,775 in 1979."

³ Human Development Report in Benin P.N.U.D (United Nations Development Programme), 1997, p. 65.

⁴ Report on development in Africa, 2000, p.227.

⁵ Movies, video games, picnics, travel to tourist destination ...

⁶ Sources: Report on the state of the national economy: recent developments and medium-term prospects, Cotonou, December 1997, p. 80.

² French speaking countries that have in common the use of the CFA money: Benin, Niger, Ivory Coast, Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal ...

(Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Benin, 2001). The eighties are based on a self-reliant development strategy backs to the world market since the government basically tried to create an internal market for inducing a profitable and sustainable production. But by 1983, the country entered a serious crisis of economic downturn because current expenditures are one and a half higher than total revenues, causing major imbalances in finance and loss-making public enterprises. The fact finding is that tourism contributes even marginally to Gross domestic product (GDP) was 0.16% in 1981. However, "The lack of economic infrastructure, namely the lack of adequate roads, supply of drinking water and reliable, communication is one of the major constraints" Godin 1986: 86) ... without which the development of tourism would be an illusion. In the years ninety, it is the cotton (seed and fiber) which constitutes 80% of exports, cement (4.7%) and fruit (2.8%)... But it should in return whether the export of these annuity products enables Benin to support its development and global tourism in particular way. GDP goes from 0.8% in 1994 (Issifou et al., 1996: 54) to 2% in 2000 (Larguet, 2001: 2).

During this year "economic activity in the production level would be characterized by a growth of 5.0%, as in 1999. This growth is mainly driven by the primary (1.9) and tertiary (2.1 %)"⁷. "The situation of public finances is characterized by deterioration in budget balances in connection with the stagnation of tax revenues. Indeed, tax revenues increased by 10.7% compared to 1999 are expected to amount to 222.4 billion in 2000.

This development situated the tax burden to 13.9% against 13.8% in 1999. On the other hand of tax revenues, the share of non-tax revenues in GDP is expected to deteriorate from 2.3% in 1999 to 1.7% in 2000. This would bring total revenues to 15.6% of GDP in 2000 against 16.2% of GDP in 1999 "⁸. Obviously, the beginning of 2000 refers to the new economic and political context of Benin benefit the tourism sector. In absolute terms, tourism revenue in million CFA also progressed from "14 667 in 1992 to 23 758 in 2000"⁹. So, can Benin rely on its financial capacity to meet the expenses relating to tourism development? He has to rely on perpetual aid and international financing consists of loans granted by the group ... the World Bank for developing countries with IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development), the International Agency Development (USAID) and the International Finance Corporation (Vellas, 2002: 129). For example, "in regard to the external public debt, its assets should amount at December 2000-1082600000000, a debt ratio of 67.6% against 58.3% in 1999 reflecting a deterioration." It certainly appears some handicaps because "its economy is dominated by low-productivity service activities, strongly influenced by regional and international environment."¹⁰

⁷ Execution Report Excerpt from the Multilateral Surveillance of UEMOA, December, 2000, p.1.

⁸ (ibid)

⁹ (ibid)

¹⁰ National studies of long-term prospects, Benin, 2025, August 2000, p. 54..

Minor tourism resources facing the Saharan and sub-regional competition

The correct positioning of Benin in the group of the most visited countries in sub-Saharan Africa (South Africa, Kenya) in general and West Africa (Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo), in particular through the value of its tourism resources compared to those of others; which results in a competition it has to manage is to say, find out if the available resources are of higher importance or attractiveness, or less distant or those of its direct competitors. In sub-Saharan Africa, Benin's natural resources are far from competing with those of some countries in East Africa and Southern Africa. For example, the tourist should take into account the climate, beaches, lakes or waterfalls ... to choose his destination, found in other, better than Benin. When we read the table 2, we notice that tourists (59.1%) are more interested in the authenticity of Benin.

