Setting Cultural Tourism in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

Cultural tourism is highlighted as one of the most important development opportunities for Africa. In the region of southern Africa cultural tourism is of rising significance both for tourists and policy makers. The task in this article is to provide an overview of the expanding opportunities and debates pertaining to cultural tourism development in southern Africa. In addition, a setting is provided of the existing 'state of the art' of cultural tourism research in this region.

Keywords: *cultural tourism, inclusive development, southern Africa.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism is acknowledged as one of the fastest expanding segments of the global tourism economy with some observers estimating that as much as 40 percent of international leisure tourism incorporates a cultural component (Novelli 2015). Across sub-Saharan Africa as a whole cultural tourism is identified by Christie et al. (2013) and Novelli (2015) as offering untapped potential for generating opportunities for tourism expansion and inclusive growth. In one recent influential World Bank report it is stated that in light of the rich traditions of music, art and dance in sub-Saharan Africa "cultural tourism presents a substantial opportunity for tourism growth" (Christie et al., 2013: 58). Currently, many African countries including Botswana, Ghana, Mali, Kenya, Mozambique and Tanzania are using cultural tourism as a niche product in order to diversify their tourism economies (Rogerson 2012). In addition, across several parts of Africa cultural World Heritage Sites are being developed as "key anchor projects" for tourism destinations (Rivett-Carnac, 2011: 6). Examples include Great Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe, Kilwa Kiswani in Tanzania or South Africa's Cradle of Humankind and Mapungubwe National Park. Overall, cultural heritage products are viewed by Twining-Ward (2009: 36) as "perhaps the most underdeveloped of Africa's tourism products".

It is against this backdrop that there is need for a richer tourism scholarship in Africa to explore the nexus between tourism and culture and not least for the region of southern Africa. The aims of this article are twofold. First, is to sketch the rising opportunities and issues pertaining to cultural tourism development in southern Africa. Second, is to provide a setting of the existing 'state of the art' of cultural tourism research in this region.

2. SOUTHERN AFRICA: RISING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CULTURAL TOURISM

The connection between tourism and culture is probably as long as the history of tourism. In this respect, a widely acknowledged lack of culture and cultural products in southern African tourism landscape sounds surprising (see Manwa 2007; Manwa et al., 2016), as most countries in the region also have very rich and diverse ethnic cultures, heritage resources and vibrant urban lifestyles (see Ivanovic 2008; Dantas e Sa and Mather 2011; Duval and Smith 2013; Ivanovic and Saayman 2013a, 2013b; Ivanovic 2015; Tomaselli 2012). Thus, there is no absence of cultural resources for tourism in the region, albeit it must be acknowledged that historically the connections between tourism and local cultures and between cultural tourism and local economic growth have not been as developed as they might have been.

However, while there may have been a shortage of cultural tourism products in the past for southern Africa, the perceived lack is also – at least partially – a result of a strong domination of nature and wildlife oriented tourism products focusing on 'Big 5' and nature experiences in an imagined pristine wilderness without human presence and interference (beyond tourism and tourists!). Southern African tourism marketing has been characterized by representations which refer to (empty) natural landscapes and/or safari tourism scenes with images of tourists and tourism facilities in wilderness settings (Saarinen and Niskala 2009; see Edwards 1996; Wels 2004).

In many respects, the imagined Africa has been strongly linked to wild environments and wilderness which represents an opposite to culture and civilization in western thinking (see Nash 1967; Saarinen 1998). The resultant domination of nature-based tourism activities has left local people and cultures in a relatively smaller role in tourism products. Thus, in the past the position of cultural tourism occasionally has been characterized as being a complement to wildlife, safari and wilderness tourism rather than having its' own distinctive profile and justification as a regional tourism product (see Manwa 2007). In Botswana Mbaiwa (2011: 291) observes that the national focus "on wildlife tourism has led to the country's unique and spectacular cultural attractions being given little attention in national tourism policy development and planning". This said, even as a subsidiary tourism product, culture has played an important part in driving the growth and impacts of tourism in the region. For example, Jansen van

Veuren (2004: 140) estimated in the late 1990s that over one-third of international tourists visited a cultural village during their stay in South Africa.

Currently across southern Africa cultural tourism is becoming more visible and important in the region's tourism development, including for the region's tourism policy-makers. As Manwa, Moswete and Saarinen (2016) record southern Africa is endowed with diverse cultural resources that include numerous ethnic groups, languages, communities, traditions, religions, archaeological sites, museums, industrial sites, townships, battlefields, San rock art paintings and carvings, rural landscape, cuisine, vineyards and other heritage resources (see also Ivanovic 2008; Tomaselli 2012). Arguably, in many respects, the recent success of tourism development in southern Africa has been anchored on its diversity rather than on any single 'product'. The diversification of tourism products towards people, local cultures and/or urban settings is now more actively promoted and planned for across the region. Thus, in addition to more diverse tourism demand and tourist segments visiting southern Africa, including evolving domestic and inter-regional tourism (Rogerson 2015; Rogerson and Visser 2006), the recent growth and visible role of cultural tourism across the region is also a result of policy making and accompanying initiatives.

