Seeking strategies for sustainability in Tourism Entrepreneurship in South Africa

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Abstract

Tourism is hailed worldwide as a growing industry that contributes towards job creation and linking businesses in various destinations, while the same thing cannot be said about its progress in practising sustainable development initiatives. However, debates on linking sustainability with business elicit controversial connotations with a myriad of uncertain futures regarding business ventures. This study complements the existing discourses in exploring challenges experienced by tourism entrepreneurs (TE) in advancing sustainability. In post-apartheid South Africa, the tourism industry's development has accelerated through the latest innovations generated in technology and transport, ubiquitous e-communications, collaborations on local economic development, less defined geographical borders between the countries and climate change debates. A review of literature indicates that there is paucity of literature on sustainability for tourism entrepreneurship (TE). This study explores sustainability in the tourism industry by assessing merits and demerits in practising sustainable development with the intention to develop strategies that can mitigate these barriers. A document analysis approach was adopted to draw data from the literature review, policy documents, articles from accredited journal and books. Findings from this study recommend policy options on further integration of tourism towards sustainable development.

Keywords: Tourism; entrepreneurship, small and medium sized enterprises, sustainability.

Introduction

The main aim of this study is to examine the limitation experienced by tourism entrepreneurs in promoting sustainable development in South Africa. Tourism entrepreneurship has a tremendous influence on local economic development (Ateljevic, 2006:283). Tourism entrepreneurs are obviously surrounded by risks and limitations that hinder their prosperity and advancement towards development and growth of their business. However, government in the post-apartheid era has identified tourism as important for the economic development of this country; hence, there needs to be expansion in the tourism industry. Consequently, the emerging tourism entrepreneurs must tap into various programmes to develop their entrepreneurial skills so that they can address challenges they experience while practising sustainability in their businesses.

This study's argument intends to contribute to the emerging discourse on the tourism industry's limitations towards sustainability, which can in turn add value to policy-makers in crafting policies that consider the contribution of tourism towards sustainability. While the tourism literature affords scholars an understanding of specific challenges facing TEs in urban and rural regions, it does not provide a broader understanding of their involvement in the skill transfer strategies in a sustainable way. In addition, the White Paper on Development and Promotion of Tourism (1996) is silent on sustainability of tourism for future growth and development. Notably, tourism destinations in South Africa can take advantage of both natural and fabricated competitive advantage driven by science, innovation, technology and

information. This study argues that although there is quite substantial research focussed on tourism entrepreneurship (TE) and sustainability, and how TE contributes towards socio-economic development in the communities, the stakeholders must constantly appraise tourism entrepreneurship in order to align their businesses with sustainability to reduce poverty in South African communities. Boley, McGehee and Hammett (2017:68) agree that stakeholders must evaluate the importance of sustainable development in various tourist places.

This study targets TE that facilitates at the low entry level, with a relatively low start-up capital for some services and with the potential for growth offered by skills and aspirations of host communities, and the existence of local culture and local awareness of their strength. The literature review focuses on diverse studies of TE with the intention of expanding on the discourse of TE using the lense of sustainable development. The main aim of this study was to explore merits and demerits in the practice of sustainable tourism. However, the organisation of this study is as follows; introduction, conceptualisation of tourism entrepreneurship, sustainable tourism, challenges of promoting sustainable tourism, policy implications, and recommendations. Findings from this study may contribute towards the development of a suitable policy framework on tourism entrepreneurship for sustainability.

Conceptualising Tourism Entrepreneurship

The hospitality industry dates back 2000 years due to evolution of the transport industry and which led to a demand for educated and skilled personnel (Kamau and Wando, 2012:55). Some scholars note the challenge of slow development of human capital in the hospitality industry in many countries such as China, Taiwan, Cyprus, Australia and many more. Sibanyoni *et al.* (2015:3) state that KwaZulu -Natal, South Africa has also entered the world of tourism and hospitality with pressure to become technologically more advanced, and the effects of increased global competition have further increased the demand for highly skilled workers. Daniel *et al.* (2017:66) are of the view that entrepreneurship and innovation in tourism is overlooked in areas dealing with today's consumers and environmental trends. It is obvious that formal education can be provided to develop skills and empower young entrepreneurs. Azmat, Ferdous, Couchman (2015) also agree that the current studies in tourism are limited in developing entrepreneurial skills for sustainability. They further contend that the subsistence marketplaces are not conducive to developing entrepreneurships due to their limitation on multiple financial, infrastructural, informational, and educational resource shortages.

