

Developing a Viable Cultural Heritage Tourism Site at the Tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi: Lessons Drawn from the Muzibu-Azaala-Mpanga, Kasubi, Uganda

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Abstract

The Northern Limpopo Province of South Africa is characterized by a number of natural, environmental and cultural heritage sites, which could be developed into sustainable tourism sites. These sites could assist formerly disadvantaged communities improve on their livelihood options. This study covers the cultural heritage site of the tombs of the Masingo dynasty of the Vhavenda. The site is located in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study used the model applied at the Baganda cultural heritage site at the Kasubi tombs in Uganda, where some Baganda kings (*kabakas*) are buried in what is known as the Muzibu-Azaala Mpanga. Historical critical analysis was applied to data collected through a qualitative literature study, key informant interviews, and site visits. The study found that, while Ugandans supported Kasubi being used for tourism purposes, the custodians of the Swongozwi site were not willing to make the site available for tourism development, or any other economic activities. Developing cultural heritage sites of indigenous African peoples should be informed by their attitudes to the protection of culture and identity, though it means that opportunities for poverty alleviation are missed. The result corroborated other studies conducted earlier amongst the Vhavenda.

Keywords: Heritage, Kasubi, Kabaka, Muzibu-Azaala-Mpanga, Swongozwi

Introduction

It is claimed that the Baganda of Uganda are the only African tribe that buries their deceased kings in tombs built within enclosures – a culture and practice started by King Mutesa I in Buganda in approximately 1884, after he had built what came to be known as Muzibu-Azaala-Mpanga (Baker, 2017; Kigongo & Reid, 2007; Stonehouse, 2012). The tombs of the Baganda kings, known as the Kasubi tombs, have become global phenomenon, due to the unique, sophisticated and distinct cultural symbolism these tombs carry amongst the Baganda. These tombs have won iconic status amongst many pundits of African Studies. Some consider the tombs to represent East African cultures and heritage. The Muzibu-Azaala-Mpanga are described as significant indigenous hut structures made of Ugandan grass housing comprising the four tombs of the Kings of the kingdom of Buganda (Stonehouse, 2012). Kigongo and Reid (2007) suggest that King Mutesa I was the first *kabaka* (king) to have been buried at the Kasubi effectively declaring the site into a royal and sacred place amongst the Baganda. Since then,

the Kasubi site has held immense spiritual, religious and ritualistic significance for the Baganda, because of its connection to their ancestral roots; in addition serving as the royal shrines of the Baganda nation (Stonehouse, 2012). Kasfir (2012) reports that, in the absence of a modern security system, there are instead elderly women posted as ritual guardians inside the tomb area who take care of the tombs ensuring that they are protected from vandalism for example. Visitors to the site are expected to observe strict traditional practices, like avoiding trespassing into places designated as ‘sacred’ and ‘holy’ (Kasfir, 2012) for example.

Due to the significance of the Kasubi site as a cultural site, it has been converted into an internationally acclaimed Ganda cultural heritage site by UNESCO (Stonehouse, 2012). An assortment of artefacts are displayed there, for instance, spears, medals, drums and pictures of former *kabakas*. The site attracts many international and local tourists, and has made a big contribution to the economy of both the Buganda kingdom and Uganda in general. According to Baker (2017: 98), the “tourismification and integration of Buganda’s culture in community socio-economic activities” in Uganda, through the development and integration of the Kasubi site into the mainstream economy and developmental agenda, has assisted the country in its fight against poverty, and promotion of sustainable development of the tourism industry in this West African country. This practice is not exclusive to Uganda. Turning heritage sites, such as the Kasubi tombs, into tourism centres has long been a practice in post-colonial economies in Africa. In support of this assertion, McGregor and Schumaker (2006) explained that this practice had attracted widespread significance in the growing tourism economy, as a strategic tool to boost the national budget and local livelihoods in most regions of Southern Africa. Culture-based tourism has been part of the Ugandan economy for decades, and this has been consolidated in the Kasubi project. The marketability of the Kasubi tombs is strengthened by the supposed uniqueness of the site.

This local and international tourism-related interest in Kasubi is in contrast to the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi, South Africa, which remain obscure, hidden in buffer secrecy by the owners and custodians of the tombs – the Ramabulana royal house. The tombs of the Masingo are closely guarded and almost impossible to access; furthermore, information about them is scarce to come by even by visiting the site does not help much. The Masingo practice of hiding information from the public is synonymous with the larger Vhavenda tribe practices – especially when such information is considered sacred and privileged. Mafukata (2015) reports on this practice in the work, *Mythical Leopards (panthera Pardus) of the Vhavenda*; in the study, informants would not divulge information they deemed sacred, holy and therefore privileged to royals only, and should be hidden from the researcher who was considered an outsider – outsider by royalty although insider by tribe. In contrast, the tombs of the Kasubi could be accessed by the members of the public as they have open access to all. In addition, information on the Kasubi tombs is easy to find in public space – especially in the academic research domain and the tourism industry. To bring the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi into the research domain – let alone to the tourism industry – would require breaking down significant resistance at the royal house at Swongozwi.

The main objectives of this paper were to explore the prospects of developing a viable cultural heritage site at the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi, by modelling it on the tourist site of the tombs of the Baganda kings at Kasubi in Uganda. Secondly, the paper investigated the attitude of the custodians and owners of the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi on tourism development at the site. Attitude of the owners of prospective tourism sites has a significant impact on the development of tourism economies in most countries, especially amongst minority ethnic groups with limited options for development, who are in search of alternatives in tourism development (Yang & Wall, 2009). In pursuit of these objectives, the paper sought to answer the following research questions:

- Could promotion of cultural tourism through the promotion of the tombs of the Masingo heritage site at Swongozwi become the main driver of local economic development?
- Considering the success of cultural heritage tourism for local economic development in Southern Moravia and at the Kasubi in Uganda, what prevents the same successes at the Swongozwi site?

Research methodology, location of Swongozwi, and the cultural significance of the tombs

Unlike other papers on cultural heritage site tourism development, which relied on questionnaire-based surveys (Ahebwa et al., 2016; Kushwah & Chaturvedi, 2019; Yang & Wall, 2009), this paper used key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and site observations for data collection. Transect walk for observation was key, especially for gathering data about the location of the site and its surrounding environment, in particular, infrastructure and its locations. Figure 1 shows the geographical location of the Soutpansberg area under which Swongozwi is located.



