

# The Uneven Geography of Tourism in South Africa

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## Abstract:

Understanding the spatial dimensions of tourism is one of the core challenges for geographers involved in tourism studies. The aim in this paper is to pursue a geographical analysis of uneven patterns of tourism in South Africa and specifically to unpack the key trends observed in the country's tourism space economy. The analysis is conducted between three groupings of municipalities as destinations or tourism spaces. These three groups are demarcated as the metropolitan areas, the rural spaces of the priority district municipalities, and what is called the intermediate space of the remaining non-priority district municipalities. The findings show the dominance of South Africa's tourism space economy by the metropolitan areas. In addition, the analysis shows these three different tourism spaces exhibit different trajectories in terms of growth performance (numbers of trips, bednights and visitor spend), origin of visitors (domestic versus international) and purpose of travel (leisure, business, VFR and other). Interpreting the characteristics of these tourism spaces is an essential first step for improved local tourism planning.

**Keywords:** spatial patterns; uneven development; tourism space economy; local tourism policy

## INTRODUCTION

Arguably, the activity of tourism with its focus upon travel movements and the transfer of people, goods and services through time and space can be viewed as “essentially a geographical phenomenon” (Williams, 2009: 19). Not surprisingly, therefore, as Hall (2013: 601) observes the discipline of geography “has long had a significant place in tourism research”. With its core interests in place, space and the environment the research produced by geographers constitutes an important element of the growth and consolidation of the multi-disciplinary base of tourism studies (Mitchell, 1979; Hall & Page, 2006; Williams, 2009; Gill, 2012; Wilson, 2012). In one of the earliest surveys of scholarship by geographers Pearce (1979) identified six major areas of interest for geographical research in tourism. These related to spatial aspects of supply, spatial aspects of demand, the geography of resorts, patterns of movements and flows, tourism impacts, and models of tourist

space. During the 1970s for Pearce (1979: 247) “the geography of tourism was mainly concerned with the spatial differentiation of tourism and the recognition of general regularities in its occurrence”. The particular focus on spatial issues among geographical researchers was reiterated over a decade later in a subsequent review by Mitchell and Murphy (1991: 63) who maintained that the spatial implications of tourism “are very important to geography”.

As documented in works by, among others, Williams (2009), Gill (2012), Hall (2013) and Lew et al. (2014) contemporary geographical studies have moved beyond simply issues of spatial analysis. Recent scholarship by tourism geographers incorporates an array of competing theoretical and methodological perspectives, including positivist and behavioural approaches, political economy, postmodernism and most recently the mobilities perspective (Hannam, 2008; Wilson, 2012; Hall, 2013).

The seminal international review of progress in geographical research by Hall and Page (2009) observes “geographers have made a substantial contribution to the field of tourism overall” (Hall & Page, 2009: 4). Several topics or themes are identified in which geographers have made particularly notable contributions, namely concerning conservation and biosecurity, destination planning and management, global environmental change, human mobility, innovation, pro-poor tourism, and tourism entrepreneurship.

Further themes must be added to this list. From the recent collection by Lew et al. (2014), which charts the frontiers of contemporary tourism studies, it is evident geographers are well-represented in debates around public policy, wilderness studies, urban tourism, local economic development, and climate change. In addition, Hall (2013) asserts that sustainable tourism research is another arena in which geographers have made important contributions.