There is a growing need to develop tourism entrepreneurship (TE) of small and medium sized enterprises that can contribute towards job creation and economic development in South Africa. Tourism entrepreneurs are individuals developing businesses to explore opportunities to create goods and services in the form of small and medium sized enterprises focusing on farm attraction, homestays, bed and breakfasts (B&B), restaurants, coffee shops and small cafes, gifts shops, travel agencies, transport, parks and recreation and tour operators. While there is a lack of a universally accepted definition of entrepreneurship, Ateljevic and Page (2009:55) assert that entrepreneurship is a consequence of the direct behaviour patterns attributed by a person with interests in economic and human engagement. Entrepreneurship plays a prominent role in the early developmental stages of tourism in small and rural towns where international hotel chains and multi-national corporations and firms are most likely to be attracted to do business and provide potential investments. Ateljevic (2006:283) posits that the tourism entrepreneurship process is expected to develop in a path that would promote the local economic development. By the nature of their services, tourist entrepreneurs are small and medium sized entrepreneurs that do not have a large employee and production base.

The application of tourism entrepreneurship is from family based enterprises to innovative SME's like sustainable local business, agro-tourism farms, organic food restaurants, family style restaurants and cafes, bed and breakfast operations, economy hotels, boutique hotels, homestays, local gift shops, independent travel agencies and rent-a-car companies, farm

attractions and retail outlets serving the specific needs of various types of tourists (Pirnar, 2017:79). Entrepreneurs in tourism might not have a fully developed business entity, but they are striving to develop their potential using their own skills and tapping into resources that can sustain their business in the tourism market segment. Tourism entrepreneurship is different since it refers to a specific and different industrial sector in terms of identification of entrepreneurial opportunities and the process of their conversion into consumable tourism products.

The limited conceptualisation of the tourism industry results in the tourism concept not being adequately defined and understood. However, the changing nature of global and local development has resulted in a steady growth in tourism entrepreneurship, especially in the travel and leisure sectors. Mao (2014:37) also agrees that TE micro-entrepreneurs have limited support at their disposal; hence, they have a limited chance of survival and developing ways of how to sustain local resources while relying on their own skills, labour, gardens, nurseries and cultural knowledge. Pirnar (2015:86) argues that the entrepreneurship process involves the creativity, innovation, risk-taking and market niching of many entrepreneurs. Nikraftar and Hosseini (2016:6) are of the view that the scale of tourism is not only driven by the human desires to travel or their attributes and creativity to take a risk in searching for opportunities, but to respond to human needs in one of the fastest growing sectors of the global economy.

Some of the TE activities have mushroomed preceding the hosting of international events such as the World Trade Organisations and the Olympic Games. Liberalisation of international trade was the emphasis of these games and hosting countries discarded restrictions of people's mobility and opened doors for an entrepreneurial spirit to flourish. Big business owners such as Walt Disney have sourced their investments from entertainment and leisure. In such liberalisation and free trading, a tremendous growth of economies and mobility of entrepreneurs to import skills and business ideas to expand their tourism business has taken place. However, factors contributing to the development and sustainability of the tourism industry include socio-economic and political factors and government supporting strategies and mechanisms towards tourism. The growth of small business in tourism can be linked to conditions where in some areas there are relatively low entry barriers, few skills required and few restrictions to enter the tourism industry. Power, Di Domenico and Miller (2017:37) assert that TE should concentrate on ethical development when making profit acquired through economic activity of the highest virtue and refrain from bad tendencies. Hence, entrepreneurial tourism flourish in areas where local culture and its accessories are promoted as a way of developing local economies in the market by developing several consumable products such as gifts and cultural attires.