Figure 1: The location of the Soutpansberg in South Africa's Limpopo Province
Source: <http://www.soutpansberg.com/intro.htm>

Swongozwi is located at the summit of the Soutpansberg Mountains, also known as *Vhuilausumbwa* (Nemudzivhadi, 1977). This pre-colonial settlement started out as a cattle post in the late 18th century, was popularised as a fully-fledged settlement for permanent human residence by King Thohoyandou, and later became the capital settlement when King Mporu settled here from Mabeyani, after escaping a raging war for the succession of King Thohoyandou at Dzata in the Nzhelele Valley (Möller-Malan, 1953). The settlement continued to grow, until it became the influential 'capital' of the Masingo of Ramabulana (Möller-Malan,

1953; Nemudzivhadi, 1977; Templehoff & Nemudzivhadi, 1998). There have been various kings of the Masingo of the Ramabulana dynasty, from pre-colonial times up to the arrival of the Voortrekkers approximately 1836 in the Soutpansberg (Mudau, 2006). Mpofu was succeeded by Ramabulana, who was succeeded by Makhado Tshilwavirusiku (Möller-Malan, 1953), who was succeeded by Tshilamulele Alilali Mphephu, who was defeated by the settler whites during the Mphephu-Boer war that ended on 21 December 1898 (Mudau, 2006; Templehoff & Nemudzivhadi, 1998). Although Tshilamulele Alilali Mphephu was banished by the Boers to Dzanani near Dzata in the Nzhelele Valley, the Swongozwi settlement remained in the custody of the Masingo of Ramabulana, mainly as a shrine and burial site, because some of their senior royals had been buried there prior to the Mphephu-Boer war.

The Significance of the Tombs of Kasubi: Lessons for the tombs of the Masingo

The tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi are owned and are in the custody of the Masingo of Ramabulana clan of the Vhavenda who are located in northern South Africa. In the case of the Kasubi tombs, the ownership pattern is different. Kasubi has experienced significant factional fighting for control amongst the Baganda with various groups claiming entitlement of ownership. These fights are encouraged by the economic significance of the tombs, also aggravated by the foreign investments the tombs have attracted over the years. However, the contestation is about access to the investments – not necessarily the tombs. On the other hand, the government of Uganda also comes into the picture as it uses the tombs to showcase Ugandan heritage to the world (Kigongo & Reid, 2007). Achieving World Heritage status after promotion of the tombs by the government of Uganda transformed the site into a symbol of colonial transformation and post-colonial accommodation initiatives (Kigongo & Reid, 2007). According to Kinyera (n.d.), the tombs at Kasubi represent critical African indigenous knowledge and skills, which are disappearing as a result of modernity. The World Heritage Committee and other institutions, such as UNESCO, identified this threat and have sought to protect this heritage, and promote social and archaeological research interest and projects at the Kasubi tombs. Structures at the site were slowly disintegrating through the new building and construction, which, according to UNESCO, could destroy archaeological knowledge still hidden at the site (Kinyera, n.d.). Intermittent outbreaks of fires at Kasubi have stimulated heritage researchers to call for greater preservation and protection of the site; on 16 March 2010 a fire destroyed the Muzibu-Azaala-Mpanga (Ahebwa, Aporu & Nyakaana, 2016; Stonehouse, 2012), and on 5 June 2020, the sacred house (*Abalongo*) was also destroyed in a mysterious fire. The call for increased protection of the Kasubi supports UNESCO's initiative on the protection of world cultural and natural heritage which was adopted in 1972 (Álvarez-García Maldonado-Erazo, de la Cruz Del Río-Rama & Castellano-Álvarez, 2019). Cultural heritage resources should be protected and preserved because they are crucial legacy for future generations which could provide historical memories for these generations (Álvarez-García et al., 2019). In addition, such sites could be used to safeguard and strengthen initiatives to promote sustainable community livelihoods and cultural tourism through tourism development (Ahebwa et al., 2016). The tourism development success of Kasubi has strengthened the belief that so-called dark tourism is a growing phenomenon worldwide in developing economies, such as Uganda, and is an opportunity that could be exploited at Swongozwi.

The tombs at Kasubi attract much attention from African studies, especially amongst disciplines with interest in indigenous heritage, whether on culture, traditional practices, language, or spirituality and religion. The tombs at Kasubi have dominated debates in the tourism economy about African heritage sites for decades. A plethora of literature (Mafukata, 2020; McGregor & Schumaker, 2006) have opined that heritage sites should be preserved and protected for tourism development. Mafukata (2020) argues that these sites should be used to

improve on the economic viability of rural-based societies – especially in post-apartheid South Africa where rural areas are still predominantly occupied by poor Blacks as a result of the past apartheid economic policies which excluded and marginalised Blacks from mainstream economic activities.

Claiming that the tradition of burying kings in enclosed tombs, such as at Kasubi, is exclusive and unique to the Baganda of Uganda is problematic, and distorts the truth, and has resulted in the tombs at Kasubi gaining cult status and politico-economic mileage for the Baganda at the expense of similar traditions and cultures elsewhere in Africa – the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi being one such example. This paper presents another perspective on cultural heritage tourism for economic benefits in developing regions, by refuting the notion that burying African kings in enclosed tombs is a unique culture, practice and tradition of the Baganda of Uganda. The purpose is to contribute new knowledge to African heritage studies disciplines, with a particular focus on the art and science of preserving and protecting indigenous African knowledges and heritage. To achieve this objective, this paper uses the Masingo tombs at Swongozwi as case issue. The Masingo tombs at Swongozwi are located in the former Venda in northern South Africa, the modern-day Vhembe District in Limpopo Province (Magwede, Van Wyk & Van Wyk, 2018).