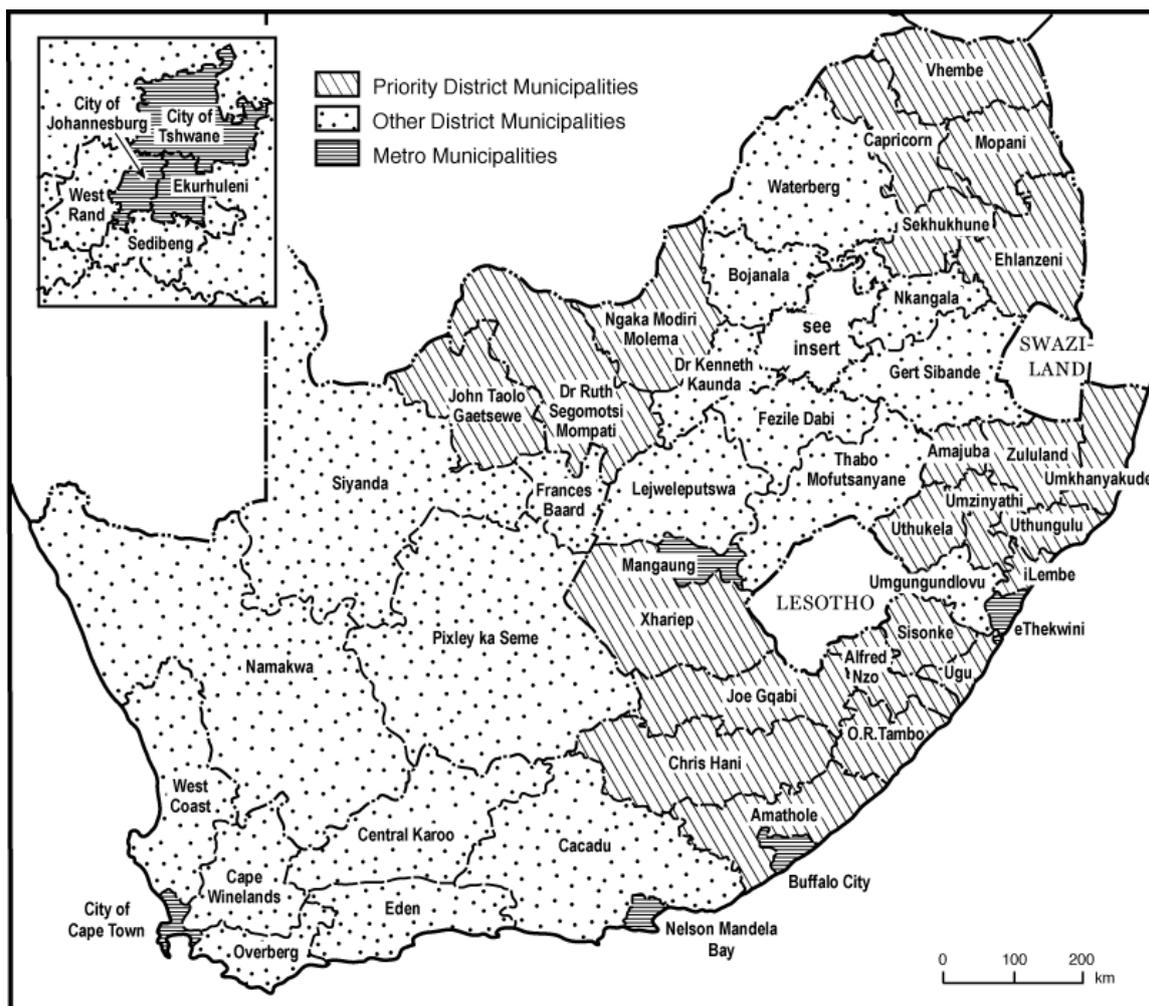
Accordingly, it is evident that over the past 15 years, the research of tourism geographers has revealed considerable diversity and in so doing contributed to the multi-disciplinary character of tourism studies. This said one dimension of the tourism landscape that remains the special domain for geographical researchers is the mapping out and interpretation of the spatial organization of tourism. Understanding the production and organization of tourism spaces are enduring themes for geographical works on tourism (Lew et al., 2014). In terms of

specifically African geographical scholarship on tourism the need for applied research to understand the unfolding spatial patterns of tourism is vital for informing strategic policy development and analysis both at national and local scales (Rogerson & Visser, 2011a).

## **CONTEXT, METHODS AND SOURCES**

In South Africa the National Development Plan acknowledges tourism as one of the central drivers of the country’s economy and employment creation, envisaging that the sector can contribute to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction (National Planning Commission, 2011). For local governments tourism is a vital sector for analysis and strategic planning for local development (Rogerson, 2010, 2013a, 2014).

It is the task in this article to undertake a geographical analysis of patterns of tourism in South Africa and specifically to unpack key trends in the country’s contemporary tourism space economy. By adopting the traditional spatial organization perspective as advocated by Pearce (1979) the paper seeks to contribute to the limited existing knowledge base about the uneven geographical development of tourism in South Africa (Visser, 2007; Visser & Hoogendoorn, 2012; Rogerson JM, 2013a, 2013b). The details of the tourism space economy of South Africa have remained so far unrecorded mainly because of the absence of any official data which is differentiated on a geographical basis other than the country’s nine provinces.