Table 2. Reasons for the choice of Benin

Reasons for the choice of Benin	Number of citations	Frequencies
Discovery of an authentic country	211	59,1 %
Humanitarian purpose	29	8,1 %
Voodoo	21	5,9 %
Political and security stability	13	3,6 %
No answer	83	23,2 %
TOTAL OF CITATION¹¹	357	100%

Source: results of our survey of foreign tourists visiting Benin

In southern Africa, for example, South Africa is in the southern hemisphere where summer (September to April) are hot and dry, with temperatures around 28°C, a winter (May to August) moderate (17°C) temperatures that can drop to 8°C, with a climate very favorable to the whole Mediterranean nature tourism activities. Kenya, East Africa, climate, although tropical like Benin has particular advantage favorable to tourists because the air is warm and humid there, but with the monsoon winds and altitude, climate remains pleasant throughout the year; Benin, receives only two months (July and August) of monsoon in the south. At the sub-regional level, although it has almost the same climatic conditions as its competitors in West Africa, the tourist chooses Senegal, Ivory Coast and Ghana, concerning the seaside, because these countries have the best equipped beaches where swimming is safe to do; which is not the case in Benin although it is also a coastal State (board sloping beaches, big waves, strong currents, deep near the beaches ...). "On the other hand, its hunting areas in the north have superior qualities to those of Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Togo"¹² because they offer ideal living conditions of animal observation sites by tourists, the presence of pools of water, an original environment (savannah dotted with trees and shrubs and less dense forest). It follows from the foregoing that the Benin in the field of natural resources can only rely on the latter to position relative to its competitors. In the cultural and historic area, the wealth of Benin allows it to be competitive face to face its competitors in a global consideration of the

¹¹ The number of citations is higher than the number of cases due to multiple responses (up to 3). Percentages are based on the number of citations.

¹² International Society of Tourism, National Tourism Development Policy in Benin, 1995 p.76.

traditional aspects of the lives of West African societies (royalties, colonial resistance). The areas in which Benin has particular advantages over its competitors include voodoo, the lake cities, relics of the colonial period and the history of slavery. Voodoo, although it extends till to Togo, Benin its cradle, this is where are installed the main temples and monasteries and where the main ceremonies are held. There is nothing equivalent in every other country. The lakeside villages (Ganvié and Aguégues) are an originality that does not exist anywhere in Africa. Tourists seem to share this opinion favoring Table 1 culture (35%), the lake cities (17.2%), the remains (11.6%) among the major tourist attractions they deem Benin.

Table 3. Major tourist attractions in Benin

Tourist attractions	Nombre citations	Frequencies
Culture	290	35,2 %
Lake cities	142	17,2 %
Remains	96	11,6 %
Gastronomy	83	10,1 %
Sun	69	8,4 %
Sea	68	8,2 %
Beach	63	7,6 %
No answer	7	0,8 %
TOTAL OF CITATIONS¹³	825	100 %

Source: Our survey results upwind of foreign tourists visiting Benin.

In the exploitation of relics of the colonial period of history and slavery, Gorée Island off Dakar, forts dotted along the coast of Ghana and some of which are preserved and enhanced (Elima, Cape Coast ...) seem better prices than in the two cities of Benin (Ouidah and Porto-Novo) that are better focused yet unexploited old buildings.

Conclusion

Starting with a question on the provision of Benin against its African and West African competitors to determine its place in the different tourist areas on the basis of the assets available to it, we conducted investigations under this research. They like the new opening of Benin to the world through its economic and political renaissance in the early 90s resulted in encouraging arrivals and tourism receipts. As they show that remains a poor country whose economic resources are modest in terms of support to the tourism sector. For although the primary sector is the lifeblood of the national economy, it is not one on which it can rely to make investments. Recall that "for the years 1999 and 2000, the major exporters, are all recorded activities combined hundred twenty-two against more than one thousand four hundred ninety-three importers This explains the real lack of strong national resources and the deficit nature of the Beninese economy characterized by a primacy of imports over exports ... ". This article also shows that due to its status as a least developed country with strong representation illiterate ignoring or not appreciating the true value of the practice of so-called modern activities, Benin knows a certain delay with respect to certain countries the regional and sub-regional levels.

About its position in the African market, natural resources do not allow it to compete alongside countries such phrase in achevée Nigeria, Niger, Burkina-Faso. But it has some advantages socio-culturally because of its history. Tourism "largely depends on diversification of supply policies ..." (Kibicho, 2007: 264), Benin with a view to selection of products to constitute a specific offer should develop other strengths such as voodoo and cities lake.

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¹³ The number of citations is higher than the number of cases due to multiple responses (up to 3). Percentages are based on the number of citations.