Masingo amongst the Vhavenda

Oral and written history – which some argue is distorted anyway presents the Vhavenda as a small tribe comprising diverse subgroups, amongst which Vhangona which is the group opined by some such as Rakhadani (2017) to be the autochthonous people of Southern Africa and the aborigines of northern Limpopo, Vhatavhatsindi, Vhalaudzi, Vhambedzi, Vhanyai, Vhandalamo, Masingo, Vhania and Vhanzhelele (Möller-Malan, 1953; Mudau, 2006; Murimbika, 2006; Nemudzivhadi, 1977). It is also evident from Mellet (2020) and Rakhadani (2017) that Vhavenda could have had more subgroups, and therefore a larger group than had been reported in some historical accounts on the peopling of northern South Africa. According to Rakhadani (2017) the Vhavenda tribe cuts across many a people considered to be within other tribes in southern Africa. This paper is about the Masingo – the last group to arrive and settle in the region known as Venda, where it subjugated the so-called earlier settled indigenous tribes of the area such as the Vhangona and Vhatavhatsindi (Murimbika, 2006). This notes the diverse opinions on the ‘original’ Vhavenda dominating current debate in South Africa. Mudau (2006) suggests that it was Dimbanyika who subjugated the subtribes that had ‘arrived’ in Venda earlier, from across the Limpopo River into the known Vhavenda tribe today. Masingo has some splinter groups, the main being Masingo of Ramabulana, who founded Swongozwi; Masingo of Tshivhase, who occupied and settled in eastern Venda after some internal strife at Dzata after the ‘death’ of king Thohoyandou. The Masingo of Tshivhase currently have their *musanda* (royal place) at Mukumbani; Masingo of Mphaphuli, who occupied and settled in central and far-eastern Venda and have their *musanda* at Mbilwi, Sibasa Miluwani (Murimbika, 2006). This paper has its focus on the Masingo of Ramabulana, who occupied and settled in the Nzhelele Valley, but have their royal burial site at Swongozwi. This is the group whose *mahosi* (kings) and senior royals (*vhakololo*) are buried in traditional thatch roofed mud huts, which this paper refers to as the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi.

Contextual and theoretical underpinnings: Economic and developmental linkages

This paper has as its framework on the 34th African Union (AU) gathering of Heads of State and Government (Africanews, 2021). This gathering acknowledged the African continent’s diverse cultural and arts heritage, which expresses the various ways of living of African communities, and which is cascaded down the generations in the form of customs, practices,

artistic expressions and values. The AU believes that these facets of African cultural heritage defined Africa and Africans. This assertion confirms the theme adopted for the AU summit, namely *Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want*. This theme declares that arts, culture and heritage should be the levers to help Africa build the continent they are dreaming of (Africanews, 2021). It is evident that the AU Summit reinforced the idea that Africa's arts, culture and heritage could be lobbied and harnessed as catalysts to aid the continent's socio-economic development, and promote the integration of the continent in the spirit of pan-Africanism. Africa's Agenda 2063 articulates, in its Aspiration 5, that the envisaged Africa should be strong in "cultural identity, values and ethics" (Africanews, 2021). The AU argues that this Africa would strengthen its competitiveness on the global stage.

The authors argue in this paper that attempts to integrate the site of the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi into the broader context of (South) African tourism and local economic development conforms to continental heritage targets as expressed by the various instruments, tools and institutions mentioned earlier. In the case of the tombs at Swongozwi, the idea is to preserve and protect the movable and immovable property defined as infrastructure, and the subsequent oral traditions and expressions hidden in the language of the intangible cultural heritage (Álvarez-García et al., 2019). This paper, therefore, records some of the activities and infrastructure using Tshivenda language, in order to protect and preserve its value at the cultural heritage site, because the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi exist within the context of *luambo lwa musanda* (royal language) of the broader Vhavenda tribe under which the Masingo of Swongozwi are affiliated. Tshivenda comprises two languages – the language of royals (*luambo lwa musanda*) and that of commoners (*luambo lwa vhasiwana*). This cultural heritage should not be allowed to erode and disappear as has been happening in some regions in Africa over the years.

The context of this paper regarding the precepts of African political leadership targets, therefore, consolidates the idea that cultural heritage resources such as the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi, could have a role to play in the South African political, economic and social liberation struggle, and could contribute to local economic emancipation by way of affirming formerly disadvantaged Black communities. This could be done by promoting the development of cultural heritage tourism in local communities. Cultural heritage tourism has been used the world over, in many developing and developed nations, to generate crucial revenue for states and investors. In Egypt, for example, heritage tourism has yielded huge returns for the economy for centuries (Elnagar & Derbali, 2020). It is regrettable that, in countries such as South Africa, especially in areas dominated by Blacks and during apartheid, cultural heritage tourism received little attention and support from the white apartheid regimes. A viable economic and developmental opportunity is being missed by ignoring this important economic source. As it is located in one of the poorest regions of South Africa, a rural community of Swongozwi and beyond could be assisted to make the most of its available resources, including cultural heritage resources to facilitate development of a viable local economic development model through tourism development. Doing so would promote the spirit of what Mazibuko (2020) called pro-poor tourism. Mazibuko (2020) further argued that the pro-poor tourism development would improve the livelihood prospects of rural dwellers and economies. This paper frames the significance this attempt could have on local economic development, which, according to the Radhika Kapur theory, requires countries to prioritise the development of rural communities – especially those residing in poorer settlements called villages (Kapur, 2019; Mafukata, 2020). Swongozwi has the potential to stimulate rural community development through cultural tourism development. The site is a potential heritage attraction point, which could enhance opportunities for cultural prosperity through tourist

experiences (Kushwah & Chaturvedi, 2019). Obstacles must first and foremost be removed to exploit opportunities.

The South African apartheid government had concentrated its tourism development and promotion on the recreation, eco-tourism, sports and conference tourism economy, at the expense of other facets of the tourism industry, such as cultural heritage for example. This focus could have been motivated by the notion that cultural heritage tourism in Black communities would have contradicted the spirit and objectives of apartheid, which had sought to undermine anything which related to Black cultures and practices – let alone economic viability of Black communities. Apartheid disregarded Black cultures, and failed to prioritise participation of Blacks in mainstream economic systems; Blacks only had access to subsistence means of livelihood survival, and were expected to support the commercial whites, as confirmed by the Chief Native Commissioner's report of 1918, which states that Blacks had to be stopped from competing the whites but encouraged to provide labour to assist the progress of the apartheid state (Davis, 2006; Mazibuko, 2020). Developing a competitive Black cultural heritage tourism economy would have been a double jeopardy for apartheid. Any attempt to empower Blacks to become economically active by emancipating their cultural heritage and strengthening their economic competence was not desirable for the apartheid state. Black South Africans were not encouraged to express their culture and heritage, and to exploit available opportunities for earning a livelihood in the apartheid state. Blacks had to be poor by intent and design. The poverty of Blacks was needed and had to be sustained for apartheid to survive (Mafukata, 2020).