**Figure 1: Three Tourism Spaces in South Africa**

In this investigation of spatial patterns of tourism in South Africa the focus is upon the differential performances which are recorded across three different groups of municipalities as destinations or tourism spaces. These three groups are demarcated and shown on Figure 1, namely the metropolitan areas, the rural spaces of the priority district municipalities, and what can be called the intermediate space of the other non-priority district municipalities.

The first tourism space is that of the group of metropolitan areas which are the eight recognized metropolitan municipalities of Buffalo City, Cape Town, Ekurhuleni, eThekweni, Johannesburg, Mangaung, Nelson Mandela Bay, and Tshwane. These metropolitan areas host the largest

share of economic activity in the country and represent the engines for development of South Africa's national space economy as a whole. As a whole they constitute the most prosperous and economically advanced areas of South Africa. Nevertheless, as the pace of urban population expansion is outstripping current rates of urban economic growth these metropolitan areas are at the same time "becoming home to expanding poor populations" (National Treasury, 2011: 211).

All of South Africa's metropolitan areas are engaged in energetic initiatives for job creation, urban economic development and especially of pro-poor forms of development intervention. Over the past

two decades one important aspect of local economic development initiatives in these cities has been the promotion of tourism as a labour-absorptive sector (Rogerson, 2002a; 2008, 2010; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2010). The challenges and potential for expanding urban tourism as a basis for promoting economic growth, image enhancement and employment creation are themes observed in a number of recent investigations across South Africa's leading cities (Rogerson, 2002b; Ferreira & Visser, 2007; Rogerson & Visser, 2007; Ferreira, 2011; Rogerson & Visser, 2011b; Rogerson, 2013b; Van der Merwe, 2013; Mbhiza & Mearns, 2014). As has been observed South Africa's cities have tried to catalyse tourism development through a range of different forms of tourism. Many cities have sought to drive forward their inherent advantages for business tourism through establishing new convention centres and bidding for hosting international and local conferences.

In terms of leisure tourism other initiatives have been launched to encourage variously the hosting of sports events, the building of casinos, waterfront developments, new shoppertainment complexes and creating cultural and heritage products. Niche forms of tourism have been cultivated to further city tourism development, including support for backpacker tourism, gay tourism and slum tourism which involves developing tourism products in township areas (Rogerson & Visser, 2007, 2011b). Overall, the complex of issues and challenges around tourism development in the metropolitan areas mark them as a distinctive group of tourism spaces in South Africa particularly in respect of challenges they confront as urban tourism destinations (Rogerson & Visser, 2007, 2011b; Rogerson, 2013a).

The second set of tourism spaces under investigation here are the 23 Priority District Municipalities which are a specific focus for economic development by national government as they represent the most lagging and underdeveloped regions

of the national space economy. These areas essentially cover the former Homelands which were created under apartheid and exhibit the most chronic indicators of poverty and exclusion, manifesting "high levels of poverty, service constraints, high unemployment and low levels of economic development" (CSIR, 2013: 2). These zones of worst deprivation in the country were the former 'Native Reserves', the 13 percent of South Africa designated as 'black space' and subsequently transformed into the Bantustans or Homelands. Historically, these areas were created as cheap labour reservoirs of migrant labour (Wolpe, 1972). The continued flow of cheap labour power for South Africa's mines and industries was anchored upon maintaining the oscillatory movements of (mainly male) black labourers (Wolpe, 1972). A coercive labour system was reinforced by the articulation and workings of South Africa's closed city programmes of influx control which served to block permanent black urbanization particularly in so-called 'White' metropolitan areas (Steinbrink, 2009, 2010).

From 1948 onwards Black South Africans effectively were stripped of their citizenship making them legally citizens of one of the ten ethnically-based and nominally self-governing Bantustans or tribal Homelands. Under apartheid the Homeland areas experienced economic neglect, underdevelopment, forced resettlement and overcrowding. With political transition and democratic change in 1994 the former Homelands were reabsorbed into South Africa and remained the most poverty-stricken areas of the country.

