



Production of African identity: An explorative study of The Roots Festival

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Abstract

The Roots Festival has been organized in The Gambia since 1996 in an effort to attract diaspora Africans who are interested in their own identity and Afro-American history. The festival is inspired by the story "Roots" by Alex Haley (1976) which has been a world-wide success as a book, as well as a film and a TV series. This study looks at the role of the festival in terms of identity formation for festival visitors and reflects on the production of festival activities in the context of the Roots Festival. The study is exploratory in nature and aims for a better understanding of the production of festival activities. The theoretical framework is based on a model of destination capitals by Sharpley (2010) adapted to a LDC context by Drammeh (2013). An explorative survey of 22 stakeholders provides data for a description and discussion of the Roots festival activities organized to build identities with the use of destination capitals. Stakeholders also suggested activities to enhance the value of the Roots Festival for participants. In the concluding section, the role of the festival for sustainable tourism development in The Gambia is discussed. Based on the survey and a discussion about the concept of the destination capitals for sustainable tourism development, Roots festival can be conceptualized as a mechanism for tourism development by bringing forth the culture and history of the people of The Gambia. The festival also stimulates cultural all year round tourism activities on the destination.

Keywords: Roots Festival; identity; destination capitals; The Gambia; sustainable tourism development.

Introduction

Periodic events such as cultural festivals, organised in many countries as national, regional or local events, can act as instruments to support visitors' identity formation. Typically they are produced at a specific time and with specific characteristics and associations of meanings attached to them. Such events usually include local cultural and traditional activities which also may be tourism attractions in their own right. Many people visit other countries, and places for cultural events and festivals based on identity formation.

Event tourism can encourage the provision of additional infrastructure and stimulate local production demanded by visitors. The most obvious reasons for the suitability of festivals as tourism promotion tools are that festivals: (1) increase the demand for tourism; (2) help create an image and expose a place; and (3) can help extend the tourism season (Felsenstein, Fleischer, 2003). Consequently, festivals can provide a lot of benefits to the host destination, to investors, and to the tourism industry in the area. Festivals have the potential to encourage



more visitation, both new and repeat visitations, and stimulate creation of enterprises by locals and increase revenue and consumption of local products on the destinations. In essence, festivals can contribute to a sustainable tourism development as they, to a large extent, are based on local production using resources that are unique to the destination.

The Gambia has since 1996 organised the International Roots Festival, in an effort to attract diaspora Africans, and especially Americans and Caribbeans of African ancestry, to commemorate slavery and the abolition of slavery in The Gambia. The aim of this study is to reflect on the production of festival activities from the perspective of capital utilisation based on a modified destination capitals model for sustainable tourism development (Drammeh, 2013). Understanding host communities' perceptions of the production of festival activities from the perspective of destination capital utilization can be an important mechanism for tourism development for the festival host community. Attention will also be paid to the role of the festival in terms of identity formation for festival visitors.

The objective of this study is to analyze the production of festival activities and to look at the role of the Roots Festival in terms of identity formation for festival visitors. The study is exploratory in nature.

The Roots Festival

Historical Background of the Roots Festival in The Gambia

The United Nations (UN) estimates that, for over 400 years, more than 15 million men, women and children were the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, one of the dark chapters in human history. In 1767, whilst searching for wood to make a drum, Kunta Kinteh (1750-1822; also known as Toby Waller) from the Mandinka village of Juffureh in The Gambia was captured in the area of Albreda (Albadar) after wandering from his village of Juffureh (Afro Tourism, 2016). Alex Haley's 1976 novel, entitled, "Roots, The Epic Drama of One Man's Search for His Origins", is based on the story of this young man who was captured on the soil of The Gambia and together with many others kept in the dungeon of James Island from where they were shipped to America and enslaved. The River Gambia formed the first trade route into the interior of Africa and became an early corridor for the slave trade (UNESCO, 2003). This is also an important constituent of the tourism product in the country.

Haley's work on the novel involved ten years of research, with intercontinental travels and writing. According to Haley, Kunta Kinteh was kidnapped and taken into captivity by four strong men; blindfolded and bound as a prisoner on board a slave ship called *Lord Ligonier* with other young Gambian men and women for a three months voyage of no return to North America (Haley, 1976). Despite his refusal to be enslaved throughout the journey, with heavy punishment, brutal beatings and cruelty on him by his captors, Kunta Kinteh was able to survive the trip to Maryland. Upon arrival he was sold to a Virginia plantation owner called Master Waller, who renames him "Toby". Through six generations of slaves and freedmen, Haley traced his ancestry back to The Gambia, and to this man called Kunta Kinteh from Juffureh. He became a household name worldwide and many Afro-Americans celebrate him as a hero and a freedom fighter and a dignified personality in the fight against slavery.