Tourism entrepreneurs must exploit opportunities and be innovative to survive and further achieve their goals. According to Nikraftar and Hosseini (2015:16), opportunity in TE to develop business is a trial and error process, and the success in managing small businesses is reached through risk-taking. An opportunity in TE is realised through creative and innovative ideas that need skills to promote the business and make it sustainable. This study argues that entrepreneurial opportunity can only be recognised when there is some self-perceived alertness on sustainable development. The self-perceived alertness of individual entrepreneurs can be triggered by the environmental factors and innovative ideas that an individual entrepreneur has acquired.

The Context of Sustainable Development

Before analysing how TE is challenged in contributing towards achieving the goals of sustainable development, it is important to further elaborate on the meaning of sustainable development. This section attempts to conceptually connect the concerns of sustainable

tourism with those of local economic development. Debates about sustainable development became pervasive shortly after the publication of the World Commission report (WCED 1987), with further interpretation and narrative discourses about sustainable development still further alluded to by diverse fields of studies. In the context of this study, a considerable simplification of the nexus of sustainable development and tourism is imperative and practical. According to the United Nations (UN), sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their resource needs (UN, 2015). Sustainable development is development beyond environmental carrying capacity, with improvement and growth that do not comprise of the exploitation of the environment and natural resources (Theron, 2011:31). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2007), the challenge of sustainable development is observed through the exploitation of natural resources by human beings and the mismanagement of the environment.

A key notion to emerge from this exercise is that different interpretations of sustainable tourism are appropriate under different circumstances. Sustainable tourism should not be regarded as a rigid framework, but rather as an adaptive paradigm, which legitimises a variety of approaches according to specific circumstances. Tourism should be practised in contribution towards sustainable development by keeping all basic human needs at an equilibrium with the environment.

The major issues in the conceptualisation of sustainable development include the follows:

Table 1. Major Issues in Interpreting Sustainable Development

Hunter (1997) Sustainable development	UN Sustainable goals (2015)
• The role of economic growth in promoting human well-being. • The impact and importance of human population growth. • The effective existence of environmental limits to growth. • The substitutability of natural resources (capital) with human-made capital, created through economic growth and technical innovation. • The differential interpretation of the criticality of various components of the natural resource base and, therefore, the potential for substitution. • The ability of technologies (including management methods such as environmental impact assessment and environmental auditing) to decouple economic growth and unwanted environmental side-effects. • The meaning of the value attributed to the natural world and the rights of non-human species, sentient or otherwise. • The degree to which a system's (ecosystems) perspective should be adopted and the importance of maintaining the functional integrity of ecosystems.	• End poverty and its forms. • End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. • Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages. • Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. • Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. • Ensure access to clean water and sanitation for all. • Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. • Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all. • Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation. • Reduce inequality within and among countries. • Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. • Ensure sustainable consumption and production matters. • Take urgent action to combat climate change. • Conservation and sustainable use of the ocean, seas and marine resources. • Sustainable management of forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss. • Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. • Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

There is a need for TE to adopt sustainable development principles that are agreed by all participating countries. The table (1) above reflects on the principles of sustainable development as advocated by two discourses. However, it is important to specify to TE the conditions under which they are expected by the government and other stakeholders to specify their entrepreneurial ventures as providing sustainable products and services. South Africa is also game to these principles; by addressing and ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all. However, some TE might be challenged in adopting and practising these principles since they don't have enough funding and there is an economic problem that is explained by the mismatch of unlimited human needs versus limited resources. In South Africa, the world of tourism and hospitality has become technologically more advanced rather than focusing on sustainable development because of increased global competition that has further increased the demand for skilled workers. This means the avoidance of development, which maintains, creates, or widens spatial or temporal differences in human well-being, is a fallacy. Entrepreneurs' consciousness of sustainability can only prevail through discipline, awareness and training.