Policy and planning initiatives to support cultural tourism have emanated from national and local scales of government. At the national scale the White Paper on Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996), stated that the competitive advantage of the country is no longer based on natural elements only, but increasingly includes culture as well as built environments. Similar policy sentiments are expressed elsewhere in southern Africa regarding the potential for cultural tourism development (see Republic of Namibia 1994; UNWTO 2008). From a policy perspective cultural tourism commonly is viewed as an integral element of regional and national reconstruction, innovation processes and development within southern African (see Rogerson 2012). It is argued that tourism could (and should) be used in socio-economic development and empowerment of communities and previously marginalized groups (Saarinen 2011; Visser and Rogerson 2004) which both explicitly and implicitly places strong emphasis on cultural tourism involving local people and providing possibilities for inclusive business models, for example (Saarinen and Rogerson 2014). As a result, nowadays several countries in the region see the promotion of cultural tourism as a viable strategy that can be used for poverty alleviation, inclusive growth and socio-economic development. In particular, for promoting 'place-based' local economic development through tourism, much attention has focused on the potential for maximizing cultural and heritage assets particularly in the case of South Africa (King and Flynn 2012; Marschall 2012; Rogerson 2014; Rogerson and van der Merwe 2016; van der Merwe and Rogerson 2013; van der Merwe 2013, 2014). With the notable exception of Robben Island the limited local tourism development impacts of many of the country's heritage sites associated with the anti-apartheid struggle are

highlighted by Murray (2013) who views most such sites as mundane, make-shift memorials.

Arguably, an increasing interest and utilization of local cultures and people in the development of tourism does not come without associated risks and challenges (see Butler and Hinch 2007; McKercher and du Cros 2002; Telfer and Sharpley 2008). Essentially, in spite of the local and social development emphases in various regional and international policy documents, cultural tourism usually operates based on the same principles as the rest of the tourism industry, i.e. being a business-oriented endeavor focused on profit, not public goods or social welfare goals. Although there are some prominent tourism businesses in the southern African cultural (and nature-based) tourism operations that practice corporate social responsibility, the majority of the cultural tourism industry and activities exist in order to satisfy the commercial imperatives of businesses (see Ringer 1998).

When using local culture in tourism operations, there is a tendency for commercializing hosts and their traditions in tourism products (van Beek and Schmidt 2012). Often this commercialization is mostly harmless 'banalization of localities' but it can also involve ethically problematic elements. Specifically in the context of indigenous people and other similar ethnic minority groups, tourism can exoticize, eroticize and primitivize local people and their traditions (Bollig and Heinemann 2002; Waitt 1999; Wels 2004) in order to meet the assumed or known expectations of visiting (Western) tourists (see Cohen 1993; Echtner and Prasad 2003; Edwards 1996). This may be done in a way that is not socially and culturally sustainable (see Saarinen 1999, 2011). In addition, tourism can have consequences and impacts for host cultures and communities, such as undesired changes in cultures, traditions and norms, increasing inequalities and demonstration effects (i.e. imitation of tourists behavior and/or style conflicting with local traditions and norms) (see Butler and Hinch 2007; Mathieson and Wall 1982). The cultural tourism industry may also represent a competing resource user for other local livelihoods and a form of non-local development that does not "derive from processes internal to those societies" (Urry 1990: 64). Thus, many scholars have emphasized the need for sustainable cultural tourism development across southern Africa (see Manwa et al. 2016; Mbaiwa and Sakuze 2009). For cultural tourism development the idea of 'sustainability' necessitates a strong emphasis on local control and participation in tourism operations. In addition, cultural tourism and especially ethnic or indigenous tourism should imply respect for local people, identities and traditions (Tomaselli 2012).

3. RESEARCHING CULTURAL TOURISM IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The purpose of this special issue of is to examine aspects of the relationship between tourism and cultures in the region of southern Africa. Over the past decade research issues around cultural tourism have strengthened in the growing

corpus of tourism scholarship about southern Africa (Rogerson and Rogerson 2011). Among key issues that have attracted academic scrutiny in cultural tourism research in southern Africa are questions of socio-economic impacts and sustainability, authenticity and representing localities in tourism, power relations, poverty alleviation, local participation and rural development. This said, given the current developmental challenges facing the countries of southern Africa the tourism-development nexus is increasingly at the forefront of scholarly debates about cultural tourism.