Haley claims to be a seventh-generation descendant of Kunta Kinteh. He went to the village of Juffureh in Gambia; where Kunta Kinteh grew up, and listened to oral historians telling the story of Kunta Kinteh. This bestseller book "Roots," which was also made into a movie, inspired Black Americans to trace their family ancestry. Haley's work came to depict the story of around 40 million Americans of African descent whose history is similar.

According to UNESCO (2003), James Island and related sites present a testimony to the main periods and facets of the encounter between Africa and Europe along the River Gambia - a continuum stretching from pre-colonial and pre-slavery times to independence. The site is



particularly significant for its relation to the beginning of the slave trade and its abolition. Albreda, Juffureh and Kunta Kinteh Island (James Island) became World Heritage Sites in The Gambia and have become major attractions for tourists, students of world history and diverse African descendants in the Diaspora (Afro Tourism, 2016).

The Roots Festival in The Gambia

The story of Kunta Kinteh was developed into a biannual festival commemorating the enforced enslavement and transportation of millions of Africans like Kunta Kinteh to the Americas and the Caribbean Islands. The Ministry of Tourism and Culture in The Gambia recognizes the potential in the story of Kunta Kinteh to market the country as a tourist destination. Research in the United States concerning the economic power of the African Diaspora indicated that this market was worth \$450 billion (Nana Ama Amamoo, the executive director of African families' foundation in African Echo, 2000).

The biannual Roots Festival was established in 1996, and is mainly advertised in USA, the Caribbean and UK, to provide opportunities for atonement and reconciliation for those whose ancestors were engaged in slavery and the descendants of Africans who were forced into slavery. Visitors from around the world, especially Europe, America and the Caribbean are encouraged to travel to The Gambia during the summer to attend the Roots Festival. This is now an annual event between May and June as a week of remembrance and also a week to raise awareness about the ancestral past, history and cultures in Africa. The economic activities generated from the festival activities is of huge importance to the host communities.

The scheduled activities for the festival from start date to conclusion govern the activities that attendees of the festival participate in. The immense interest in the story of Kunta Kinteh led The Gambia to set up a tourist office in New York already 1970 (Gamble, 1989). Consequently, acquiring a better understanding of perceptions of host communities on the production of festival activities is of vital importance not only for the success of the festival but also to serve as a foundation for a tourism development built on local resources i.e. the destination capitals.

Development of the Roots Festival from 1996

Although ambitious plans and marketing activities are yet to be put in place for the festival, the number of people retracing their roots in The Gambia is increasing (Jeng-Njie, 2015). This might be due to the fact that The Gambia enjoys a global reputation about Kunta Kinteh and the history of slave trade in the country. The long historic connections and involvement in slavery has forged The Gambia as an attraction for the remains of slavery and slave trade in Africa. Consequently, countries like USA, UK and the Caribbean have become the source markets for visitors identifying themselves with Africa.

Although there are no official records accounting for the number of attendees at the Roots Festival in The Gambia, it is still believed by officials in the country to be growing. During the festival of the year 2014 for instance, The Gambia hosted over 300 attendees including international guests artists, historian and author Dr. Rashidi Rukono, the son of the great Jamaican Pan-Africanist Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Princess Beatrice of the Kingdom of Spain, Jamaican music stars like Empress Reggae and Yawande Austin, among a host of other "home-comers." Some of these visitors such as Sizzla Kalongi and Eryka Badu were performing artists at the festival. Previous visitors, include the renowned Jamaican musician Bob Marley's family, Rita Marley and the band members. The Roots Festival is said to be one of the most internationally recognized festivals in Africa attracting cultural groups within, and outside Africa (Daily Observer, 2014). The 12th edition of the festival took place from the Friday 6th - Friday 13th May 2016.



Activities during the Roots Festival

This week-long festival features music, dance, workshops, excursions, and other activities designed to help visitors of African background discover their roots. The Festival starts with a traditional prayer as well as a welcome reception and dinner at a theater building in Kanifing Municipal Area with different performances including traditional music and dance, Kora and Halam music, historical narratives and traditional songs and drama. Most of subsequent activities are staged in the localities Brikama, Kanilai, Jurreh, Albreda and Kunta Kinteh Island (previously known as James Island). Activities draw upon local cultural resources, i.e. the destination capitals, which play an important role for tourism development.

The Roots Festival promotes Gambian cultural activities in order to share knowledge about history, traditions and cultures of the ancestors with the attendees. Some of the highlights of the festival include a carnival procession of masquerades with cultural groups, wrestling matches, kora and djembe drum concerts, traditional paddle boat races and an African fashion show. Kora and djembe drums are musical instruments which are unique to The Gambia.