Literature Review

Mowforth and Munt (2015:1) contend that tourism can be viewed through the lenses of vulnerability of the Third World countries, which is reflected through extreme poverty and disease, fundamentalist terrorism, overpopulation and food shortages. According to them, the growth of tourism offers a means for Third World countries to escape their confines of 'underdevelopment', and provide strategies that can determine tourism growth within the transition of sustainably and equitably. In the same context, South Africa can use its vulnerability of poverty and densely populated areas through diverse interventions to counteract the challenges of tourism entrepreneurship by aligning their businesses with sustainability. Hall, Gregory, Daneke and Lenox (2010:850) are reluctant about the future of entrepreneurship in fostering sustainable development due to the perceptions in labelling sustainable development principles as controversial connotations.

Whu and Chang (2015) identify a segment of tourism such as 'gaming' as having a socio-economic impact on the local communities through job creation and leisure. According to them, some of the benefits generated by casino games can lead to greater business opportunities and wage increases in rural areas. In urban areas, casinos can display and embrace the historical and cultural heritage, protect nature and the environment or parks and provide recreation and leisure concurrently, while this business may suffer in rural areas. Cultural tourism that relates with nature and the environment is not promoted enough to elicit how it encompasses the use and management of the environment. It is important for tourism entrepreneurs to support sustainable development and refrain from carbon emission while they carry out their business operations aiming at developing local amenities. Even if one is broadly content with the currently dominant, tourist-centric paradigm of sustainable tourism, it is incredible that tourism sustainability research is not contributing more to the ongoing discourse and interpretation of sustainable development. Conversely, linking sustainability with TE in the densities of general sustainable development debates like gaming, also reflect on the difficulties of maintaining wildlife during accidents and poaching while scavengers are profiting at the expense of the wildlife. However, the South African Veterinary Foundation (2001) agrees that the view that Animal Welfare is an issue worldwide and officials in South Africa also agree that the South African legislation is in urgent need of reviewing issues relating to veterinary implications on animal welfare, animal protection and gaming.

Studies conducted on TE have focused on how innovations and technology have influenced the tourism industry in the last decades in areas such as transportation and technology, with barriers on divisions of territorial boundaries between states, and increased spending on

consumption and leisure (Dincera, Dincera and Yilmaza, 2015:413). However, TE for sustainability should promote development goals aiming to establish a resilient infrastructure that is linked to safer practice of sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation. However, lack of transport viability in rural areas is limiting tourism to achieve sustainable development and the empowerment of people in various countries. Tourism entrepreneurs in areas of transport contribute to Local Economic Development (LED) when there is income generated to produce technological solutions and the development of an industry that does not destroy nature. However, it is also expected that in the process of infrastructure and industrial development, skills can be developed to enhance service quality.

According to Dincera, Dincera and Yilmaza (2015:421), the international tourism industry influences local economic development, and is preferred as an alternative for the development path for transition and recovery of countries' economies that have suffered during economic downturn, political qualms and instabilities and climate change. Although each country's case is unique, TE have been compelled to address socio-economic problems and consider sustainability of the degrading environment. This implies that TE can be re-directed to embrace and appreciate the culture, environment and natural resources in their surroundings. The literature suggests that sustainability of the environment elicits controversy on issues relating to air pollution, water use, geology, and landscape and habitant impact. The main arguments of scholar's pro environmental justice are based on the degradation of the environment and its natural resources due to an increase in carbon dioxide (CO_2) emission.

Machamely and Gilmore (2017:26) assessed the role of the SMMEs in heritage supply chain. According to them, SMMEs are directly involved in engaging with tourists. However, it should be noted that heritage tourism is not presented fully to tourists since some of the stakeholders are communities who are not directly involved in decisions relating to heritage tourism. However, Jones, Young and Ymamoto (2017:68) appreciate the use of world heritage sites (WHS) and those of different countries. They argue that WHS are crucial to justify the impact of environmental costs. The overall administrative costs for WHS contributes towards the gross domestic product of diverse states. The challenge is that in rural communities where there is less market for heritage, communities seldom participate in decision-making regarding the use of heritage sites unless the leading government agencies like the National Parks and the department of Arts and Culture create incentives to attract local communities to participate.