Research on cultural tourism across the region of southern Africa has been undertaken in both urban and rural contexts, albeit the majority of studies are rural-focused. It is forwarded in recent scholarship about growing the markets for rural cultural tourism that many local communities have been integrated into tourism systems and now are receiving direct benefits from tourism (Jansen van Veuren 2004; Jansen van Veuren and Rogerson 2007; Mbaiwa and Sakuze 2009; Monare et al. 2016; Saarinen et al. 2014). Several studies emphasize the locally beneficial role of cultural tourism in southern Africa and the possibilities that the region's evolving tourism industry could provide for communities and households to improve their livelihoods and wellbeing, especially in the remote or peripheral regions where there are limited alternative economic options to tourism (Bialostocka 2014; Lenao 2016; Moswete et al. 2016). This said, other rural-based studies have pointed out that while cultural tourism can provide development opportunities in rural areas, it is important that the principles and practices of sustainable tourism development are emphasized and implemented (Mamimine and Madzikire 2016; Saarinen 2016a; see Monaheng 2016). This is crucial especially when introducing tourism to indigenous communities or other ethnic minority groups (Lapeyre 2016; Moswete 2009; Saarinen, 2011; Tomaselli 2012).

Another rising issue is the role of cultural tourism in regional and rural development (see Lenao and Saarinen 2015; Mbaiwa 2016;Monaheng 2016; Njerekai 2016; Saarinen and Lenao 2014) and poverty alleviation (Rogerson 2006; Novelli and Hellwig 2011; Saarinen and Rogerson 2014). As pointed by Ashley and Maxwell (2001: 395) "Poverty is not only widespread in rural areas, but most poverty is rural", and consequently many southern African governments have identified cultural and/or community-based tourism as a strategy for the poverty alleviation in rural areas (see Lapeyre 2016; Lenao 2016; Monaheng 2016). Cultural tourism is viewed as offering considerable potential to contribute towards employment creation and thereby reduce rural outmigration (see Moswete et al. 2016).

As noted, uncontrolled cultural tourism can have negative consequences for local communities and cultures. In this respect questions are raised concerning cultural commodification, authenticity and representations in rural research conducted in southern Africa (Hottola 2009; Mbaiwa 2011, 2016; Saarinen 2016a; Saarinen and Niskala 2009). In order to avoid potential negative impacts of evolving cultural tourism the need to create platforms and models for local participation is highlighted (Lenao 2016; Moswete et al. 2009). Related to this

there is an evolving research field centred upon power issues and neoliberal policy-making in southern African tourism landscape (see Boggs 2000; Büscher 2013; Lapeyre 2016; Lenao 2014; Saarinen 2016b). Essentially, these critical perspectives call for ethically driven policies that would ensure sustainable utilisation of cultural and other resources in tourism development (Moswete et al. 2016). In order to have more balanced development between non-local and local interests and to avoid local exclusion in tourism development, current research emphasizes a need to understand communities and their specific cultural (and natural) resource values, priorities as well as internal and external dynamics (see Manwa et al. 2016; Stone and Nyaupane, 2013).

Beyond the dominant rural mainstream of work on cultural tourism, several recent investigations have turned to examine cultural tourism in city settings. In particular, the development of cultural tourism products has featured on the agenda of urban tourism research which has been conducted in South Africa (Rogerson and Visser 2011). Several investigations have interrogated the potential of cultural heritage products as one lever for promoting urban regeneration and local economic development opportunities in cities as well as smaller centres (Bialostocka 2014; Rogerson and van der Merwe 2016; Snowball and Courtney 2010; van der Merwe, 2013, 2014; van der Merwe and Rogerson 2013). Arguably, the most distinctive and controversial cultural products in urban South Africa are the heritage struggle attractions which constitute an integral component of the country's township or slum tourism economy (Frenzel et al. 2015; Khumalo et al. 2014; Marschall 2006; Rogerson 2008). Issues of heritage management, tourism and the construction of identity are of critical concern in the region (see Boswell and O'Kane 2011; Murray et al. 2007; Murray and Witz 2013; Witz 2011).

It is against this backdrop of vibrant debates taking place in rural and urban areas of southern Africa around the nexus of cultural tourism, development and poverty that the contributions in this special theme are presented. The articles address many of the key issues in these current debates concerning the characteristics, development and impacts of cultural tourism and the utilization of culture in tourism and tourism products. Although the full spectrum of cultural tourism debates would be impossible to cover in one volume, the papers of the special issue manage to approach the relationships between tourism and culture from diverse perspectives. In addition, they encompass tourism and culture issues in both rural and urban settings. Taken together they represent a deepening of our knowledge base around the importance of cultural tourism for the region of southern Africa.

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