The historical and cultural themes of the festival attract visitors and create a connection between the visitors and the people of The Gambia. It includes a Pilgrimage to the village of Juffureh/Albreda where everyone can pay homage to Kunta Kinteh Island, the ancestral homestead of Kunta Kinteh. Other sites of historical importance include the Slavery Museum which plays a significant role for the rituals and is a reason for people to attend the festival. Instead of the traditional rite of passage to adulthood of the Mandinka ethno-linguist group, that Kunta Kinteh belonged to, event participants attend the "*Futanpa*" rite, which is a Jola ethno-linguist group initiation ceremony during which guests are initiated and adopted into a Jola family in Foni Kanilai, which is the ethno-linguistic group and birth village of a former president of The Gambia. This rite of passage includes different cultural dances, the Jola Kumpo and other masquerades. Guests join their adopted families for preparatory formalities for manhood. The sacrificial slaughtering of a chicken is performed to foretell the future and to protect the initiates from evil spirits as well as seeking the blessings of the ancestors before going through the rites of passage.

They perform the absolution for the rite which includes washing of the hands and face with water for protection against evil spirits which is performed under the village big tree and supervised by the village chief. The initiates are then allocated escorts who act as their personal coaches during a two days event of passage to adulthood. The initiates are dressed in white outfits and taken round the sacred silk cotton tree of the village before heading to the bush. The male and female initiates are then separated and kept in different places in the bush. The process of adulthood begins at this stage where different cultural and traditional aspects of Gambian society, norms and values of the people are taught. The process is punctuated by intense drumming and dancing lessons given by the initiates' personal coaches.

The final stage entails emerging from the bush, and gathering under the village sacred tree for the presenting of initiates to their families. They are dressed up in special robes signifying transformation from childhood to adulthood. Each initiate will now show their dancing skills that they were taught in the bush. Each initiate is then presented with a piece of cloth from an elder of his or her adopted family and given an African name and surname.

Other programs that follow involve a symposium with various national and international speakers, an African dinner night, a visit to Makasutu Cultural Forest which is an internationally renowned eco-tourism lodge. A traditional boat race (Regatta) at Banjul Wharf is also part of the festival program which also includes a pillow fight, climbing the greasy pole, traditional drumming and dance, and awards of prizes to participants. Musical concerts, cultural jamborees, visits to traditional batik factories, craft work, Gambian cuisine, hairstyles, fashion and jewelry are also organized during the festival.



Literature Review

Festivals and Event Tourism

Festivals and event tourism has been one of the fastest growing sectors of the world leisure industry (Nicholson, 2001; Pearce, 2001), and is receiving increasing attention in academic research as well. Festivals and special events have increased in number and size, with various purposes including enhancing domestic culture and history, providing domestic recreation opportunities and contributing to the domestic economy by stimulating domestic tourism businesses (Getz, 1991; 2010). Festivals are now popularly regarded almost as a 'rite of passage' for young people in the twenty-first century (Webster, 2014). The Roots Festival organised in The Gambia also includes a similar characteristic. Many people with African descent from the diaspora attend it in order to attempt to reconnect with their ancestral home, history and culture.

Festival production is an important economic activity with a significant impact on the development of tourism in the host communities. It can be an important instrument for attracting visitors and for creating a favorable image of the destination. Special events create an opportunity for leisure, social and cultural experiences outside the normal range of choices or beyond the individual's everyday experience (Getz, 1991). Special events are being created under the Roots Festival for attendees to experience the social and cultural settings in The Gambia as part of the rite of passage and leisure. Festival tourism management is essentially instrumentalist, treating festivals as tools in tourism and economic development, or in place marketing and the selling of attractions and venues (Getz, 2010). Although, some communities may host festivals to provide recreational and leisure activities for their citizens (Long, Perdue, Allen, 1990), festivals are often used to manage a community's image in order to attract tourists (Getz, 1991).

Africa has a lot of festivals, with its abundant, diverse arts and cultures. The continent's festivals represent the ways Africans preserve and promote their varied heritages (Fest Gurus Magazine, 2014). The dates of many festivals are determined by the traditional calendars, often decided close to the event (Africa Guide, 2016). Throughout the whole continent, colorful and vibrant festivals range through musical, religious, cultural and harvest events to name just a few (Africa Guide, 2016). It includes thrilling durbars of chiefs' festival, when tribal leaders and Queen Mothers parade in decorated palanquins, shaded by the traditional umbrellas, and supported by drummers and warriors discharging ancient muskets.