Another interesting sustainable activity involving SMMEs in tourism is the use of community energy sources as part of the social enterprise. Kerr, Johnson and Weir (2017:202) note the contribution of community energy projects as part of a social enterprise. However, these scholars argue that it is common for renewable energy projects to incorporate financial packages that provide payments directly, or in kind, to local communities. The main limitation to these kinds of benefits is that they can be extended to other controversial forms of energy such as the building of nuclear power builds that is also destructive to the human kind. Iychettira, Hakvoort and Linares (2017:106) calls for transformation in the renewal of energy policies design and analysis aiming at incentivising of renewable energy, to transform the domination of the dominated by the neoclassical school of thought, and focus on sustainability. On the other hand, the role of social entrepreneurs and enterprises is to generate profit that can assist communities to develop in a positive way while managing natural resources within the environment. The communication sector has emerged as a promising TE business that contributes towards local economic development. The infrastructure for developing emerging collaboration between public enterprises like Eskom and the community in energy projects uses the advantage of existing infrastructure in urban developed areas with less impact on rural areas in creating jobs opportunities and developing local communities. However, the generation of renewable energy can enhance social acceptance about the omission of carbon emissions. South Africa can learn from the European Union and Western countries, since they

have emerged as leaders- in practising community energy generation with less carbon emission.

Sustainability practices also adopted in agrarian tourism, which features homestays as sustainable way, which has emerged through sustainable accommodation that displays natural landscaping and livelihood. However, homestays have been used for decades with less spending on the infrastructure since the environment and rural landscape is preferred to be less cost effective than the urban leisure accommodations. Smith (2012) observes challenges facing managers of homestay businesses in fostering sustainable tourism. According to them, limited human resources and strategic knowledge is a threat and most challenging in sustainable tourism. Prince and Ionnides (2017:349) also concur with the view that local tourism entrepreneurs in small scale and sensitive operations can be used to develop a bottom-up development within communities. Since a homestay is regarded as a form of accommodation with residential facilities where tourists can live with host families, there is a chance for the host family to acquire income and for both the host family and the tourists to interact with each other while experiencing an exchange of culture. In addition, homestays can contribute towards sustainability by providing job opportunities for host family members to guide and provide bed and breakfast to tourists and to have an income, which could develop the community to a better level.

Based on the literature, sustainability is regarded as imperative to sustain economic growth while preserving the natural resources and the environment. Richards and Hall (2000:93) assert that those communities are becoming a serious concern as a primary source of tourism. They are able to be involved in preserving natural environments culturally (Richards and Hall, 2000). In addition, communities can also be at the centre of initiatives that distract local economic systems and be part of policy debates that focus on tourism entrepreneurs, focusing on empowering communities by developing skills of the current and the next generation while advancing towards sustainable development. However, Jugmohan, Mtapuri and Giampiccoli (2017:388) concur with the fact that policy makers regard tourism as a buffer to reduce unemployment instead of considering tourism as a door to create decent and sustainable employment that would provide growth and experience. They argue that job seekers, especially youth, are challenged by their lack of work experience to find jobs in tourism. It is imperative that the same young job seekers be supported in finding ways and means to develop their skills and capacity as entrepreneurs until they reach the level of being self-supportive and self-reliant.

Implications for Policy Management

The literature reviewed indicates that even though tourism entrepreneurs have specialised training in the field with lengthy experience, they lack the capacity and ability to adopt sustainable operation practices in their businesses that will use sustainable resources. There is a greater need for government policies on tourism growth to provide more support for those institutions, such as colleges and universities, which focus on developing capacity building of tourism for sustainability. However, there are institutions and departments that are already assisting TE, either at a central or local level, regarding policy development, regulatory compliance, and through setting economic and social market mechanisms and standards. Sustainable development supports the idea that stakeholders in the tourism industry must contribute in decision-making regarding issues affecting them.