Developing the tombs of the Masingo site at Swongozwi for local tourism development is, therefore, framed in the context of 'rectificatory justice' that seeks to amend the injustices of apartheid against all other races in South Africa but white (Daly, Kumar & Regan, 2012), as postulated in the literature (Davis, 2006; Mafukata, 2020; Mazibuko, 2020). Doing so would place the local economy on a path of 'distributive justice', and ensure that opportunities to access resources are equitable – especially for a country like South Africa, which is characterised by a Black-white socio-economic dichotomy (Daly et al., 2012). This paper demonstrates that the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi bears such economic potential that it can serve as an emancipatory tool for self-development for local people. This confirms the ideas of the World Travel Organisation (WTO), which postulates that exploration of heritage sites for cultural tourism could enhance developmental opportunities for local economies (Št'astná et al., 2020). These authors tested the validity of this assertion by investigating the significance of cultural tourism as potential driver for sustainable rural development using Southern Moravia as a case study of reference. Although the authors found that cultural tourism could have significant influence on the local economy, the sector could, however, not be the panacea to drive the rural development agenda in the area. This paper uses this finding to fashion its critical question (the same question investigated by Št'astná et al. (2020): *Could cultural tourism through the promotion of the tombs of the Masingo heritage site at Swongozwi become the main driver of local economic development?* The findings in Southern Moravia were compared to the success of tourism at the tombs of the Baganda kings at Kasubi. In Egypt, cultural heritage sites at the pyramid of Giza managed to build successful and sustainable tourism economies (Elnagar & Derbali, 2020). What would emerge as a critical follow-up question in the case of the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi site is, *If cultural heritage tourism had been successfully used for local economic development through a heritage tourism economy, like the case of Southern Moravia and the Kasubi tombs in Uganda, what prevents the same successes at the Swongozwi site?*

This paper assumes that the significance of African cultural heritage, for example, that of the tombs of the Masingo kings at Swongozwi and the Baganda kings at Kasubi, could be

analysed from social and economic perspectives. For instance, the cultural significance of the tombs as heritage sites, which could involve spiritual and religious analyses, indicate the significance of these two groups in an African cultural heritage framework. This paper assumes that it can preserve the heritage of minority groups, such as the Masingo, in African heritage studies. In the past, minority groups have been forgotten and relegated to obscurity – especially in Africa, where significant information on crucial cultural heritages remain undocumented. In fact, preservation of minority cultural heritage has been the target of African governments post-colonialism. Elsewhere, for example, in India, Kushwah and Chaturvedi (2019) report that cultural heritage tourism has been used to encourage amongst others preservation and conservation of specifically identified heritage sites citing developments in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh in the Chhatarpur District for example.

African states, first in the OAU and now in the AU, have always recognised cultural diversity, and the necessity to defend the rights and freedoms of minority cultures. This paper challenges the focus of African research on the so-called ‘bigger’ cultures of Africa at the detriment of the so-called ‘smaller’ cultures. It is unacceptable for African heritage studies to focus solely on Africa’s so-called main ethnic groups, such as the Akan and Asante in Ghana, Igbo in Nigeria, and Zulu in South Africa, and seldom on minority groups, such as the Tsonga and Venda in South Africa, or Luo in Zambia. The idea of focusing solely on the cultural heritages of the so-called main ethnic groups, at the expense of the so-called ‘minor’ cultural groups, contradicts the essence of the charters. With its focus on advocacy and activism, this paper contributes rare knowledge about the heritage of a minority ethnic group in South Africa, to dispel the distorted notion – by design or ignorance – that only the so-called main ethnic groups have meaningful and significant cultural heritage. The paper proposes that giving recognition to the cultural heritages of minority ethnic groups could pave the way for the development and building of what could be called universal civilization in (South) Africa, in the place of the promotion of Western-centric ideas of ‘main’ and ‘minor’ ethnic groups. No culture is bigger than the other; no culture is smaller than the other. Even if ethnic groups differ in size, cultures are unquantifiable in terms of value. South Africa is a multi-ethnic and multicultural space comprising widely divergent ethnic and linguistic group identities, none of which can be side-lined in cultural heritage recognition and subsequent tourism development.

This paper used historical critical analysis to investigate the historicity of the tombs at Swongozwi, and the cultural and traditional values that influence the owners and custodians of the site, who refuse to modernise, transform and/or develop it into a tourism site. It is evident that the practices at Swongozwi are influenced by indigenous Masingo culture and traditions. The study weighs the sources of this historicity to test the authenticity of narratives – some sources were primarily oral narratives relayed by very young key informants. The overreliance on oral information was the result of a lack of written sources on the history of the Masingo in particular, and the Vhavenda tribe in general. Braun (2013) acknowledges the complex nature of research in this area, and concedes that it instead has been reliant on fragments of rare to find written archive(s). Braun (2013) explains that the royal burial site at Swongozwi emanates from the history of the Masingo of Ramabulana’s presence in the Soutpansberg area. Braun (2013) acknowledges that the remains of King Alilali Mphephu who was the son of King Makhado are interred at the Swongozwi royal grave site. Other kings and royals of the Masingo who died before Alilali also lie in this sacred place located just behind the great and legendary Soutpansberg Mountains. This is the place which Alilali had fled in December 1898 after being defeated by the settler whites during the Mphephu-Boer war. This paper, therefore, argues that the nature of the current infrastructure at this site cannot be understood without a critical examination of its historicity. This approach enables the paper to revisit the history of the burials and funerals of the Masingo royals over the years, beginning as far back as King

Dimbanyika 1st, who died mysteriously at Lwandali at the Nzhelele Valley (Möller-Malan, 1953; Schutte, 1977), and ending with the burial of King Tshimangadzo Dimbanyika 2nd who perished in a horrific car accident in 1997 near Tshipise, and was buried at the Swongozwi burial site.