To address the economic distress of these areas the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform is collaborating with the Department of Economic Development to take up the development challenges of 23 priority district municipalities, including for small town revitalization (Mathfield, 2013). Alongside initiatives to promote small-

scale agriculture and address infrastructural backlogs, tourism is viewed as a potential focus for promotion in terms of job creation and regional development (Rogerson, 2015a). It is notable that in 2012 the National Department of Tourism launched its Rural Tourism Strategy one facet of which is build tourism in these mainly rural areas (Department of Tourism, 2012). Although cultural and heritage assets are under scrutiny it should be noted that some of the 23 Priority Districts have substantial assets for catalyzing leisure tourism as they contain or are proximate to some of South Africa's leading protected areas for nature tourism, including the Kruger National Park and iSimangaliso Wetlands Park.

Tourism research about the 23 Priority Districts is largely undeveloped with the exception of studies which investigate the impacts of nature tourism for surrounding communities (Spenceley & Goodwin, 2007; Strickland-Munro et al., 2010; Rogerson et al., 2013; Rylance & Spenceley, 2013). Although positive community attitudes towards development of rural tourism have been disclosed major challenges emerge for the expansion of leisure tourism (Nzama, 2008; Magi & Nzama, 2009). Nzama (2010) highlights developmental challenges of deepening tourism in terms of existing capacity constraints as local communities have little knowledge of the tourism potential resources of their area and lack knowledge of how to package existing resources into tourism products. Additional critical constraints relate to local communities being unaware of policies and strategies that seek to support their broadened participation in tourism and the capacity weakness of most local authorities for supporting rural tourism development (Nzama, 2009; Rogerson, 2013b). Arguably the tourism development challenges faced by these 23 priority districts are highly distinctive as for the most part these areas represent deep rural spaces with the exception of the two provincial capitals of Nelspruit and Polokwane, which are included.

The third group is the 'intermediate spaces' and represented by those District Municipalities which are not designated as priority areas for current government planning intervention. In large part these are the more prosperous rural spaces which also include a number of significant secondary centres such as George, Kimberley, Knysna, Rustenburg and Stellenbosch. Geographically, these District Municipalities are concentrated in the provinces of Western Cape, Northern Cape, parts of Free State, Gauteng, North West and Mpumalanga and with small pockets of Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. As a broad statement these areas are more economically developed than the 23 priority districts but lack the economic dynamism of the country's more prosperous metropolitan regions. Many of these areas are more economically vulnerable than metropolitan areas as their economic base is often anchored upon only one dominant economic activity. Issues of local economic development are therefore especially important with an imperative need for diversification of urban and district economies (Marais, 2014). For local development, tourism has assumed an increasingly significant role in these intermediate spaces shift to a post-productivist countryside (Hoogendoorn et al. 2009). In addition to the attractions of many centres for second-homes tourism several notable local development initiatives have been enacted to leverage local tourism assets. This has encompassed a range of niche tourism products including for adventure tourism, agritourism, avitourism, fishing, food and wine tourism, and golf tourism. The packaging of a range of tourism products into themed routes has been another critical aspect of tourism-led expansion in these intermediate spaces with the most well-known initiatives those of the Western Cape wine routes, the Midlands Meander, the Highlands Meander, Magaliesberg Meander and the Crocodile Ramble.

As compared to the limited scholarly gaze of tourism researchers upon the priority districts, many aspects of tourism

development occurring in these intermediate spaces have come under critical scrutiny. Several research investigations have been pursued of tourism LED challenges of small towns (Rogerson, 2002a; Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Marais, 2004; Donaldson, 2007; Gibb & Nel, 2007; Nel & Rogerson, 2007; Human et al., 2008; Donaldson, 2009; Donaldson & Marais, 2012) as well as secondary centres such as George (Ramukumba, 2012; Ramukumba et al., 2012) and Kimberley (Van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2013). In addition, the LED implications of the array of route tourism initiatives are well-documented (Nowers et al., 2002; Rogerson, 2002c; Bruwer, 2003; Lourens, 2007; Rogerson, 2007; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2009). Second homes tourism and its local impacts has been another popular focus for research in a number of destinations (Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2004; Hoogendoorn et al., 2009; Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). More recently, parallel work has emerged on both the hotel sector (Rogerson JM, 2013c) and timeshare accommodation which also is a facet of tourism in certain of these tourism spaces (Pandy & Rogerson, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Finally, sectoral investigations into particular niche forms of tourism which are strongly represented in these intermediate spaces of the non-priority districts are further useful contributions to tourism scholarship on these areas. Several examples are studies produced on adventure tourism, avitourism, fishing, golf and wine tourism (Tassiopoulos & Haydam, 2008; Du Preez & Lee, 2010; Donaldson & Marais, 2012; Nicolaidis, 2012; Ferreira & Muller, 2013; Hoogendoorn, 2014; McKay, 2014).

