Partnerships and networks in Zimbabwe's cultural tourism arena: A host community perspective

Caroliny Makacha *
Midlands University State
Gweru, Zimbabwe
E-mail: makachac@staff.msu.ac.zw

Munodawafa Njovo
Catholic University of Zimbabwe
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Dr Albert Mada
Registrar, Catholic University of Zimbabwe
Harare, Zimbabwe

Corresponding author*

Abstract

Partnerships and networks are touted by stakeholders who exist beyond the spheres of destination communities as catalytic to mutually beneficial outcomes of cultural tourism. Little attention is however paid to the views and attitudes of host communities with regards to the existence of partnerships and networks in cultural tourism. This is despite the fact that local residents should play an equal and active role in decision making processes that affect them. Additionally, it is noteworthy that when tourism receipts and benefits are enumerated, they are considered by policy makers as appropriated to the local people, who happen to be at the centre of driving cultural tourism as owners and custodians of culture. The study seeks to bring host communities into the cultural tourism discourse in Zimbabwe by firstly, having them to share their understanding and existence of partnerships and networks; secondly the perceived benefits that they see as possibly arising from partnerships and networks in cultural tourism and thirdly, the factors impeding the form and functionality of partnerships and networks that should mutually benefit a wide range of stakeholders in the new normal era. The study takes a qualitative research approach with interviews being treated as the primary method of collecting data. The data was thematically analysed. The study took place at the Great Zimbabwe National Monument, a World Heritage Site. The research is deemed to be of importance in guiding policies that assist the improvement of participation of host communities in decision making processes that affect their livelihoods in particular and regional economies in general.

Keywords: Partnerships, networks, cultural tourism, host community, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries accounting for over 10% of total employment, 11% global GDP, and the total trips for tourists are estimated to increase to 1.6 billion by 2020 (WWF, 2001). The effects of globalisation on the tourism industry cannot be ignored, destinations have to be competitive hence tourism partnerships and networks have proven to be one of the strategies to achieve destination competitiveness (Zehrer & Raich, 2010). Omerzel and Kregar (2016) supports this by saying that the tourism industry is a complex environment which renders networking and partnerships among different stakeholders critical so as to ensure provision of the best service to customers. The networks and partnerships concept in tourism destinations or businesses has gained fair coverage by scholars (Provan

& Kenis, 2008; Nunkoo & Ramkinsoon, 2012; Van der Zee *et al.*, 2017; Njovo & Makacha, 2018). A network approach among tourism stakeholders is now popular in tourism where individual players are brought together to share information, knowledge, experiences and can work as a team to develop new touristic concepts and products (Van der Zee *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, Provan and Kenis (2008) articulate that the notion of networks suggests a managerial concept that is based on informal non contractual relationships and stakeholder engagement. Nunkoo and Ramkinsoon (2012) are of the view that the ultimate success of networks rests upon trust by participants. Gaining a competitive advantage in a destination should be derived from the establishment of networks that also consist of less formalised relations (Van der Zee *et al.*, 2017). The same authors also add that networks are often used to describe the interconnected nature of stakeholders across different geographical regions. On the other hand, Selin and Chavez (1995) stated that collaborations or partnerships among stakeholders refers to the pooling of resources like information, money or labour among others, between two or more tourism stakeholders in order to solve a problem or create an opportunity that neither of them could seek to effectively tackle individually.

However it is important to take note that other authors like Dredge (2006) and also Jesus and Franco (2016), say that networks are difficult to define as they can be formal or informal; a stakeholder can belong to more than one at the same time; they are not constant and they have to adapt to different situations. This can be one of the contributing factors to the varied and interchangeable use of the terms partnerships or networks. As such, it can be articulated that networks and partnerships or collaborations and cooperatives are all partnership arrangements that are aimed at enhancing development and destination competitiveness (Pansiri, 2013).

The power of networking and partnerships in cultural tourism cannot be overemphasised. Culture and tourism have become vital resources for the socio economic development of many rural areas. Many countries are adopting cultural tourism as a possible development strategy. According to UNWTO (2017), 89% of the member countries have cultural tourism as part of their tourism policy. Cultural tourism involves the community having to be highly involved in keeping their traditional customs and products (Pavlovic *et al.*, 2015). The authors also add that the diverse stakeholders for cultural tourism can provide authentic experiences to tourists if they work together. In addition, Omerzell and Kregar (2016) say that small businesses in tourism tend to use both formal and informal networks. This is applicable to cultural tourism since most of such ventures are small, being run by local communities.