The economic significance of the tombs at Kasubi and Swongozwi allow for reference in developmental debates, specifically how these tombs are relevant in aiding, for example, the development of a sustainable tourism sector of their respective countries. This is the approach used for the pyramids in Egypt. Under cultural heritage tourism, the Egyptian economy has benefitted from a sprawling tourism industry that involves, amongst others, the pulling power of tourists to the pyramids of Giza (Elnagar & Derbali, 2020). The literature presents the Egyptian pyramids as tools for economic and developmental imperatives (Elnagar & Derbali, 2020). In addition to the economic significance of the Egyptian pyramids, they are used to parade Egyptian culture, ancient lifestyle, knowledge and skills; they are used to display Egyptian educational advancement and civilisation. This has not been the case with the tombs of the Masingo kings at Swongozwi. Ignorance about and side-lining of minority cultural groups calls for policymakers to note that such ignorance – especially in relation to local economic development – could lead to the exclusion of an effective tool for achieving local economic development, and lead to what Ntibatirwa (2012) calls “a development impasse”. This paper corrects and intervenes in this gap.

South Africa’s ‘closed’ economy and transition to an inclusive transformation

The context of this paper is that South Africa used to be a ‘closed’ economy, which shut out Black South Africans from the activities of the mainstream economy for decades through various intertwined colonial and apartheid legislations (Bell, Goga, Mondwiwa & Robert, 2018; Chauke, 2021; Dommissie, 2021; Mafukata, 2020). However, not only Black South Africans suffered exclusion from mainstream economic participation as the white Afrikaners and Indians were also marginalised and excluded by the British at some point of the country’s history (Chauke, 2021; Dommissie, 2021). The apartheid regimes in South Africa came into the scene by winning political power in 1948 and entrenched the prioritisation of white Afrikaner economic emancipation, and never bothered with other ethnic groups such as Blacks, Coloureds and Indians. It was only until the post-apartheid government which came into power in April 1994 that all the other ethnic groups were brought into the mainstream economic scene. The post-apartheid government has prioritized opening the economy to all the ethnic groups in South Africa in the belief that this approach would lead to an inclusive economy while opening development to all (Pailey, 2019). The paper builds on the assertion of Bell et al. (2018) that post-apartheid South Africa should build an open development post-apartheid economy which would be inclusive of all races. The idea should be to achieve a transformational society and economy that considers promotion of economic justice amongst the citizenry, clearly affirming the ‘prophecy’ of Franz Fanon that Africans have to find a way to move beyond the colonialism–anti-colonialism and capitalism–socialism debates, into the practical reality of the need to redistribute wealth (Daly et al., 2012) in what Monaheng (1995) calls the revolutionary transformation which would lead to a society free from poverty. This revolution can be attained by applying entrepreneurship initiatives anchoring on a bricolage approach (Chinyoka, 2017). This paper combined Monaheng’s (1995) theories on development and Chinyoka’s (2017) bricolage theory for entrepreneurship development.

Furthermore, this paper borrows its contextual and theoretical underpinnings from the ideas of McGregor and Schumaker (2006) and Kausar and NiShikawa (2010), who report that using cultural heritage sites as resources for socio-economic development through heritage tourism is on the rise in many developing countries. McGregor and Schumaker (2006)

corroborate this view arguing that heritage economy has been expanding in the developing regions of late. Kausar and Nishikawa (2010) conducted a case study in Borobudur in Central Java, Indonesia, and their findings are supported by Št'astná et al. (2020), who found that cultural heritage tourism in Southern Moravia was a major economic driver in rural economies – especially as a tool for propagating rural development. This paper argues that rural tourism development and growth could be sponsored by exposure, through research, of potential development of cultural heritage sites, such as the tombs of the Masingo royalty at Swongozwi, to local and international role players, such as government, development practitioners and theorists and investors, amongst others, in the same way as it happened at the tombs of Kasubi in Buganda, Uganda; hence, the preference of this paper for a comparative approach.

The tombs at Kasubi provide a lens or framework that exposes to the stakeholder base the returns that lie hidden in the tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi. This assertion is corroborated by Kausar and NiShikawa (2010: 195), who argue that “monuments with cultural significance are usually amongst popular tourism attractions”. According to Kausar and NiShikawa (2010: 195), “the international visibility of the sites as tourism attractions will increase through the promotional and informational activities conducted by the government, tourism industry players and the World Heritage Committee”. This paper argues that heritage sites have major role to play in development and/or poverty alleviation in vulnerable communities – especially those in rural areas. The tombs at Kasubi and Swongozwi may not necessarily possess the relevance and influence of the Egyptian pyramids in terms of the economic outputs and benefits to the Egyptian and African economy at large, but they can, nevertheless, make a meaningful contribution.

The emergence of the culture of the tombs at Swongozwi

The story of the burials of the Masingo kings can be traced to as long ago as the kingship of King Dimbanyika, who is widely regarded as the first Singo king to rule Vhavenda across the Limpopo from Zimbabwe, from 1688 to his mysterious death approximately 1722 (Möller-Malan, 1953). King Dimbanyika ruled from Dzata I, located on mount Lwandali, or the Tshiendeulu Mountains in the Nzhelele Valley, until this site had to be abandoned after Dimbanyika's untimely death after he was trapped by a big rock inside a cave on mount Lwandali during hunting of rabbits (Khorommbi, 2001). Dimbanyika's dog returned to the village to signal to the people at the settlement; a dog led them to the cave where the king was trapped. From inside the cave, the king instructed the people to relocate, from Lwandali to what is currently known as Dzata. The king instructed them to abandon Lwandali because he believed that his shadow (*murunzi*) would haunt them should they remain at Lwandali. There is little information on how kings before Dimbanyika had been buried. The burial of Vhavenda kings – especially those of the Masingo dynasty post-Dimbanyika – could have been based on King Dimbanyika's unplanned ‘burial’ at Lwandali – he was never formally buried, as the cave where he was trapped became his tomb. Historical records of the Vhavenda at Mapungubwe do not record kings being buried in caves. Even those ‘others’ considered to be earlier Vhavenda in the area south of the Limpopo, for example, the Makahane of Thulamela, do not seem to have been buried in caves.

