**Special Issue: Guest Editorial**

**Contemporary trends in Africa’s tourism and hospitality landscape**

The tourism and hospitality sector has expanded rapidly over the last few decades and has become a major catalyst for the transfer of wealth from developed to less developed countries. With the African economy set to grow at an impressive rate over the next few years, further opportunities to capitalise on the tourism and hospitality sector for social, environmental and business developments are urgently needed. This is considering that over seventy percent of the world’s poorest countries are located in Africa. According to Dieke (2009) many African nations have embraced tourism and hospitality as a ‘manna’ that will stimulate local economic and social development opportunities for its citizens. Current data published by the World Travel and Tourism Council in 2015 suggests that the tourism sector is growing consistently and remains a major contributor to many national economies in Africa. The data reveals evidence of a gross domestic product (GDP) contribution of 83.3 billion USD (3.4 percent of total GDP) in 2014, and was forecast to rise by 4.9 percent per annum from 2015-2025, to USD 138.8bn (3.3 percent of total GDP) in 2025. Such data does not only underscore the significance of the sector in the African context, but also highlights the need for continuous scholarship that seeks to elucidate upon the various factors and challenges that must be considered to ensure the sustainable development of the sector.

The tourism and hospitality sector faces a number of challenges that need to be addressed if the opportunities to capitalise on this sector for African development is to be envisioned. For example, Nunkoo (2015) observes that the tourism potential in African economies is constrained by several factors such as lack of capital, political instability, distance from main tourism markets, inadequate tourism infrastructure, poor governance, marketing and management of the industry, and lack of tourism policy and planning. Dieke (2009) highlights further constraints to include lack of skills and education required to propel the sector towards sustainability. With these constraints, Africa is also undergoing a transformation that is also changing its political, cultural, economic and ecological relations prompting new tourist geographies of development that need to be taken into account. If opportunities to capitalise on the tourism and hospitality sector is to be accelerated then meaningful dialogue by ‘African’ scholars are needed to guide development trajectories that are sustainable and benefit African communities.

Although much research has been conducted on the tourism phenomenon and challenges, the imbalances between the developed and the developing countries has been largely recognised by scholars. Knowledge production has largely been dominated by the developed world, with Nunkoo et al., (2013) noting the voices of the developing world being marginalised. Such geographic imbalances according to the authors provides some indication of underlying power dimensions in the production of tourism knowledge. The need for further research in the developing context cannot be overemphasised. This need is even more pressing given the recent calls for the decolonisation of education in Africa (as seen in the student movement campaign in South Africa in 2015/2016) with specific focus on African epistemologies. There has been a general lack of African voices exploring the continents tourism geographic discourses and away from the Anglo-American dominated centre. African scholarship has also been limited explored for the hospitality sector specifically. There is thus a need to explore from where and how tourism geographic and hospitality discourses emanate and their construction thereof. This elucidates to the type of theories and methods required to solve developmental challenges in Africa and away from the Anglo-American perspective of enquiry. The kind of problems faced within Africa are highly complex (and contested) and requires African voices and local orientated expositions to understand and capitalise on any opportunities to be gained from the tourism and hospitality sector in future.

Within the above context, this issue therefore seeks to proliferate African scholarships and issues surrounding ‘contemporary trends in Africa’s tourism and hospitality landscape.’ The aim is to engage with the everyday debates surrounding tourism and the hospitality environment in Africa (and also to capitalise on the decolonisation of education debate by injecting new African scholarship on the tourism and hospitality sector at this historic moment in time). The articles contained herein shed light on the historical and philosophical conditions within which tourism and hospitality in Africa is modelled. Topics covered in this issue will include that for tourism planning and policy; political economy and tourism development; tourism and society; tourism geographies, business tourism; culture and heritage; tourism and events; hospitality and social media and issues of environmental sustainability.

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Yours truly

Tembi Maloney Tichaawa, Ph.D and Llewellyn Leonard, Ph.D

*School of Tourism and Hospitality*

*University of Johannesburg*

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