There is a huge need to provide memorable cultural tourism experiences for visitors that are enabled by partnerships and networks. This study therefore attempts to shed light on the views of host communities involved in cultural tourism on the existence and the roles played by networks and partnerships in their businesses. This has been necessitated by the fact that the host community is a key stakeholder which is in some places and should be at the centre-stage of cultural tourism development.

Literature Review

Partnerships and networks for tourism

The issue of collaborations in tourism has gained momentum due to the lack of hierarchical ties that exist between the diverse organisations that offer products independently (Zemla, 2016). Networks have been found to present an important source of support for entrepreneurs by providing them and their firms with a wide range of opportunities (Johannisson, 1986 cited in Omerzel & Kregar, 2016). Omerzel and Kregar (2016) articulate that only a networked partnership among various stakeholders within tourism destinations enables for the delivery of a holistic product to tourists. This is testimony to the fact that, whatever the objective of tourism might be, the power of collaborative action cannot be ignored. Earlier on, Selin and Chavez (1995) highlighted that the importance of forging partnerships among stakeholders

has become very popular in tourism management spheres. The stakeholders in a tourism destination includes tourists, tourism firms, tourist offices, and service providers like hotels, travel agents, and host communities among others.

According to Jesus and Franco (2016), the tourism industry provides an appropriate environment for the formation of interorganisational networks due to the fact that it brings together greatest diversity of activities, sectors, organisations and stakeholders .These various stakeholders can't achieve sustainable development on their own hence making it important to establish alliances, partnerships or networks with others as highlighted by March and Wilkinson (2009). The same authors relate to the tourism experience quality offered by a destination which depends on the interconnectedness of organisational parts and how they interact with each other. As such tourism organisations and individuals involved in tourism do not operate in isolation but they are part of the wider networks and value chains where there is co-creation and co-delivery of value.

This is supported by Augustyn and Knowles (2000) who articulate that the relationships among partners in tourism is reciprocal where they possess and share specific strengths and bring together a wide range of support sources in order to provide an integrated service. In addition, Van der Zee *et al.,* (2017) says that networks among various stakeholders help in the creation of high quality and authentic experiences for the tourists. On the other hand, McCabe *et al.,* (2012) avers that the tourism product is a result of a wide range of services and products provided by an array of complementary and competing stakeholders hence networking among the different partners is crucial so as to provide the best service to the tourist.

For the success of the collaborative arrangements, Zehrer and Raich (2010) are of the view that it is the duty and responsibility of destination management organisations to foster network development and creation of relationships among tourism stakeholders. On the other hand, Pansiri (2013) says that networks and partnerships are crucial for operation and establishment of governance structures for destinations. In a research on conceptual tools for evaluating tourism partnerships carried out in Hunter Valley Australia, March and Wilkinson (2009) proposed four approaches that can be used by destination managers to give richer perceptions into the utility and nature of inter-organisational relationships. The proposed tools include: value net application to a destination's stakeholders; partnership-activities matrix generation; identification of competition for the scarce resources among and between tourism stakeholders; and ecological approach to classifying relationships which offers organisations in the destinations the possibility to increase efficiencies and also highlighting obstacles in current networks.

The benefits of being part of a network or partnership cannot be understated. This is due to the fact that in these concepts, organisations are considered as being embedded in a relational structure where they don't operate in isolation but in relation to others. As highlighted by Jesus and Franco (2016) working together in harmony by these organisations creates the tourism product which is vital for the success of any tourism destination. Njovo and Makacha (2018) also highlight the importance of collaboration among various firms as contributing to development of policies which may lead to sustainability. Jesus and Franco (2016) also relate to sustainable development when they highlight that networks and collaborations in tourism promote the spread of information, strengthen connections and contribute to sustainable development. According to Morrison *et al.,* (2004), partnerships and networks for tourism also improves community cohesion through fostering a sense of community and common purpose.

Some authors have also argued that there is a relationship between organisational performance and networks. March and Wilkinson (2009) articulate that the performance of a tourist destination is highly dependent on the stakeholder connections. On the same note, Omerzel and Kregar (2016) say that the varied research that has been conducted in tourism and beyond has demonstrated a positive relationship among partnerships, networks and business performance. This is also evident in their research which showed that for those firms

whose profitability or market share increased in the last three years, they were more inclined to networked collaborations and were classified as great networkers. It can therefore be said that organisational networks will lead to increased competitiveness and efficiency of individual businesses.

