



# Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment through Tourism: A Case Study of the Durban Tourism Expo and Indaba

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## Abstract

The study examines the roles of the annual Durban Tourism Careers Expo and the Tourism Indaba in creating job opportunities for youths and developing entrepreneurial minds of emerging entrepreneurs. Informed by the Social Capital Theory of Career Success, the study explores how social structures create value and facilitate the actions of youths within the tourism industry for career opportunities and success. We employed a qualitative study with a purposively selected sample of 16 participants. Findings of the study show that the events create jobs for youths through internships and learnerships. In addition, they give youths exposure in the industry and encourage them to start their own businesses. Seasonal employment, limited township/community-based tourism and lack of start-up capital were challenges identified. We recommend further research concerning the dynamics of seasonal employment in the tourism industry as well as the extent to which township/community-based tourism is practised and its potential entrepreneurial opportunities for youths.

**Keywords:** Employment, Entrepreneurship, Youths, Network, Social Capital, Tourism,

## Introduction

Around the world, high levels of unemployment is an ongoing concern. In recent years, the role of tourism in employment creation, poverty alleviation and economic growth has gained global recognition. Despite the acclaimed multiple benefits of the tourism industry, a review of previous studies indicates that very few studies have focused on how tourism conferences and expos encourage youths, particularly students, learners and graduates to embrace tourism careers or pursue tourism businesses.

This study examines the potential of the Tourism Careers Expo and the Tourism Indaba in job creation and fostering entrepreneurial mindset of youths. It also examines how the Tourism Careers Expo and the Tourism Indaba support emerging entrepreneurs and the extent to which youths who attend these conferences gain employment opportunities in the tourism industry. This paper begins with an overview of the growing problem of unemployment globally and examines the South African context in particular. This is followed by a review of tourism and its contributions to economic development. The theory of social capital (A Social Capital Theory of Career Success), is presented as the theoretical framework against which findings



of the study are examined. We then present the research method and key research findings. The paper concludes by pointing out suggestions for possible future research.

### **Unemployment as a Growing Socio-Economic Challenge**

Unemployment is used as an economic indicator to measure the size of people that are of working age, willing and able to work but cannot find gainful employment (Binns & Nel, 2002; Economics Help, 2010). The unemployed are typically people aged 15 to 64 years (Department of Government Communication and Information System, 2015; Statistics South Africa, 2015a). People that are capable of working but are unwilling to work (for a variety of reasons) and are not economically active are not included in unemployment figures. However, staff that are temporarily laid off and waiting to be reinstated into that position are considered unemployed. Effectively, the unemployed refers to people that have proactively searched for jobs but are not employed. Unemployment is a growing problem for both developed and developing countries. The International Labour Organization (2015a:11) reports that “over 201 million people were unemployed in 2014 around the world, over 31 million more than before the start of the global crisis”. Global unemployment is projected to worsen in the coming years with an estimated 8 million expected to become unemployed in the next three years (International Labour Organization, 2015a).

Although there are country specific and regional differences (with a reported regional differences as high as 15 percentage point), the European Union has had its fair share of unemployment (Boeri and Jimeno, 2015). Greece alone has a reported 24% unemployment (Statista, 2015). High unemployment rates have also been recorded in the US (Boeri and Jimeno, 2015; International Labour Organization, 2015b). In Africa, two digits unemployment have been reported across countries with an average of 30% reported unemployment in both North and Sub-Saharan Africa (International Labour Organization, 2015a:16). In developing countries such as South Africa, high unemployment is characteristics of an economy that is unable to maintain a balance between the supply and demand for labour (Department of Government Communication and Information System, 2015).