Identity

Identity seems to be a complex phenomenon responding to both individual psychological and group cultural or social influences (Westin, 2010). Contemporary thinking no longer sees identity as fixed and unitary, but as malleable, multiple, and in many respects as the product of a self-constructed narrative with varying relationships to multiple in- and out-groups, with behavioral tendencies towards intra-group solidarity and inter-group competition or distinction (McLaren and Childs, 2013). However, the ways and manners people identify themselves seem to be many. Thus, when creating activities for festivals, it is essential to have an understanding of the target group's preferences concerning identity formation.

Scholars working in an array of social sciences and humanities have taken an interest in questions concerning identity (Fearon, 1999), suggesting that within political science, for instance, the concept of "identity" is found at the center of lively debates in every major subfield. Students have devoted much research to the "identity politics" of race, gender and sexuality. In comparative politics, "identity" plays a central role in research on nationalism and ethnic conflict (Fearon, 1999). Consumer activities are associated with the purchase, use and disposal of goods and services, including the consumer's emotional, mental, and behavioral

responses that proceed, determine consumption behavior. Basically it involves consumers' activities before buying the product, during and after consumption (Kardes, Cline and Cronely, 2008). The Roots Festival has strong connections to slavery and tends to be sensitive to place, race and ethnic identity which seem to be a motivating factor for attendees taking part in the festival and tends to follow such a process of thoughts and experiences.

In political theory, questions of "identity" mark numerous arguments on gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and culture in relation to liberalism and its alternatives (Fearon, 1999). In social identity theory, "identity is a matter of negotiation..., different social roles are learned in relations with others..., and individuals are engaged in identity-creating interactions every day" (Dobers and Strannegård, 2005). The identity concept took off in psychology with the publication of Erikson's books on emotional and cognitive development in a life course perspective (Westin, 2010). Erikson's ideas were, according to McLeod (2013), greatly influenced by Freud's theory regarding the structure and topography of personality. The theory suggests that the role of culture, society and the conflicts that can take place within the ego itself develops as it successfully resolves crises that are distinctly social in nature, involve establishing a sense of trust in others, developing a sense of identity in society, and helping the next generation prepare for the future (McLeod, 2013). For many European and American children, ethnicity does not lead to comparisons with others or exploration of identity (Charlesworth, Wood, Viggiani, 2007). For children from non-dominant groups, ethnicity or race may however be a central part of the quest for identity that begins in middle childhood and continues well into adolescence and young adulthood (ibid). Around the age 7, cognitive advances allow children to view themselves and others as capable of belonging to more than one "category" at once, as capable of possessing two or more heritages simultaneously (Charlesworth et al., 2007). As children mature, they may become more aware of not only dual or multiple aspects of identity but also of the discrimination and inequality to which they may be subjected (Charlesworth et al., 2007). This may for instance explain the formation of the civil rights movements in the 1960s when Afro Americans started to argue that they were being marginalized and started to challenge the social injustice of segregation and racism they suffered and were subjected to.

The emergence of the identity paradigm in the 19th century was also most likely connected to the rise of nationalism (Czarniawska, 2008). People grouped within the new borders desperately needed to know what they had in common, as the tendency was for them to see too many differences (Czarniawska, 2008). Identities are the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is (Oyserman, Elmore, Smith, 2012). Thus, identities can be focused on the past-what used to be true of one; the present-what is true of one now; or the future-the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become, or the person one fears one may become (Oyserman et al., 2012). The production of activities around the Roots Festival seems to be designed to serve such memories for attendees with a potential to influence consumers' behaviors, cognitions, and affective responses which ultimately can result in a decision making process (Peter and Olson, 2008). Such activities are found within the local environment built on the social fabrics, culture and history of the people which are important components of the destination capitals that could be useful for sustainable tourism development.

Destination capitals

The destination three-capital model suggests that tourism in LDCs relies on *the environmental, socio-cultural and human capitals* on the destination to create tourism products and services for tourists as well as a sustainable tourism development (Drammeh, 2013). The environmental, socio-cultural and human capitals, which are readily available to locals on the destination, seem to be important components also for festival activities.

The destination capitals model for sustainable tourism development is adopted and modified from Sharpley (2010). The approach, applied to the context of developing sustainable festivals,

argues (cf. Figure 1) that *festival events development* meets the *local community's needs* through *products, facilities and services* produced with the destination's three capitals namely *environmental, human and socio-cultural capitals* that embrace opportunities for sustainable tourism development for the local community.

The destination capitals allow the identification of the components that are capable of contributing to sustainable tourism in LDCs (Drammeh, 2013). Figure 1 shows the destination three-capital model.