In summary, therefore these three groupings of municipalities – the metropolitan areas, areas, the 23 priority district municipalities or distressed areas, and the intermediate space of the non-priority districts - form the basis for interpreting the uneven geography of tourism across South Africa (Figure 1). In terms of sources the study draws upon an analysis of a local level data set on tourism accessed from Global Insight. This data base contains details of the tourism performance of all local authorities in the country in respect of *inter alia*, the number of tourism trips differentiated by purpose of trip; bed-nights by origin of tourist (domestic or international); calculation of tourism spend; and of the contribution of tourism to local gross domestic product. Local data is available for the period 2001-2012 relating to travel as differentiated for all local, district and metropolitan authorities in the country.

#### **UNEVEN GEOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM**

In unpacking the uneven spatial distribution of tourism between the three groups of municipalities the analysis unfolds with analysis of patterns of tourism trips and bed-nights, visitor spend, source of tourists, and purpose of trip. The results indicate the dominance of South Africa's tourism space economy by the group of metropolitan areas. In addition, the analysis shows that the three different tourism spaces exhibit different development trajectories.

**Table 1: Total tourism trips and bednights, 2001-2012 by region**

	<b>Metros</b>		<b>Priority Districts</b>		<b>Intermediate</b>	
	<b>Total Tourism Trips</b>	<b>Total Bednights</b>	<b>Total Tourism Trips</b>	<b>Total Bednights</b>	<b>Total Tourism Trips</b>	<b>Total Bednights</b>
2001	9018345	65 461209	7585502	4772428	6543855	44476414
2006	11825467	76 175235	12363895	60970522	9046914	52439199
2010	14026046	89 580599	13136571	68556141	10210274	57720126
2012	13586902	90 759798	11707606	66363634	9251392	59538774

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

**Table 2: Total tourism trips and bednights, 2001-2012, percent share of national total**

	<b>Metros</b>		<b>Priority Districts</b>		<b>Intermediate</b>	
	<b>Total Tourism Trips</b>	<b>Total Bednights</b>	<b>Total Tourism Trips</b>	<b>Total Bednights</b>	<b>Total Tourism Trips</b>	<b>Total Bednights</b>
2001	39.0	41.5	32.8	30.3	28.3	28.2
2006	35.6	40.2	37.2	32.2	27.2	27.7
2010	37.5	41.5	35.2	31.8	27.3	26.7
2012	39.3	41.9	33.9	30.6	26.8	27.5

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

**Table 3: Estimated total tourism spend by region (R1000, Current Prices)**

	<b>Metros</b>		<b>Priority Districts</b>		<b>Intermediate</b>	
	<b>Tourism Spend</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Tourism Spend</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Tourism Spend</b>	<b>Percent</b>
2001	33731482	52.7	10575898	16.5	19711374	30.8
2006	61167164	51.3	21982508	18.4	36061357	30.3
2010	86943420	51.6	32570084	19.3	48981496	29.1
2012	88604362	53.6	33024060	20.0	43739941	26.4

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Tables 1, 2 and 3 give a profile of the growth of tourism in the three areas as a whole. Several important trends can be noted. Table 1 shows that between 2001 and 2012 there has been a net growth in indicators of the numbers of tourism trips and bed-nights. The net expansion of trips and bed-nights varies across the three regions and demonstrates uneven patterns of tourism growth. The metropolitan areas expand by respectively 4.6 million trips and 25.3 million bed-nights or 50.7 percent and 38.6 percent growth as compared to an expansion of 2.8 million trips and 15.5 million bed-nights in the priority districts representing respective growth of 43.0 percent and 34.8 percent. For the intermediate spaces growth is recorded of 2.7 million trips and 15.1 million bed-nights which respectively represent 17.6 percent and 33.9 percent growth, the weakest performing of the three groups. It is observed that whilst the numbers of tourism trips to all three tourism spaces reach a peak in 2010, the year of South Africa's hosting of the FIFA World Cup, the numbers of recorded bed-nights have continued to climb between 2010 and 2012. The unevenness of growth across the three regions is reflected in Table 2 which shows their relative share of total trips and bed-nights for the period 2001-2012. Certain shifts

have taken place in this period, most notably in terms of both total tourism trips and bed-nights there is an increased share for the metropolitan areas and the priority districts with a reduction in relative share of the intermediate spaces of the non-priority districts.