In South Africa, unemployment continues to be an intractable challenge for the democratic government. Unemployment in South Africa has been attributed to the apartheid system which privileged a small minority at the expense of the majority. Skill shortage, inadequate education and training are some of the barriers to employment for the majority of black South Africans (Department of Government Communication and Information System, 2015). According to Statistics South Africa (2014), 25.2% South Africans were unemployed in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2014. This figure represents an increase of 4.9% between the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2013 and the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2014. In the last quarter of 2014, unemployment decreased by 1.1% to 24.3% (Statistics South Africa, 2015a) but stands at 27.1% in the third quarter of 2016 (Statistics South Africa, 2016)

Although general unemployment continues to be a cause of concern, youth<sup>1</sup> unemployment is also a key issue. Youth unemployment is a key socio-economic issue faced by countries around the world particularly in light of ongoing weak global economic outlook (Bermeo, 2013; Boeri and Jimeno, 2015; Herbst and Mills, 2015). On average, global youth unemployment was 13% between 2012 and 2014 (International Labour Organisation, 2015). The International Labour Organization (2015b) notes that youths comprise 36.7% of global unemployment and they are “are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults and almost 73 million youth worldwide are looking for work” (International Labour Organization, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that definition of who falls within the category of youth is not consistent across countries. However, the World Bank (2016) notes that “youth unemployment refers to the share of the labour forces ages 15-25 without work but available for and seeking employment”



In South Africa, the labour market has continued to worsen for youths since the 2008 economic downturn. Statistics South Africa (2015c:6) notes that “unemployment rate among youth is more than twice that of adults each year while the absorption rate for youth is substantially lower than that of adults”. Statistics South Africa (2015a:6) attributes rising youth unemployment to the global economic recession which resulted in an increase in youth unemployment “from 32,7% in 2008 to 36,1% in 2011 and remained between 35,0–37,0% in subsequent years”.

### **Factors Contributing to Youth Unemployment**

There are a number of factors responsible for high rates of youth unemployment. One such factor is “a lack of information, networks and connections among youth, especially youth from families lacking significant social capital” (International Labour Organisation, 2011:6). In addition, many youths are not knowledgeable about how the workplace operates and fail to utilise the time spent in school to prepare their career path. Furthermore, they fail to use their time in school to prepare appropriately for realistic career paths.

Youths that have gone through formal training programmes often come out with theoretical knowledge that fails to prepare them adequately for practical skills and knowledge required for the workplace. Added to the foregoing is the lack of both general and specific skills “such as cooperation, communication, critical thinking, creativity, and a focus on the needs of the enterprise” required in the workplace (Mirza, Jaffri, and Hashmi, 2014:1). This lack has been blamed on the disconnect between school curricula and requirements of the workplace. The lack of preparedness for the workplace makes employers averse to employing young people due to the potential of underperformance that can affect an organisation’s business wellbeing. There are also questions about the work ethic of youths (Oxenbridge and Evesson, 2012). Although employers see these deficits as significant barriers to the productivity of inexperienced young employees, they are unwilling to invest in training youths when there is an abundant supply of experienced adults (Mirza, Jaffri, & Hashmi, 2014).

Besides the foregoing, youths are also known to lack information about employment opportunities as well as networks needed to become connected in the workplace (Billett, 2011). Youths also lack strategic understanding of how to traverse the labour market in identifying and using job and training opportunities. Effectively, most youths lack the social capital that is significant to accessing employment opportunities or being successful in business (International Labour Organization, 2011). Unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, carries significant social costs. The sense of failure, inadequacy and other negative connotations associated with being unemployed have been identified as factors that lead to social ills such as crime and other social vices that can have ripple effects on the health and wellbeing of society. Against this backdrop, studies have explored the links between unemployment and various social ills (Tang, 2011; Groenqvist, 2011; Altindag, 2012; Saridakis and Spengler, 2012).

Recognising the problem of rising youth unemployment, the South African government has instituted a number of policies and strategies aimed at addressing this problem. In pursuing employment and economic development in South Africa and around the world, tourism has been identified as one of the sectors that can stimulate economic development and employment creation.

### **The Potentials of Tourism in Economic Growth and Job Creation**

Globally, the significance of the tourism industry for employment creation, economic development and poverty alleviation is being increasingly recognised. The tourism sector has



experienced the fastest growth rate in comparison to other sectors of the global economy in recent years and is reported to account “for more than one-third of the total global services trade” (International Labour Organization, 2011). Tourism is a labour intensive industry requiring both skilled and unskilled labour force. Recent estimates indicate that the tourism industry will contribute a total of 296 million to global employment by 2019 (International Labour Organization, 2011). Besides direct contributions to global employment, the industry also has a positive impact on livelihoods of local communities in tourism destinations. In recent years, studies have shown a growing trend in the expansion of the benefits of tourism beyond the confines of traditional tourist attraction sites to local communities (Snyman, 2012).