Partnerships and networks in tourism can also lead to business survival. Peltier and Naidu (2012) aver that organisational networks represent an essential element of a firm's survival strategies as only collaboration with others will enable the firms access to opportunities and exchange of resources. In support, Luthe *et al.,* (2012) posit that tourism businesses through networking can become more resilient in a fast changing environment which is characterised by cut-throat competition. In a study done in Botswana by Pansiri (2013) it was established that organisations that have sound marketing and planning activities appreciate partnerships and collaborations more than those that do not have.

Though the benefits of partnerships and networking in tourism are many, there are also some factors that work against the success of such initiatives. Van Der Zee *et al.,* (2017) says that due to the fact that most tourism entrepreneurs are competitors, collaboration and sharing of knowledge becomes risky and they end up being reluctant to actively participate in such initiatives. This is also evidenced in their research where they found out that trust related activities like member engagement and partnership between members were only applied by a small minority. In addition, Jesus and Franco (2016) in their study found that partnerships and networks in tourism are affected by different points of view, bureaucracy and differing needs, slow decision making, different vision and lack of dialogue among others.

Other authors like Zemla (2016) are of the view that the networks concepts is mainly applicable to large companies and therefore not being much relevant to the tourism sector which is dominated by mainly small to medium enterprises. Hence the competing relations and different services offered to tourists by these small organisations make setting of partnership/network goals more difficult. Owing to the nature of the tourism experience where companies are interlinked in tourism product preparation, it becomes difficult to withdraw from a certain network even if it is inefficiently organised.

The cultural tourism concept

Pavlovic *et al.,* (2015) posits that the definitions of cultural tourism run into hundreds and they are derived either from tourism or are based on the tourist experiences. Silberberg (1995:361) defines cultural tourism as visits by people from outside the host community who are motivated wholly or partially by interest in the artistic, historical, and scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a region, community, group or institution. An analysis of Silberberg (1995) definition shows that the author purports cultural tourism to be only for those outside the community of which even those from within the host community can also engage in cultural tourism in their own area. According to Richards (2013), cultural tourism entails cultural consumption by people while travelling. A new operational definition for cultural tourism has been crafted by UNWTO (2017:18) where it is defined as a type of tourism activity in which the essential motivation of the visitor is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions or products in a tourism destination. This new definition goes beyond the sites and monuments but also relates to ways of life and creativity. Cultural tourism includes performing arts like theatre, dance and music; visual arts and crafts, festivals, museums and cultural centres; historical sites and interpretive centres.

According to INTERPREG (2014), cultural tourism embraces the full range of experiences that visitors' to a destination can undertake in order to learn what makes the destination distinctive. This includes the lifestyles of the community, heritage, art, people and the business of providing and interpreting that culture to visitors. Cultural tourism enables creativity. According to Pavlovic *et al.,* (2015), this form of tourism in rural areas allows tourists to actively participate in different activities that include events, handicrafts making or recreation among others. This

enhances the tourist experience as they get to know and learn about other cultures. The authors also add that successful development of cultural tourism in rural areas is dependent on the creation of strategic collaborations among the stakeholders.

It should be noted that cultural tourism represents an area of significant economic benefit to museums and heritage sites. According to Silberberg (1995), partnerships can be utilised by cultural and heritage facilities to increase tourist numbers and generate revenue. In addition, Turker (2013) articulates that cultural heritage is one of the most valuable attractions available to tourists and is also among the largest and fast developing brands of the world tourism industry. This is because tourists are being more interested in cultural experiences and activities. Destinations like Canada are increasingly recognising cultural events and attractions as potential partners in product packaging and other collaborative arrangements. This is supported by Palmer (2013) who says that cultural tourism is about people and partnerships. The author also adds that cultural tourism is based on the understanding of the collective cultural offer of the destination and packaging it in a way that is meaningful to the consumer. Therefore focused leadership that is based on genuine partnerships is a necessity.

The concepts of partnerships and networks have been found to be very crucial in creating a cultural tourism destination. According to Silberberg (1995), they are three partnership opportunities for cultural tourism which include: (a) cultural products of the same type like museums and museums, (b) cultural products of different types like festivals and arts, (c) cultural and non-cultural tourism products like museums and hotels, crafts and amusement parks among others. It can be deduced that from the three proposed partnership opportunities by Silberberg (1995), the collaboration between a cultural and non-cultural tourism product is the most ideal one as it widens the tourist experience.