Table 3 directs attention to the important issues of estimated tourism spend in each of the three sets of destinations. Three points are revealed. First, is growth in tourism spend is evident in each of the three regions. Second, is that the unevenness of growth is reflected in the rising relative share of total visitor spend which is captured by both the metropolitan areas and the priority districts at the expense of the intermediate spaces as a whole. Three, it is observed, however, that if a comparison is undertaken of the relative share of total trips and visitor spend that the visitor spend proportion is higher in both metropolitan areas and the intermediate spaces but is lower in the priority districts. This finding underscores the higher value of average tourism trips which are taken to destinations in the metropolitan areas and intermediate spaces as compared to the lower spend on trips taken to destinations in the priority districts.

**Table 4: Total tourism trips by source, Domestic or International**

	RSA		Metros		Priority Districts		Intermediate	
	Dom	Int	Dom	Int	Dom	Int	Dom	Int
2001	83.6	16.4	79.4	<b>20.6</b>	<b>91.2</b>	8.8	80.5	<b>19.5</b>
2006	83.4	16.6	77.1	<b>22.9</b>	<b>91.3</b>	8.7	80.9	<b>19.1</b>
2010	79.9	20.1	74.2	<b>25.8</b>	<b>87.6</b>	12.4	60.1	<b>39.9</b>
2012	75.0	25.0	69.4	<b>30.6</b>	<b>83.8</b>	16.2	57.2	<b>42.8</b>

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

**Table 5: Total bed-nights by source, Domestic or International**

	RSA		Metros		Priority Districts		Intermediate	
	Dom	Int	Dom	Int	Dom	Int	Dom	Int
2001	77.3	22.7	71.9	<b>28.1</b>	<b>88.4</b>	11.6	73.3	<b>26.7</b>
2006	76.3	23.7	69.6	<b>30.4</b>	<b>88.6</b>	11.4	71.5	<b>28.5</b>
2010	70.7	29.3	61.9	<b>38.2</b>	<b>84.4</b>	15.6	68.2	<b>31.8</b>
2012	66.7	33.3	56.7	<b>43.3</b>	<b>83.6</b>	16.4	62.9	<b>37.1</b>

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Tables 4 and 5 disaggregate the data for numbers of trips and bed-nights in terms of source of visitor, whether domestic or international. The category 'international' includes both the lucrative market of longhaul travellers to South Africa, mainly leisure tourists from Europe and the USA, as well as the market of regional African tourists, the largest share of which are involved in cross-border shopping/trading and business tourism rather than leisure tourism (Rogerson & Visser, 2006). Tables 4 and 5 indicate that the sources of tourists differ markedly between the different tourism spaces. It is observed that in particular the tourism economy of

the priority districts is heavily dominated by domestic visitors. A comparison of the three regions with the national profile of tourists shows that, as indexed both by trips and bed-nights, the relative importance of metropolitan areas for international tourists as opposed to domestic tourists expands in significance. In addition, the patterns of tourism trips to destinations in the intermediate spaces are weighted proportionately towards international rather than domestic visitors. By contrast, in the priority districts, there is an overwhelming concentration of domestic tourists in these areas.

**Table 6: Total trips by purpose of travel**

	SOUTH AFRICA				METROS				PRIORITY DM				INTERMEDIATE			
	L	B	VFR	O	L	B	VFR	O	L	B	VFR	O	L	B	VFR	O
2001	22.4	10.8	57.3	9.5	<b>27.1</b>	<b>14.2</b>	51.7	6.9	11.1	5.4	<b>69.0</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>29.1</b>	12.4	51.3	7.2
2006	16.1	9.2	67.3	7.3	<b>19.4</b>	<b>13.2</b>	61.5	5.9	9.1	4.6	<b>76.5</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>21.4</b>	10.3	62.5	5.8
2010	19.9	10.2	63.1	6.9	<b>23.6</b>	<b>14.9</b>	56.1	5.4	12.1	5.2	<b>72.8</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>24.7</b>	10.2	60.1	4.9
2012	19.7	11.9	60.8	7.7	<b>24.4</b>	<b>17.9</b>	51.1	6.6	12.1	5.7	<b>71.8</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>22.3</b>	10.8	<b>61.1</b>	5.7