Many developing countries are increasing beginning to recognise the strategic relevance of tourism to their economic development and are beginning to give it considerable recognition in economic planning (López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares and Pavón, 2011). In developing societies, tourism is perceived as relevant to sustaining economies characterised by sluggish growth. This reality is true for a country such as South Africa.

### **The Size and Scope of the South African Tourism Industry**

Tourism is a fast-growing industry in South Africa. In 2013, “14,3 million non-resident visitors visited South Africa, increasing from 13,1 million in 2012 and 12,1 million in 2011” (Statistics South Africa, 2015b). The tourism industry has been recognised for its contributions to the South African economy. According to Statistics South Africa (2015d), direct contributions of the tourism industry to the country’s GDP “was R103,6 billion in 2013, rising from R93,5 billion in 2012” (Statistics South Africa, 2015d:2). The contribution of the sector represents approximately 2.9% of the country’s GDP in 2012 and 2013. The contributions of tourism to the country’s GDP come from both domestic and international tourists. Statistics South Africa (2015a) notes that of the total spending in the tourism sector in 2013, 57% came from domestic tourists while 43% was from international tourists. This spending pattern is consistent with the work of Ghimire (2013) which found that domestic tourism is outpacing international tourism in most developing countries.

The increasing number of tourists in South Africa and their contributions to the economy through increased spending promotes employment creation in the sector as evident in the employment of 4.4% of South Africa’s total labour in the tourism industry Statistics South Africa (2015a:2). All these figures reflect the growing direct contributions of the tourism industry to South Africa. Besides these direct contributions, there are other unaccounted contributions from the tourism value chain. Jobs and business opportunities abound in the tourism industry and allied sectors in areas of tourism marketing, hotel management, tour operator jobs, tour guide, and chef etc. The foregoing demonstrates that the industry provides great opportunities for growing a new crop of entrepreneurs who, in turn, can contribute to job creation and poverty reduction. Recognising this potential of the tourism industry, this research seeks to explore the extent to which the annual Durban Tourism Expo and Indaba contribute to fostering entrepreneurship, job creation, and networking opportunities for youths.

### **Tourism Careers Expo and Tourism Indaba**

The Tourism Careers Expo was created in 2008 to provide relevant information to school learners, graduates and prospective entrepreneurs on how to start tourism careers. It is committed to presenting tourism as a viable and fulfilling career path for youths (NDABA, 2013). The Tourism Career Expos highlight available tourism professions in South Africa. In addition, it provides an avenue where young people can interact with established tourism entities and learn about opportunities in the tourism industry. Furthermore, it provides a platform for interaction between youths and prospective employers.



The Tourism Indaba promotes networking in the tourism industry by connecting entrepreneurs to trade opportunities and exchange their business expertise and rating emerging entrepreneurs and enterprises. The Tourism Indaba incorporates not only South African entrepreneurs in tourism but entrepreneurs from other countries from across the African continent (NDABA, 2013). Visitors to this conference seek to meet stakeholders in the tourism industry and engage in business activities with both new and existing business entities. Participants at the Tourism Indaba are able to network with relevant stakeholders.

### **Theory of Social Capital (A Social Capital Theory of Career Success)**

According to Coleman (1998:98), "Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors-whether persons or corporate actors-within the structure". Coleman (1998:98) further argues that "just as the creation of physical capital involves changes in materials to facilitate production, human capital involves changes in an individual's skills and capabilities". Social capital is formed when interpersonal relations results in positive outcomes (such as increased trust) for those involved (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995). Social Capital Theory involves the concept of social networks. A network can be defined as the pattern of ties linking a defined set of persons or social actors (Okem and Lawrence, 2013). Seibert, Kraimer and Liden (2001) constructed a number of social capital theories and created a model for a capital theory of career success.