The origin of the Masingo practice of burying kings in caves – especially Mpofu and Ramabulana, who were buried inside a cave at Tshamakoko at Vuvha Village – remains an unresolved debate. Mapungubwe history suggests that kings could have been buried at the summit of the mountain, where kings usually had their palaces. King Dimbanyika's successor, Thohoyandou, has no grave site in Venda, since known history posits that he disappeared without trace from Dzata; it is not known whether he had died or he indeed ‘disappeared’ as some opine. The Swongozwi burial site has the remains of King Makhado, King Alilali

‘Befula’ Mphephu, King Mbulaheni George Mphephu, King (later Paramount Chief and president of Venda Republic – a Bantustan in apartheid South Africa) Ramaano Patrick Mphephu, and King Tshimangadzo Dimbanyika Mphephu. Other members of the Masingo dynasty – (*thovhele*) Chief Sinthumule and his successors, (*thovhele*) Chief Kutama and his successors, and Chief Mulambilu of Vuvha and his successors – were also buried at the Swongozwi royal place. They are said to have been buried inside traditional mud huts (*nndu*) in the royal compound. The Masingo dynasty’s history, from King Dimbanyika at Lwandali, makes it clear that the practice of burying their kings in the mud huts could have started with King Makhado, who died in 1895, allegedly after a poisoning incident following a conspiracy hatched by his own people and the Boers at Soutpansberg (Braun, 2013). The idea of burying royals in traditional mud huts is believed to be an improvisation of the caves in which other kings and royals had been buried. In other words, the practice of burying kings and other royals inside traditional mud huts was not traditional practice for the Masingo earlier than King Makhado, but was a way that simulated the burials of kings and royals in caves which could have been the first during King Makhado. Instead, it reflects a change in lifestyle, and was not an historical cultural practice of the Masingo, nor was it a ritual. The observation made here is that traditions and cultures could be influenced by prevailing conditions of the time. They evolve and change with circumstances and moments.

This paper argues that the indigenous African knowledge used in the design and construction of the tombs of Buganda and Swongozwi was informed by a vast belief system of a particular culture regarding the significance of the departed kings. Amongst the Vhavenda of northern Limpopo Province, for instance, the practice of burying deceased kings and chiefs in enclosed tombs is still common and popularly practiced, especially amongst the Masingo and Vhandalamo subgroups of Vhavenda over the past 200 years. It is clear from the reviewed literature that, while the tombs at Kasubi are a significant heritage site and tourist attraction in Uganda, the Masingo tombs at Swongozwi have not attracted attention on either a national or international level, nor has the site attracted research interest and attention. Therefore, this paper presents the Swongozwi tombs as potential site for research exploration, and consideration as a heritage site that needs both preservation and protection. The fire that destroyed the tombs at Kasubi should serve as a warning to those involved in the affairs of the tombs at Swongozwi, to consider the vulnerability of these tombs to disasters. This paper suggests a way forward to protect and preserve the tombs at Swongozwi.

Currently, the Masingo of the Ramabulanas who occupy western Venda in modern-day Vhembe District still bury their deceased kings in enclosed tombs at Swongozwi in the Soutpansberg Mountains. The tombs of the Masingo of Ramabulana at Swongozwi are located in a closely guarded enclosure at Swongozwi Village or royal settlement. Swongozwi is also known as Gaza, a sophisticated traditional village, and many traditional huts are built around the tombs. The meaning and significance of the name Gaza is not known yet. It should be investigated because this tribe bears significant historical ties with Palestine – especially on the Jewish side considering that the Lemba clan which is a known Jewish lineage forms part of the Masingo people. At Swongozwi, the tombs are protected from invasion by intruders because they are considered sacred, and the site can only be visited by selected special individuals who are descendants of the king. The tombs are guarded by a special attendant who does not share stories about them with ‘outsiders’. This paper’s investigation into the origin of the tradition of burying Masingo kings in enclosed tombs, which had not been the historical tradition of the Vhavenda before the burial of King Makhado at Tshirululuni Swongozwi in 1895, found that, prior to Makhado’s interment, there is no evidence of this practice amongst the Masingo of Ramabulana lineage up to King Ramabulana, who died approximately 1864 (Braun, 2013) and was buried at the Tshamakoko caves at Vuvha Village. Ramabulana was succeeded by his son

Makhado after a fierce succession battle with his nemesis and elder brother Davhana (Braun, 2013; Khorommbi, 2001).

Burial of kings at the Kasubi tombs and at the Masingo at Swongozwi

The tombs of the four Banganda kings are housed in one big structure while the tombs of the Masingo are in individual traditional mud huts. Kings are buried at *zwiendeulu* (cemeteries, singular *tshiendeulu*), which are often in the vicinity of the residential compound of the king, known as *thavhani* or *musanda* (royal palace). The significance of burying them nearby – in the royal compound in particular, and in traditional mud huts, relates to general Venda belief that states that the deceased have not died, but have just left the world of the living to travel to the ‘other’ world of the departed dead. This assertion is in line with a submission by Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2014: 232) who argued that “from an African perspective death is a natural transition from the visible to the invisible spiritual ontology where the spirit, the essence of the person, is not destroyed but moves to live in the spirit ancestors’ realm dead”. Vhavenda, like most African cultures and traditions, believe that these living dead remain in contact with the living ‘living’, because they have merely translated into what is popularly known as “the living dead” (Ukwamedua, 2018: 24). The belief is that “the living dead” forms the core element of ancestral recognition in Africa, and this is part of African cosmology in wider and broader African communities. Vhavenda – especially those of Masingo ancestry – originate from this context; the departed king is viewed from the perspective of an ancestor and he is, therefore, not detached from his own family and abode. Ukwamedua (2018: 25) explains that the departed “living dead” are, according to African religion, “members of the families on earth”. Khorommbi (2001: 120) corroborates this view by arguing that:

Many African cultures never say that a person has died, but rather that he/she has departed, has left us, is no longer, has passed on. To an African, death is not the annihilation of a person...the dead are treated like they are alive.

In fact, in some African cultures, the living share their beer and food with the “living dead”, thereby implying that those who have died actually never died (Khorommbi, 2001). Both Khorommbi (2001) and Ukwamedua (2018) are corroborated by Idowu (1991), and Awolalu (1979), who argue that in most regions of Africa, most viewed the departed souls of their loved once as having had graduated or translated into ancestors who not only stood in close relations with their families but have attained higher statuses of prestige for example. Idowu (1991) corroborated this assertion arguing that the departed family members only changed their physiques which make them no longer ordinary mortals in their families restricted to the limitations of the physical world but still live amongst their own in the invisible world. Considering Ukwamedua (2018), Idowu (1991) and Awolalu (1979), it is evident that most African religions and cultural assertions view the departed in the same way as the Masingo view their departed kings. In fact, Ikechukwu (2017: 35) drew parallels between the African ancestors as “living dead” and Catholic sainthood, by arguing that:

Most of the precepts, ordinances and rituals in Christian religion are more of resemblances than novelties of what were the cases in the original religion of the African people. The belief in the communion of the Saints, and its surrounding practices stressed especially amongst the Catholic group is coterminous with the veneration of the Ancestors in this latter religion.