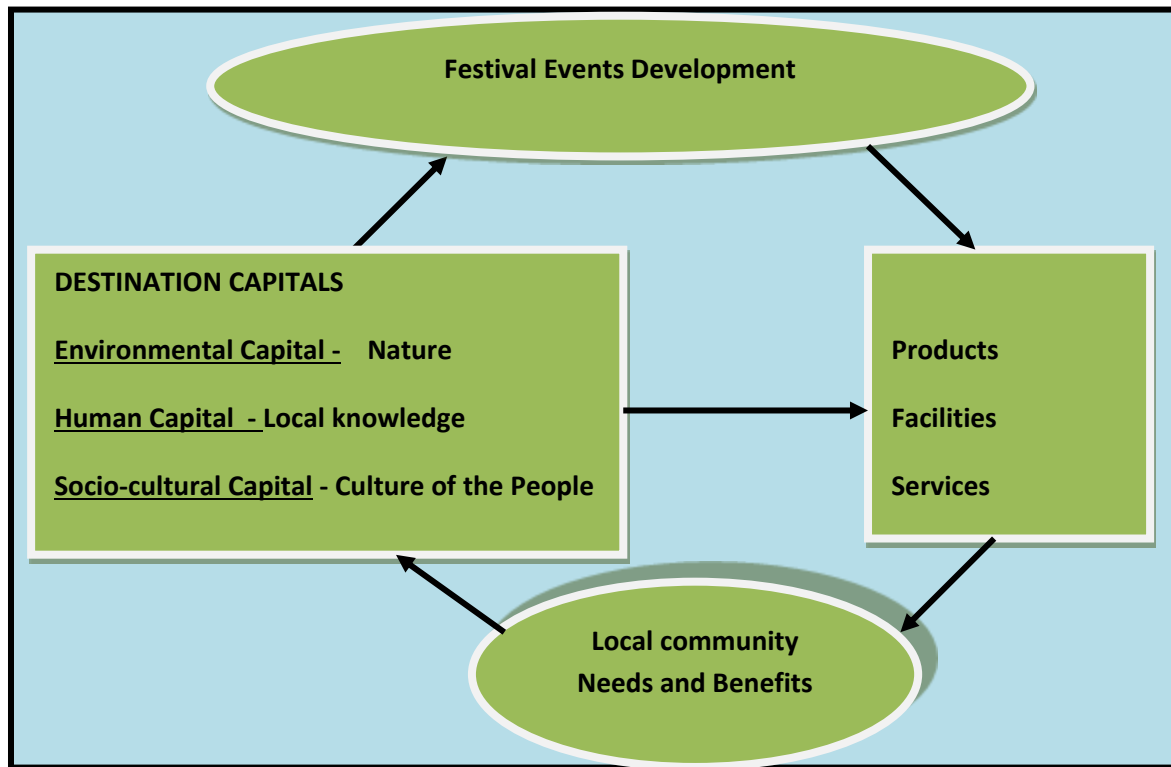


Figure 1. The destination three-capitals model for sustainable tourism development in LDCs.

Figure 1 presents the proposed model by Drammeh (2013). In the absence of technological, financial and political capital which are the major development challenges that the least developed countries are confronted with, and which are part of Sharpley's (2010) model, there are still possibilities through local knowledge to utilize the three destination capitals; *environmental, human and socio-cultural capitals* that are available and easily accessible enabling locals to create festival activities that could become part of the tourism *products, facilities and services* on the destination in accordance with *local community needs* thereby encouraging sustainable tourism development in LDC. The concepts will be tested for the Roots Festival in The Gambia that is heavily dependent on the destination capitals for the development and production of its activities to create extraordinary experiences; entailing a sense of newness of perception for attendees (Abrahams, 1986).

Methodology

A case study of the suppliers of products and services for the Roots Festival in The Gambia provided the data for this study. An exploratory approach was adopted to throw light on specific questions (Beeton, 2005, Veal, 1998). It does not intend to offer a conclusive solution to existing problems experienced in organising The Roots Festival, but rather to have a better understanding of perceptions of host communities on production of festival activities from the perspective of destination capital utilisation. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from stakeholders providing products and services for the Roots Festival in The Gambia.



The questionnaire focused on information about products and services that can impact the festival activities and attendees' identity formation. All-together 22 answers were received for this explorative survey of Gambian residents who participated in providing products and services for the festival. About 65% of the respondents were males and their ages varied from 24 to 44 years old with the average being 33.

RESULTS

Products and services provided by respondents

Lodging was by far the most important service provided by the respondents and 86% hosted between 1 and 12 guests with an average of 3 guests.