Institutions offering tourism studies need to link sustainable development into their programmes. Daniel, Costa, Pita and Costa (2017:67) agree with the fact that entrepreneurial courses that can expand the tourism programmes to enhance more options such as sustainability are limited. They further argue that the environmental impact of tourism is another increasingly important area to explore, as its focus is limited on the distribution that is often concentrated in major tourism terminuses that are ecologically vulnerable. Policies that

support TE are more about financial support. However, the department of trade and industry is hands-on in financially supporting institutions such as the CEDA, Youth Development Agency (YDA) and others. Some of the policy issues that affect the TE include levies and tax reforms, which can incur additional costs on the transportation, administration and consumption of goods.

Conclusions and Recommendations

According to this article, entrepreneurs are practicing tourism for sustainability, and it is revealing more limitations than merits of practising sustainability in TE practices, especially decision-making and engagement of communities in sustainable development aiming at contributing towards community development. It should be noted that TE are not a large segment by nature, and they are facing challenges that can retard their progress in as far as skill development, empowerment and resource management. This article contributes towards conceptualisation of tourism entrepreneurship and sustainability and alludes to the limitations of TE in providing strategies for sustainable development. Limitations are revealed in areas where TE are focusing on job creation, protection of the natural environment, skills transfer, asset acquisition which surfaced as the main contribution of the TE in developing local communities. Issues dealt with by TE include gaming and parks, recreation, cultural tourism, heritage, energy projects and homestays. It has surfaced from the literature that the tourism industry, represented through SMMEs have an increasing concern regarding sustainable development. However, SMMEs on TE are challenged in their plight since they are generally operating on a small capacity by nature, and the minimal resources at their disposal limit them. As business enterprises, they are also affected by government policies that require them to comply and contribute the natural revenue like the big businesses. Policy makers should offer more support on TE in terms of sustainability through policy formulation, which will compel the tourism industry to support sustainable development through their practice and daily operations.

This study strongly recommends the intervention of government in providing support by re-working their policy framework to be more precise in supporting sustainable development and local economic development. However, policies focusing on tourism and sustainable development are often debated and crafted through political circles with little contribution from the practitioners. Policies should support training institutions to include sustainability in their tourism curriculum and studies dealing with solar energy in operational matters of their business, and business practice of sustainability. Government planners and policy-makers should consider linking the management of rural tourism to larger rural planning strategies. In so doing, efforts should be made to balance the often-competing interests of tourism, the environment, and the local community. It is also important for TE to be organised and be part of the associations aimed at preserving future energies and local economic development in South Africa. The benefits of registering for membership in those associations include inclusion in their database, networking, invitation to workshops and information sharing.

This study notes differential clarification of various components of the natural resource base and their potential. However, there is a need for tourism entrepreneurs to explore the ability of technologies (including management methods such as environmental impact assessment and environmental auditing) to decrease economic development that is acquired through environmental side-effects in the tourism industry. There is an urgent need for government to provide more support to TE, by affording them better opportunities to participate in the main tourist attractions. However, the South African government have set aside money and prioritised responsible tourism in the main tourist attractions including safaris, games and parks. The aim is to upgrade these areas to the same standard as the other international tourist attractions, in line with responsible tourism practice that conserves nature and the environment to benefit communities. However, TE must tap into various resources on sustainability, take advantage of opportunities and participate in forums that engage parties

on climate finance for reduction of emission and vulnerability. Tourism enterprises should divert their businesses to address the challenges of the hospitality industry in South Africa including lack of compliance on sustainability performance areas in businesses such as hotels and restaurants. They should provide training through workshops and add to solutions to the shortage of qualified personnel in the hospitality industry in South Africa on the knowledge area of sustainable practices in LED. This can also assist the hospitality industry and policy makers to look at the valuation of tourism and sustainability in consideration with contributing stakeholders. A bad brand image without accurate understanding of the industry, can lead to many people leaving the industry with a negative attitude. This paper provides some insights for future research in the field of tourism, sustainable development, entrepreneurship and policy studies.

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