Stakeholder partnerships and networks are crucial in the minimisation of the possible threats posed by cultural tourism to community residents. Having the host community at the centre stage of everything is what is required. According to Turker (2013), the host community is the main stakeholder in heritage tourism hence it is vital to understand their perceptions towards such initiatives. The sentiments by the author also apply to this research as it is based on tourism at a heritage site. To support the fact that the host community buy-in is very crucial, in a study in Turkey, Turker (2013) found out that residents have consistently positive perceptions towards tourism projects that emanate from their belief that employment and business opportunities will be improved and community development is created.

The role of the host community in cultural tourism

According to Sproule (1996) a community is a group of people, often living in the same geographic area, which identifies them as belonging to the same group. The development of a tourist destination cannot be separated from the multiple roles of related stakeholders in in the broader tourism system. The host community is one of the main elements that make up tourism (Boz & Karakas, 2017). According to Manaf *et al.*, (2018), a variety of elements like accommodation, attractions, transport and tour organisers among others make up the tourism system and therefore should not standalone which makes the local community the main actor in tourism.

According to Moyo and Tichaawa (2017), most researches on the host community importance in tourism revolve around the need for communities to be involved in decision making and planning for tourism development. Community approval of any tourism project is therefore required for sustainability. However in their research, Moyo and Tichaawa (2017) established that local communities were not adequately involved in terms of planning, decision making and participation on the development of tourism in general. Williams (2009) supports this by saying that the absence of vital aspects like host community participation in tourism can lead to risks such as haphazard development that will lead to more negative impacts. The host

community therefore needs to understand tourism and its potential impacts so that they advocate for better development aimed towards sustainable livelihoods.

Zamani-Farahani and Musa (2012 cited in Moyo and Tichaawa, 2017) are of the view that the tourism industry is dependent on the hospitality of the local community hence a happy community means destination positive image which will in turn generate favourable word of mouth. Moyo and Tichaawa (2017) also add that the host communities are the tourism development focal point in any destination as they provide the tourist services. Akama (2011) posits that the decision-making for tourism should be in the hands of the host community and they have to determine how the resources are to be utilised in their community. Host community involvement should be supported by governments because such involvement helps in the formulation of the appropriate decisions, and it also generates an increased amount of local motivation (Viljoen & Tlabela, 2007). The authors also add that the involvement assists with protection measures and environmental conservation that is vital for sustainability.

On the same note, Yu *et al.,* (2011) says the host community's role in tourism development is crucial. Such roles include, identifying and promoting the tourist resources and attractions that form community tourism development basis (Matarrita-Cascante*et al.*, 2010). In addition, Israr *et al.,* (2009) articulates that the host community has a duty to enhance and maintain a sense of place that is vital for guaranteeing long term conservation of tourism resources. This is substantiated in their research where they established that the host community plays an important role in the promotion of ecotourism in the area hence they are not to be neglected in the development of tourism. It is therefore in the best interest of the host community to support and be involved in cultural tourism initiatives as this provides new livelihood opportunities for many communities.

The study area

The research was done at Great Zimbabwe National Monument. According to Musasa and Mago (2014), Great Zimbabwe is an ancient city which is a preservation of Zimbabwe's historical and cultural resources. The monument has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Site since 1986 and it is one of Zimbabwe's main tourist attractions. According to Zimfieldguide.com, the monument is centrally located and is highly accessible owing to the good roads. Great Zimbabwe Guide (2014) asserts that the monument was listed as a world heritage site owing among other things to the fact that the ruins bear a unique testimony to the lost civilisation of the Shona people between the 11th and 15th centuries. According to Mbaiwa (2016), tourists visiting a world heritage site often expect the visit to the site to be a unique experience. The author also adds that local communities are one of the most important stakeholders for world heritage sites as they are the custodians and the traditional owners who are strongly connected to these places culturally.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, with interviews being the preferred method of collecting data. The qualitative approach was chosen because of its ability to draw data from the context in which events occur as well as its ability to describe occurrences and to determine the process in which events are embedded (Jamali, 2018). The perspectives of host communities are easier established with the qualitative approach than any alternative and admittedly, other approaches are not amenable with this kind of an enquiry (Musasa & Mago, 2014).