Table 1: Number of guests received by the respondents

NO OF GUESTS	Frequency	Percent
1	1	4,5
2	10	45,5
3	4	18,2
4	2	9,1
5	1	4,5
12	1	4,5
Total	19	86,4
NO LODGING	3	13,6
Total	22	100,0

Other products and activities varied but were typically based on local skills and the environmental, human as well as socio-cultural capitals. Craft works, culture products, guiding and music performances were some of the products and services provided by the 55% of the respondents that were involved with the festival.

Table 2: Activities (apart from lodging) engaged in by respondents

ACTIVITIES	Frequency
CRAFT WORKS	1
CULTURE PRODUCTION	2
EVENT PRODUCTION	2
GUIDING	1
HOME STAY	1
LOCAL PRODUCTS	1
MUSIC	1
PICTURES	1
ROOTS	1
TRANSPORT & GUIDING	1
NO INVOLVEMENT	10
Total	22



Respondents perceive the Roots Festival to be beneficial in several ways. For their own personal economy most respondents answer “Very Important”. The 15% that do not offer lodging answered “Somewhat important”. The 55% of the respondents that are involved in the festival considered the festival more important for their own economy, more so than respondents that are not directly involved with the Roots Festival.

Festival Activities Development

Respondents were asked to name activities that they think are of interest to the visitors of the Roots Festival, and the most consistent and recurring responses are visits to the Kinteh families, the Island (Kunta Kinteh Island), and the rite passage. Other activities respondents included in their answers are boat races, bird watching, visits to the Makasutu cultural forest, wrestling, storytelling, women gardening, ethnic dances, art and craft, food vendors, fun rides, creative site-walks, visiting the upland and the stone circles, river cruising, ecotourism, circumcision ceremonies, site seeing, cultural activities, participating and involvement in communities. The responses are clearly related to the aims and objectives of the festival itself, which seem to enforce the concept of the Destination Three-Capitals Model. The activities provided are drawn from the *environmental, human and socio-cultural capitals* of the destination. Respondents were further asked what more can be offered to Roots attendees, and they mentioned items including cultural extravaganza, Gambian wrestling, creek tours, to extend accommodation, bird watching and nature trips, local cooking, hospitality of the people, cultural heritage, history, introduction and information about the slave trade, site viewing, and cultural exchanges.

These findings show that the festival is not merely a showcase of the story of Kunta Kinteh and slavery, but could also form part of an overall visitor experience of the country. Also mentioned was the utilization of mainstream hotel accommodation around the Tourism Development Area which provide star rated types of, and mostly foreign owned, facilities. Other products mentioned draw upon the *destination three-capitals* that are easily accessible to local participants who provide products and services during the Roots Festival.

Furthermore, respondents were asked to list 3 to 5 activities that they considered most important for tourists in order to make them identify themselves with their African heritage and be satisfied with their visit. They mentioned, wrestling, storytelling, vegetable gardening, home stays, time in Juffureh communities, symposium, visits to families, kumpo, traditional boat race, visiting historical sites, night life activities, cultural carnival, slave houses, visiting local families, name changing, adoption by a family, local music, ancestral history, local outfits, local food and houses, educational forums on slave trade, memories about Roots, traditions, customs, and values of the people.

The suggested activities seem to reveal gaps in the production of The Roots Festival activities and provide a better understanding of perceptions of host communities on products and services that could be important for the festival and consequently for tourism development in The Gambia. The Festival could be used to bridge gaps and provide extended and suitable forms of activities for tourists with a local character relying purely on the destination three-capitals for sustainable tourism development. It is clear that there are strong links to the three destination capitals i.e. environmental, human as well as socio-cultural capitals. Respondents are convinced that activities connected to nature, local knowledge and the cultures of Gambian people are most important for the Roots Festival attendees.



Discussion

The Roots Festival and Destination Capitals

In the context of the Roots Festival in The Gambia, activities are designed around the memories of slavery, culture, traditions and history of the people drawn from the destination capitals. These are important components of sustainable tourism development. Through the Roots Festival, there is a possibility for The Gambia to further develop a tourism industry that is purely based on local production and experiences which encourages a more sustainable practice. We modified the destination capitals (Drammeh, 2013) model from Sharpley's (2010), and applied it in the context of developing sustainable festivals, so that the events carried out under the festival meets the *local community's needs* through *products, facilities and services* produced with the destination's three *environmental, human and socio-cultural capitals* that embrace opportunities for sustainable tourism development for the local community.

The assumption herein is that the destination capitals allow the identification of the components that are capable of contributing to a sustainable tourism in LDCs (Drammeh, 2013). For instance, human capital, which draws on the socio-cultural and environmental capitals on the destination, will create activities within the festival without external influences. This will tend to minimize the dependency on foreign goods and services and thus the economic leakage. The same applies to *socio-cultural and environmental capitals* since tourism development in LDCs is often accused of causing degradation. Activities created within the Roots Festival provide opportunities for the formation of local SMEs and local product development thereby minimizing the much talked about economic leakage that tourism is often accused of.