In social capital theories, there is a weak tie and strong tie in terms of networking. The fundamental principle of weak tie theory is that a weak tie is valuable because it is more likely than a strong tie to act as a bridge between social cliques, providing an organisation member with contact with people of different social groups or statuses (Baer, 2010; Granovetter, 1973). The network approach to understanding social capital is underpinned by the view that resources within a given network are beneficial to actors within that network (Deng, 2013; Hsueh, Lin and Li, 2010). Being in a network can provide multiple benefits including access to information, finance, legitimacy, sponsorship and more visibility arising from connectedness (Ring & van de Ven, 1994; Tang and Xi, 2006). In this research, a social network structure and social resources facilitated answering the question of whether business owners in the tourism industry play a role in developing the entrepreneurial minds of emerging entrepreneurs while networking in tourism conferences and whether they are willing to support entrepreneurs who aspire to start tourism ventures and businesses by investing their time and energy and engaging in social relationships during these conferences. Social resources and network benefits will answer the question of whether the tourism conferences (such as Tourism Indaba and Tourism Careers Expo) open doors for people who have an interest in pursuing a career in the tourism industry by giving them greater access to information and access to sponsorship.

### **Methodology**

In this study, the qualitative approach/ methodology was employed with 16 purposively selected respondents. The sample comprised 10 youth respondents at the tourism events, 3 organisers of the events and 3 owners of tourism business. The 3 categories of respondents were selected on the basis that they can provide useful insights into the research objectives. All study respondents were invited to participate in the study during the tourism events. Prior to being interviewed, respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, voluntariness of participation and anonymity of respondents in the dissemination of research findings. All respondents were interviewed face to face after agreeing to participate in the study. These respondents include those employed as sales and marketing, liaison officers, project coordinators, sales executive managers in tourism businesses and unemployment youths seeking career prospects in the tourism industry.



To ensure anonymity of respondents, pseudonyms are used when making reference to the study respondents in presenting research findings. Youth respondents are identified as Y1-10 (youth respondent 1-10); conference organisers are identified as C1-C3 (conference organiser 1-3) while business owners are identified as B1-B3 (business owner 1-3). Direct excerpts from interviews are italicised.

## Research Findings

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study respondents. The table shows an equal gender of youth respondents. There were two female conference organiser respondents and one male. Of the three business owners that participated in the study, 2 were males while one was female. In general, there was an equal number of male and female among all study respondents. The four racial groups in South Africa participated in this study. Black South Africans were the most represented (N=7) while South African coloured were the least (N=1). Table 1 shows that of the 10 youth respondents in the study, only two were employed.

**Table 1: Demographic Data for all respondents**

	Gender		Race				Employment	
	Male	Female	Black	White	Indian	Coloured	Employed	Unemployed
Youths	5	5	5	2	2	1	2	8
Conference organisers	1	2	2	0	1	0	3	0
Business owners	2	1	0	2	1	0	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>

## Perceptions of the Prospect of Tourism Conferences in Creating Employment for Youth

Perceptions of the prospect of the tourism conferences in creating employment for youths is a key aspect of this study. To this end, respondents were asked what they think about the prospect of tourism conferences in creating employment for youths, students, graduates and others interested in the Tourism Industry. Responses to this question from respondents are presented in table 2 below. As shown in the table, five youth respondents (Y1, Y3, Y4, Y6 & Y8) said that the events provide employment opportunities for youths. However, only learnership and internship were cited as employment opportunities in the tourism industry by youth respondents. Both Y1 and Y6 reported being provided employment opportunities in the tourism industry in this manner. All three conference organisers and three business owners also noted that tourism conferences offer employment opportunities for youths. They cited various examples including youths being employed in the marketing and communication department, as ushers, and as receptionists during conferences. Two conference organisers also noted that short-term work experiences during conferences sometimes lead to full-time employment in the tourism industry.