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Table 6 gives the relative shares of trips in terms of purpose of travel. Four categories of tourism are recognized, namely leisure (L), business (B), visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and other (O), which is mainly religious travel and travel for health

purposes. It is shown that in terms of absolute numbers of trips the largest proportion of tourism to all destinations is represented by VFR travel. This finding is in line with national data that VFR travel in 2012 accounted for 60.8 of all tourism

trips. Beyond VFR travel, the next most significant purposes of travel in terms of national patterns are travel for leisure and business purposes with the category other of only minor significance. A comparison of the relative profiles of these different categories of travel between the three different regions discloses, however, some significant differences.

Undertaking a comparison between the regional versus the national share of different forms of tourism the following observations can be made (Table 6). First, tourism to metropolitan destinations is relatively concentrated in leisure and business travel which are the two most lucrative forms of tourism as indexed by average spend per trip. Further, between 2001 and 2012 the relative share of metropolitan destinations in business tourism expands markedly from 14.2 percent to 17.9 percent. The forms of tourism which in relative terms are under-represented in metropolitan destinations as compared to the national situation are VFR travel and the category of other travel. Second, in the priority districts a contrasting picture emerges. In these areas the concentration in tourism trips is for VFR travel and other trips whereas the categories of leisure and business tourism are underperforming. It is shown that in relative terms the share of VFR trips accounted for by the priority districts records an increase from 69.0 to 71.8 percent of all national VFR trips. The strength of VFR travel is explained by the continuation of circular migration in the post-apartheid period despite the abandonment of coercive controls. The geographical pattern of VFR tourism in South Africa is explained by a complex of factors, most importantly the existence of split or translocal households for whom VFR mobilities are critical (Rogerson, 2015b). The significance of the category 'other' in tourism for the priority districts is accounted for by religious pilgrimages (Rogerson, 2015a). In these areas are the major pilgrimage sites of large African

independent churches in South Africa, most importantly of Moria village in Limpopo province which is site of the Zion Christian Church. At various times of the year large gatherings of pilgrims are attracted to these sacred locations with the most important, Zion City, attracting more than one million church members over the Easter pilgrimage.

Finally, for the group of intermediate spaces the most striking observation is that the tourism economies of these areas are most strongly dominated by the lucrative leisure tourism market. As a whole these areas show under-representation in the remaining forms of travel, albeit with the exception in 2012 that the share of VFR trips marginally exceeded the national proportion. Overall, these findings about purpose of travel provide a base for accounting for the lower visitor spend which was recorded per trip in priority districts as compared to the higher proportion of spend which accrues per trip in both metropolitan destinations and the intermediate spaces.

## Conclusion

Interpreting and mapping the spatial dimensions of tourism is one of the research challenges for geographers engaged in tourism studies. The goal in this article was modest, namely to provide a picture of the uneven geography of tourism across South Africa. Trends observed in the country's tourism space economy were in relation to disaggregating three groupings of municipalities as destinations or tourism spaces. The analysis as a whole discloses metropolitan dominance of the national tourism space economy and reveals the different profiles and performance of tourism in the three different sets of tourism spaces. In particular, the three groups of destinations exhibit different

characteristics in terms of their growth performance (numbers of trips, bednights and visitor spend), origin of visitors (domestic versus international) and purpose of travel (leisure, business, VFR and other). The particular relevance of these findings is for improved local tourism planning which must be informed by knowledge of the shifting trends in patterns of tourism.

In reviewing the findings it must be understood, however, that they concern the aggregate categories of metropolitan areas, priority districts and intermediate spaces or non-priority districts. The caveat must be made that each of these three sets of destinations is diverse in respect of growth performance, tourism flows and development with variations existing

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between the different metropolitan areas, between the different priority districts and between the different non-priority districts or areas which were defined as intermediate spaces. This observation underlines the need for further more disaggregated forms of analysis to unravel the changing geographical landscape of South African tourism.

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