The focus is on the past and related to the *socio cultural capital* bounded by history on which the concept of the Roots Festival is derived. The event is thus based on the *sociocultural, human and environmental capitals* of the destination which attendees tend to identify themselves with when engaging in this specific festival as a rite passage in honor of their ancestral past.

The framework of the three capitals model (Drammeh, 2013) facilitates an understanding of possibilities for using destination capitals within the Roots Festival as a model for sustainable tourism development. Components that are identified as unique to LDCs are readily available to local SMEs and are central for the Roots Festival which thus seems to follow the directions described by the model. For instance, the historical and cultural themes of the festival are used to attract visitors creating a connection between the visitors and the people of The Gambia. This is drawn from the *environmental, socio-cultural and human capitals* of the destination. All the three destination capitals for sustainable tourism development can thus be important elements in the production and development of the Roots Festival and consequently a way forward for sustainable tourism development.

The Roots Festival and Identity Formation

The growing awareness among Afro-Americans has created political and social movements calling for Afro American identity: to be proud of whom they are and to take pride in the role played by their ancestors in the creation of America. The festival visitors take interest in their own roots, defining themselves not just as Americans but more precisely as Afro-Americans having an ancestral connection with slavery. The *human and sociocultural capitals* of the destination are thus important for such attendees with ancestral links to the destination.

According to The Daily Observer (2011), the views of some of the initiates who are experiencing an African traditional rite for the first time, are that they appreciate this particular culture as well as African culture in general. The Roots Festival tends to encourage a sense of attachment, and belonging that seems to be emotionally loaded. Visitors to the festival



identify themselves with, and tend to be associated with, the concept of hedonic consumption producing an intensely positive and intrinsically enjoyable extraordinary experience (Arnould and Price, 1993) as it entails a sense of newness of perception and process (Abrahams, 1986). Consumers look for effective memories, sensations, and symbolism which combine to create a holistic and long lasting experience (Hossany and Witham, 2009). The festival thus tends to create a sense of belonging that defines the identity of participants which seems to be a major motivation for them taking part in the festival.

The type of identity created by the Roots Festival does not only define people in a nationalist way, but it also propagates the Pan African ideology with a very strong political stance about African dignity, pride and independence. This Festival is a historical, cultural and educational event attached to national heritage sites providing opportunities for visitors to experience places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the history of the people and their forefathers. According to the organizing committee, the aim of the festival is to reunite peoples of African descent with Africa while promoting The Gambia and her cultural, historical and traditional values. The festival entails an element of pilgrimage like visits to sacred places with emotionally loaded experiences. This represents a high state of consciousness. Knowledge obtained in this state has greater validity than the insights of the normal, sub-optimal level of consciousness associated with a mundane life. It constitutes some of the most memorable and subjectively significant events in life (Charlton, 1998).

The Role of the Roots Festival for Tourism Development in The Gambia

The Roots Festival seems to present a myriad of opportunities for The Gambia as a cultural and all year round tourism destination, with a potential to create real growth for the country's event sector, generating business opportunities for local enterprises leading to the formation of vital local small scale business enterprises in the country. It puts The Gambia in the focus of the region as a lot of people may subsequently come for a spiritual and emotional pilgrimage to their ancestral land. Pilgrimage visitors usually suggest they had a "special experience" when they talk about their unique experiences. A pilgrimage is a sacred journey that maybe attached to the Roots Festival as a sacred visit to the ancestral homeland.

Added to the economic potential, there are opportunities to extend the tourism season in The Gambia. The time of the festival could be considered to be a good time to visit The Gambia to experience the people, its cultural diversity, history and traditions, sun, sea, sand, arts and craft, cuisine and its sometimes simple, enthralling and scintillating tourism offerings served in their rustic but pure and natural captivating environment. Thus promoting the Roots Festival could be a strategy to diversify the tourism product of The Gambia and help the country to move away from its mainstream coastal beach seasonal tourism to a seemingly more sustainable tourism development that encourages all year round tourism activities.

The objective of the Roots Festival is to attract visitors, mainly people of African descent, to explore and celebrate their roots of origin and history through cultural and educative activities. The findings of this study suggest that only a limited number of possible activities of these types serving the spirit of Roots homecoming are provided for the festival attendees. Hence event managers and promoters of the festival need to understand the value of such activities to the audience of the festival, as well as the value for the communities where they take place, as there is a considerable scope for improvement and extension in this aspect.