**Table 2: Potential of Employment Creation and Entrepreneurship**

	Youths	Conference organisers	Business owners
Tourism conferences offer employment opportunities	5	3	3
Tourism conferences provide information about career path in tourism industry	7	3	3
Tourism conferences offer guidance to aspiring/emerging entrepreneurs	6	3	3
Willing to encourage aspiring/emerging entrepreneurs	-	3	3



Of the ten youth respondents, seven noted that the conferences provide a direction in the field of study and offer guidance within the industry. Y3 captures the foregoing vividly by stating that “*They [tourism conferences] create an opportunity to graduates and provide a direction in the field of study and offer career guidance within the industry of choice with relevant and updated trends*”. All conference organisers and business owners agreed that information about career path was an important part of the conferences. They noted that business owners and employees in the tourism industry share their experiences with youths that attend the events in the hope that these will clarify concerns they might have about employment or business opportunities in the industry.

Another question directed to respondents in this study was about the influence of tourism conferences on the entrepreneurial skills of youths. The question was: having attended a tourism conference, please tell me whether it has influenced you to become an entrepreneur in the tourism industry. Six of the ten youth respondents noted that the conferences meet this objective. However, four youth participants noted that information and experiences at the event were not sufficient in getting them to become entrepreneurs in the tourism industry. All six conference organisers and business owners were of the view that the events provide guidance to entrepreneurs. For C1, attending tourism conferences provide emerging entrepreneurs with the opportunity to understand the trends and market opportunities in the tourism industry. C1 notes that “*the main aim here is to encourage graduates to become entrepreneurs within the tourism industry*”. The respondent also notes that the tourism industry has many untapped niche markets that need to be explored. She explains that conferences are a platform to have a first-hand experience for graduates and that they can get knowledge on how to start tourism businesses. C2 and C3 both agree that the tourism conferences provide useful information about entrepreneurial opportunities in the tourism industry.

Other findings relate to whether conference organisers and tourism business owners will encourage youths to become entrepreneurs in tourism. In responding to this question, B1 noted that business owners collaborate with other sectors (such as sports) in the country in encouraging young tourism entrepreneurs. According to B3, such collaboration creates an enabling environment that encourages start-up business in tourism. The excerpt below was an answer from B3: “*Yes I will encourage another person to start a business in tourism as there is no limitation to collaboration with other industries, such as sports*”. C3 also noted that encouraging another person to become an entrepreneur in the industry is a good thing to do. B2 agreed that people who own businesses in tourism are willing to support the ones who dream to start their tourism businesses. According to the respondent, tourism business owners do this by teaching emerging entrepreneurs how to draw up business plans and identify support and business opportunities. The respondent, however, noted that tourism businesses most often do not provide financial support to emerging entrepreneurs. The respondent made this point by stating that “*some people are lucky to get funding from tourism businesses but the support they can get mostly is not monetary but experiential*”.

### **Constraints to Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment in the Tourism Industry**

This study also examines constraints to successful business/career in the tourism industry. These two questions were asked: What do you think are the constraints to aspiring entrepreneurs in the tourism industry? Would you encourage a person who is interested in starting a business in the tourism industry? All respondents noted that the main constraint in starting a tourism business is the lack of start-up capital. B1 captures this view in the following words: “*I think that the main constraint in starting a tourism business is not having access to funding*”. B1 also identified “*unavailability of structured knowledge and business know-how*” as another barrier to entrepreneurship in the tourism industry.



**Table 3: Constraints to Emerging Entrepreneurs in Tourism Business**

	Youths	Conference organisers	Business owners
lack start-up capital	10	3	3
Limited attention to attention to township/community tours	6	1	1
Seasonal employment	7	3	3
Long working hours	-	1	2

The respondent also suggested that not paying attention to township/community tours reduces opportunities for youths to start tourism businesses. As shown in table 3 above, this problem was cited by 6 youth respondents while 1 conference organiser and 1 business owners cited this as a constraint. Y4 noted this point by stating that *“promotion of tourism is only about big tourism sites. They are not doing enough to promote tourism in townships. This is why it is hard for some of us go into tourism business because people don’t know about tourism in townships”*

The sustainability of employment due to seasonal employment in the industry was identified as another challenge. This was captured in a response by B1 who noted that tourism jobs are sometimes seasonal as people are hired for specific events. The respondent cited the 2010 World Cup during which a number of youths were employed as a good example. B1 noted that *“if you see employment in this light, then it is obvious that they are not sustainable”*. Seasonal employment was cited as a problem by seven youth participants. They refer to temporary jobs during tourism events as not being sustainable employment.