Protocols of burials at Swongozwi

Burying kings and other important royals, such as *vhakololo* (princes) at these grave sites cannot be arbitrary. Who gets buried here is decided by the royal family of the *makhotsimunene* (younger brothers and half-brothers of the departed kings), as kings generally have multiple wives (*vhatanuni*) and, therefore, children from different mothers) and *khadzi* (sisters and half-sisters). At Swongozwi, only kings from the Masingo senior house, including *khotsimunene* from Nndwakhulu's house and its senior *khadzis*, *thovhele* (main chiefs) from Sinthumule and Kutama, and *makhotsimunene*'s house of Mulambilu of Vuvha, are buried here. The *khadzis* from the Sinthumule, Kutama and Mulambilu of Vuvha are not buried here. During the burial ceremony, other seniors who are considered to be elders (*Vhavenda*) in the royal family normally lead the proceedings. However, the leader-in-chief should be from the lineage of *khotsimunene khosi* Nndakhulu Mphephu, who was the son of King Alilali Befula Mphephu Ramabulana. Nndwakhulu was succeeded by his son Masia, who was succeeded by his son Bogisi, who was succeeded by Mukondeleli Jeffrey, the current incumbent caretaker of the burial site and the royal compound at Swongozwi. In other words, this is the priestly house that manages the rituals of the *thevhula* and *miphaso* when required. At Uganda's Kasubi tombs, an ordinary caretaker takes care of the site, in the main, managing visits to the site by large contingents of tourists and locals. It is evident that the tombs at Swongozwi have spiritual or ritualistic significance – something which the Kasubi tombs seem to lack. While this factor makes the tombs at Swongozwi special, the tombs at Kasubi appear ordinary and therefore frequented by tourists. This is not the case with the tombs at Swongozwi whose transformation into a tourist site has been difficult.

Burial at Swongozwi is a closely guarded ritual that cannot be attended by outsiders (even if they are from other royal clans of the same tribe) – particularly persons outside Venda royalty; the so called *vhasiwana* - commoners. In a conversation this researcher had with *mutahabvu* (the late chief) Masia at Swongozwi some years ago, the chief lamented the invasion of sacred cultures and traditions, arguing:

We can't want development which destroys our culture – what we have. The whites came here and destroyed everything about us, but they were not alone. They were assisted by some of us who wanted to be their friends at the cost of our inheritance and our people – because if you destroy people's culture, you leave no people... are we still people if I were to ask you... no, we are no longer people. Today, our children kill others because they call people makwerekwere or vhabvannda [foreigners]. It is because we are no longer people. Nga tsha hashu, a ri na zwithu zwavhabvannda – muthu ndi muthu... finish [in our culture, we do not have foreigners because a human being is a human being irrespective of their origin]. Sedzani [look], a ri tsha phasa – a ri tsha tevhula ngauri makhuwa [whites] vho ri ndi zwa fhasi na uri zwi humisela vathu murahu [because the whites said we can't do that – it is primitive and backward]... Lushaka lu fanela u vha na zwiila [people should have taboos, things which can't be seen by certain people]. Zwiendeulu zwashu hafha zwi na zwiila [our burial site here has taboos], and we can't expose these things to commoners (*vhasiwana*) ngauri [because] zwashu is not about vhutsila [ours is not about art... It can't be displayed to the world]. Zwithu zwo tshinyiwa nga mahosi a tshi tenda Kereke dza makhuwa [Things were disturbed by the chiefs when they believed the white man's religion and church]. A huna khosi ya mukhiresite Ha Rambabulana [There can't be a Christian chief amongst the Ramabulana people – the Masingo].

In fact it was at Tshifudi in Vhumbedzi, Eastern Venda that their chief called Ranndogwana had personal contact with Christian missionaries who were later invited by Chief Ramudingwana to preach the Word of God in that part of the country that the people in Vendaland ever encountered Christianity in a Venda chief kraal. Missionary Klaas Koen arrived in this part of Venda after his training as a missionary in Germany approximately 26 July 1877 (Khorombi, 2001). In defence for absence of Christianity in Chiefs' kraals in Venda, the chief argued, “*ndi nnyi a no do thogomela zwashu?* [Who then will be in charge of our own customs and cultures?]. Evidently, the attitude of Chief Masia Mphephu towards the issue of tourism development at the Swongozwi site was not supportive, unlike in the case of the Baganda, who support the idea of developing their tombs at Kasubi into a world-class heritage site. In other places, such as Dai Yuan in Mengjinglai, China, the attitude was split: the majority supported the idea of using cultural resources for tourism, while the minority were sceptical (Yang & Wall, 2009).

When asked about this view of his father, the current chief at Swongozwi argued, “*Vhuendela mashango [tourism] na themamveledziso [development] a zwi tei u vha kha u vhulaha zwashu [should not destroy what is ours]*”. When told that the tombs at Kasubi in Uganda had been destroyed by fire, and that it is important for them at Swongozwi to protect the site by considering modern forms of protection, such as guards at the tombs, a security fence, and so forth, the chief argued “*hoyu mudi wo vha hone hafha lwa minwaha ya madana na madana u bva tshe vho makhulukuku washu vha dzula hafha na u switwa. Ari athu u vhuya ra pfa nga ha tshiwo – why zwino?*” loosely translated as “this compound has existed here for hundreds of years and years since the days of our forefathers and ancestors who stayed and were buried here. We have never heard of any disaster here before – why now?” The *mukoma* (aide) of the chief jokingly interjected: “*kani na vhone vho rumiwa nga tholi dza mudi hoyu?*” meaning “have you been sent by some spies to spy on us?”