Some of the activities indicated by respondents are attractive also for non-festival tourists visiting The Gambia. Bird watching (avitourism) is a significant tourist activity where The Gambia boasts to have over 560 different exotic species of colorful birds that could be seen the whole year round. The historical built heritage in upland areas – the Wassu Stone Circles, art and craft as well as visits to the area of Albreda (Albadar), where Kunta Kinteh was captured

after wandering from his village of Juffureh, are activities which also attract many non-festival tourists.

The story relating to Kunta Kinteh and slavery, is a major component of the destination's socio-cultural capital that is unique for the country. Art and craft is embedded in the history and culture of the people and it is an important component of the human capital on the destination. It is also an element of the tourism product in The Gambia that includes its people, their cultures and traditions, and involves diverse peoples, with diverse traditions and ways of living. The collaboration, participation and involvement of locals in tourism business activities, through the provision of art and craft as souvenir articles acquired by tourists during their visit, are essential components of sustainable tourism practices. These products are also highly valued products from the Roots Festival. There are many designated tourist markets away from the developed coastal hotel areas thus encouraging visitors to travel and to acquire souvenirs as well as to explore the local communities.

Emphasis is made on visiting Kunta Kinteh Island as the core activity of the Roots Festival and as a hedonic consumption activity (Klausner, 1998; Privette, 1983). In the experience economy (Abrahams, 1986; Arnould, Price, 1993), consumers look for memories, sensations, and symbolism which combine to create a holistic and long lasting experience (Hossany, Witham, 2009). These approaches could be applied in the context of events and festivals and could be used to create everlasting tourism experiences for tourists. Consumer loyalty represents an important base for developing a sustainable competitive advantage (Kotler 1981; Singh, 1981). A sustainable competitive advantage can be gained by giving the customer a unique and memorable experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Experiences created by the Roots Festival are based on the environmental, human and sociocultural capitals of the destination. The three capitals model could serve as a good instrument to extend not only the qualities of the Roots Festival but also non-festival visitors' experiences of the cultural diversity, history and traditions away from the traditional beach tourism that the country has been dependent upon. Historical, cultural and educational activities that enhance the visitors' formation of an identity entail elements of pilgrimage and initiation like visits to sacred places with emotionally loaded experiences of identity attached to the destination three-capitals.

Conclusions

There is a growing concern for, and a number of efforts, to make tourism businesses operate according to sustainable practices through the use of design tools, guidelines for tourism development and planning policies. However, there is yet to be a consensus on a functional strategy for this endeavour. Much of the research conducted seems to focus primarily on policy proposals at the regional or state level (Burns and Sancho, 2003; MacDonald and Jolliffe, 2003; Burns, 2004) or merely focus on suggesting planning practices (Leberman and Mason, 2002). Most appears to be addressing sustainable tourism practice, but ignores the potentials of festivals, which also attract visitors to the destination.

The Roots Festival has a potential for expanding local ventures, some of which were not even intended for the tourism industry, that can be included into the tourist experience and business activities. This could facilitate local inclusion in tourism derived from the human and socio-cultural capital which is used as a filter to explore opportunities within the built and natural environment for the provision of products and services to the attendees of the Roots Festival.

Whilst much of the literature focuses on economic benefits of events, many authors (e.g. Carlsen, Taylor, Fredline et al. in *Resource Guide to The Impact of Events*, 2007) call for more research on the social, physical and environmental tourism impacts of events. The aim of this research has been to analyze the production of activities in the Roots Festival in The Gambia from the perspective of identity formation as well as from the perspective of the three-capital model for sustainable tourism development (Sharpley, 2010; Drammeh, 2014).



The general assumption is that festivals are to a large extent based on local production factors, and thus seem to be a segment of tourism with a potential to transform itself into a sustainable industry. The Roots Festival is created around symbolic resources that are unique to the destination and those who organise it, and tends to absorb a lot of human, environmental, historical and sociocultural resources that go into the production with little or no outside influence. There is thus less risk for economic leakages or risk for environmental or socio-cultural degradation for economic gains. Such activities have eventually developed to become important forms of business in the tourism industry in many LDCs, normally in the form of Small and Medium Size Enterprises operated by locals and based on 'authentic cultures' (Roessingh and Duijnhoven, 2004).

Local stakeholders will tend to play a significant protective role in safe-guarding the very resources that are used in the festival in order to bring them long term future income for the survival of their businesses, communities and families. Management strategies of stakeholders are considered a planning challenge (Andersson and Getz, 2007) for long term sustainability of festivals. In this study, respondents put emphasis on products and services drawn from the three destination capitals (Drammeh, 2014) that were found to be important components for sustainable tourism development in a LDC context.

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