Having to commit to working long hours was also identified as a barrier to working in the tourism industry. According to C3, *“the tourism industry is an interesting industry, however, the working hours are really long”*. According to the respondent, one has to be really committed to working over long hours otherwise, working in the industry can become a miserable and lonely experience.

In responding to what can be done to address identified challenges, most respondents think that there should be more networking opportunities and conferences for business knowledge sharing and more funding for aspiring entrepreneurs. Others think that these constraints should be addressed at the local level by tourism stakeholders and the municipalities. This entails coming up with funding opportunities and strategic planning for tourism at the local level. A common issue that was raised in this regard was the need to promote township/community.

## Discussion

The objectives of the study were to explore the roles of tourism conferences in creating entrepreneurial minds, the extent to which tourism conferences support emerging entrepreneurs, and the extent to which graduates who attend these conferences gain employment opportunities in the tourism industry. According to the findings, respondents affirm that tourism contributes to employment creation and provides business opportunities for entrepreneurs. This is in line with Spenceley et al (2002) who argue that tourism is a key sector of South Africa’s economy. The report by Statistics South Africa (2015a) has also demonstrated the significant contributions of the sector to the South African economy both in terms of employment creation and contributions to the GDP. As the (International Labour Organization (2011) notes, the tourism sector is the fastest growing economic sector in the world and is poised to continue to contribute to employment creation in the next three years.

In line with the theory of social capital (A Social Capital Theory of Career Success), findings of the study show that the tourism conferences help in developing the entrepreneurial minds of emerging entrepreneurs by giving them information on how to start their own business. The





results show that current business owners in the tourism industry help emerging entrepreneurs in drawing proper business plans and also giving recognition to them in terms of awards, especially during the Tourism Indaba. In general, the findings show that the network benefits those who attend these tourism conferences in gaining more information about the industry that enhances their business. The review of social capital showed that access to resources in a network is an important benefit for actors within a network (Deng, 2013; Hsueh, Lin and Li, 2010). Findings of the study are in line Seibert, Kraimer and Liden's (2001) Capital Theory of Career Success which argues that the networking benefits include gaining greater information in order to improve career success.

Findings of the study also show that by attending tourism conferences, emerging entrepreneurs get the opportunity to understand the trends, the market and opportunities in the tourism industry. Information, as a component of social capital, was found to be critical in finding jobs or being successful in business. In addition to information, access to resources such as skills acquisition through learnership and internship was found to be a benefit provided to youths. Through the acquisition of critical skills, youths are capacitated to become successful either in their workplace or in their tourism business. These resources are provided to youths by both established businesses in the tourism industry and organisers of the conferences.

## Conclusions

This research looked at the roles of the Durban Tourism Expo and Tourism Indaba in fostering entrepreneurship and employment opportunities in the tourism industry with the objective to explaining the roles of tourism conferences in creating entrepreneurial minds among youths, the extent to which tourism conferences support emerging entrepreneurs and the extent to which youths who attend these conferences gain employment opportunities in the tourism industry. Findings of the study show that jobs are created indirectly through internships and learnerships. The conferences also give youths the opportunity to network and ask for job opportunities from tourism enterprises during the events. Furthermore, youths are given the chance to network with business owners who can provide them with sound insights on how to start their own businesses.

Three questions were raised by this study that needs to be answered through further research. Further studies need to:

- Explore possible funding opportunities to start tourism businesses since funding seems to be one of the constraints that prevent youths/ graduates from starting their own businesses in the tourism industry.
- Examine the extent to which township/community-based tourism is practised as it can open more entrepreneurial opportunities for youths or any other person who wants to start a business in tourism.
- Assess the size of seasonal employment in the tourism industry and how that can be addressed in order to create more sustainable jobs in the tourism industry

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