Burials at the site happen at night, and the Masingo kings and other royals have no personal choice and/or preference regarding how they are buried. This contrasts with other cultures, for example, the Zulu in South Africa, of whom King Goodwill Zwelithini ka Bhekizulu Zulu expressed his choice and preference to be buried at night, with his burial attended only by men. Only members of the Masingo senior house(s) are buried at the site; spouses of kings are not allowed to be buried at the site. As most *vhatanuni* of kings in the Masingo tradition would have been princesses of other kingdoms and/chiefdoms, they were often buried with their own people at their own *zwiendeulus*, even if they had died at their marital homes. Burials are private, attended by family members only, especially the senior *makhotsimunene*, *Vhavenda* and *khadzis*. It is not known why those who attend the burials at the *tshiendeulu* do so half-naked (*vhe fhedzi*). It is widely believed that the purpose of the secrecy and privacy of the burial is to safeguard this ritualistic tradition. The burial proceedings are accompanied by a *tshikona* (flute dance and music) (Möller-Malan, 1953) and ululations (*mifhululu*), which are performed throughout the night of the burial (*u swita*). The proceedings are events of bereavement, but celebrate a life that had been lived amongst them; they usher the ‘living dead’ to the world of their ancestors. After the events, rain is expected to fall. Rain is a symbol of the happiness of the ancestors of the departed, who welcome the ‘living dead’.

Unlike in other cultures, whose ceremonies can be attended by anyone, the Masingo do it differently. First, the death (*u dzama*) of the king is not announced publicly – the announcement is usually made after the burial (*u switwa*). The body of the deceased is wrapped in *bopha* (*Adenia gummifera* var. *gummifera*) (Magwede et al., 2018), or in a fresh hide (*mukumba*) from a slaughtered bull, and lowered into its resting place, known as *pfamo* (main house of the king) or *thondwana* (junior house, if the deceased is not the king, but a senior *khotsimunene* who qualifies to be buried there). However, at some point, Western coffins began

to be allowed into the burial site, probably from the time of Ramaano Mphephu, who was the state president of the Republic of Venda in the larger South Africa (a homeland for Venda-speaking people created by the apartheid government). Some contend (Varnum & Grossmann, 2017) that culture changes according to prevailing circumstances, and other factors. In their evolutions, cultures have proven to be dynamic, with practices and values changing continuously (Varnum & Grossmann, 2017). The death of Ramaano Patrick brought the western coffin into the royal place at Swongozwi. At the death of Chief Sinthumule, his npeople tried to build the white man's tombstone on his grave site but they couldn't manage. An invisible power prohibited the intrusion and the stone still lies there broken into pieces.

After the king's remains have been interred in the grave site – which looks like any other grave site, like that of a commoner – a 'resting' period of three years has to pass before a mud hut is built to house the grave site. This mud hut takes the shape of the normal traditional Venda mud hut used for residential purpose. The tomb house measures approximately 2.5 m by 2.5 m (6.25 m²). There are a number of these houses at the compound. Although it is difficult to identify these tomb houses from the other huts in the compound – at least for a visitor – their sizes could provide clues. Only indigenous material is used to build the house. Exotic trees, such as *mubomo* (*Eucalyptus grandis*) and *mupaini* (*Pinus patula*) (Magwede et al., 2018) may not be used as source material. The entrance to the house is on the head side of the grave site, to provide easy access to the head side of the grave site for rituals, such as *miphaso* and *thevhula*. When celebrants pour African beer (*mutomboti*) and snuff (*folo*) during *muphaso* or *thevhula*, they do so kneeling at the entrance to the grave hut from the head side. A thatch roof is built using *khundwi* as rope, and not Western ropes. Cow dung (*vhutoko*) is applied or scooped (*u shula*) onto the grave site and the entire inside of the traditional mud hut (*tshitanga* or *nndu* in the language of commoners). The structure of the traditional grave mud hut looks exactly like normal traditional mud huts that locals live in. Someone from outside would find it difficult to identify the traditional grave mud hut. The departed king (*mutahabvu*) lies here, in his tomb, in the same way as the Baganda's *ssekabaka* (the departed king) would do at the Kasubi. In the language of the commoner in Tshivenda, the departed is called *munawavhane* (male) or *musadziwavhane* (female).

Conclusion

Northern Limpopo Province is characterised by plenty of natural, environmental and cultural heritage sites that could be developed to create a sustainable tourism economy. Doing so could assist formerly disadvantaged communities of this mainly rural province of South Africa to develop their own source of livelihood and economic competence. This paper explored the opportunities for developing a sustainable cultural heritage tourism centre at the site of the tombs of the Masingo dynasty at Swongozwi in northern Limpopo province, South Africa. The paper used as model the Baganda cultural heritage site housing the Kasubi tombs in Uganda, where some Baganda kings lie buried in what is known as the Muzibu-Azaala-Mpanga. The success of this cultural heritage site served as framework for this study, which investigated whether the Masingo tombs heritage site at Swongozwi could also be developed into a successful cultural heritage tourism site. Data were collected from existing literature sources, key informant interviews with two Masingo chiefs at the Swongozwi site, and observations of the site. It emerged that the Kasubi tombs and the tombs of the Masingo of Swongozwi site differ significantly. First, the Swongozwi site was developed later than the Kasubi site, as the former was only established at the death of King Makhado Tshilwavirusiku Ramabulana in 1895, while the first burial at Kasubi took place in 1884, when Kabaka Mutesa I was buried. The Kasubi site has received widespread research attention, whereas the Masingo site at Swongozwi is almost completely unknown. The Kasubi tombs have become a global tourism

attraction, visited by many tourists and listed by international agencies, such as UNESCO, while the Masingo site is a ‘closed’ entity to the world. The Baganda have demonstrated ‘openness’ with regard to development of the Kasubi as a cultural heritage site, while the Swongozwi site remains obscured, because of negative attitudes of and unwillingness by the Masingo royalty to open the site for tourism development. The tombs of the Masingo at Swongozwi are closely guarded and they are almost impossible to access; even accessing information about them proved to be a near impossibility. This negative stance of the people of Swongozwi is encouraged by the cultural significance ascribed to the site by its custodians, amongst which taboos, myths, respect for tradition and fear of the wrath of the ancestors that would result if the Masingo infringed on this ‘holy’ space and traditions. An opportunity for tourism development at Swongozwi is being missed. Limpopo tourism authorities should explore means and ways of engaging the custodians of the Swongozwi site to consider tourism development at the site.

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