Unstructured interviews were carried out at the Great Zimbabwe National Monument (GZNM). The absence of structure to the interviews was because of the non-existence of a prepared list of questions (Chu & Ke, 2017). Questions were asked on site, in a natural setting where participants lived and worked. 12 informants were interviewed and the sample size was based

on theoretical saturation (Rijnsoever, 2017). Theoretical saturation is reached when all codes have been observed once in the sample. A code is a unique piece of information relevant to the research. The codes which were relevant to the research were;

i. Understanding and existence of partnerships and networks in cultural tourism.
ii. Perceived benefits arising from partnerships and networks in cultural tourism.
iii. Impediments to the form and functionality of partnerships and networks in cultural tourism.

Data collection continued until no new concepts emerged (Bryman, 2013). Saturation is considered to occur within 12 interviews as asserted by James *et al.*, (2006) in Sim *et al.*, (2018). The same authors also suggest 12 interviews as a useful benchmark for future studies.

Interviewees were selected by means of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is consistent with theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014). Purposive sampling was also used because of the impossibility of randomisation (Rijnsoever, 2013; Etikan *et al.*, 2015) coupled with limited resources in the form of time and workforce on the part of the researchers. The participants were deliberately chosen on the basis of qualities they possessed, that is, knowledge of GZNM, custodianship of the local culture and being part of the host community. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected through interviewing study participants.

Results and discussion

The study was undertaken to answer a trio of questions. These questions are; does the host community understand partnerships and networks and do partnerships and networks exist in cultural tourism? What does the host community perceive as benefits of partnerships and networks in cultural tourism? What are the impediments (perceived) to forming and functioning of partnerships and networks in cultural tourism? The results of the study are provided in themes that speak directly to the research questions that informed the study.

Do host communities understand partnerships and networks and do the same exist in cultural tourism?

Local residents understand the concept of partnerships and networks as it relates to cultural tourism and beyond. It was established that the host communities partnered and net-(worked) with various stakeholders though on an ad-hoc basis. The stakeholders mentioned as working with the host community include the government (local and central), tourists, entrepreneurs and Non-Governmental organisations. The partnerships fell short of local people's expectations in terms of positive outcomes in terms of impacting local communities.

The partnerships and networks exist spontaneously at the Great Zimbabwe National Monument (GZNM). Stakeholders are involved in loose coalitions that are not guided by clearly spelt out objectives and defined participants with clear motivations. The objectives of stakeholders who include the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), tourists, the government were divorced from the desire to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. The diversity of goals, according to the host community, rarely links up with the culture and tourism nexus. It is important to note as observed by Chiutsi and Saarinen (2017) that the host community's involvement in partnerships is based on its own motivations and ideas. The partnerships are not guided by that which is deemed as mutually good to and for all stakeholders. The local people pointed out that they found themselves being part of uncoordinated partnerships and networks in cultural tourism largely because of lack of opportunities in others sectors of the economy.

Benefits (perceived) of partnerships and networks in cultural tourism

The host community anticipate a lot of benefits from partnerships and networks in cultural tourism. There was consensus among the study participants that partnerships and networks

could result in meaningful development of local communities. Partnerships and networks in tourism create employment and investment opportunities for the local people. This is corroborated by Nunkoo (2015) who foresees increases in personal incomes and enhanced standards of living of local communities.

The level of idleness among the youth and other vulnerable members of the community are perceived to significantly go down because of partnerships and networks in tourism. The study participants could however not give any metrics to compare previous positions and current situations. The positive thinking about perceptions may well be largely because of the "something is better than nothing" mind set since an allusion to lack of alternative opportunities outside tourism had previously been advanced. Partnerships and networks ultimately reduce crime rates and other anti-social behavioural activities among members of the community.

Challenges of partnerships and networks in cultural tourism

Partnerships and networks in cultural tourism are negatively affected by the local people lack of trust in other stakeholders. The host community does not feel empowered to decide what is best for itself as custodians of the cultural products (Nunkoo, 2015). Their sentiments are echoed by Lenao and Saarinen (2015) who highlight that the success of tourism lies outside the control of the local people. In as much as host communities are enthused to participate in the tourism development agenda, their efforts are not reciprocated by the government and other institutional structures who should meaningfully engage them.

There was a general consensus that partnerships and networks may be difficult to implement largely because of other stakeholders' (government agents and entrepreneurs) commercialisation of the local people's culture. The local people are only 'needed' to take part by other stakeholders for 'primitivisation' of their culture to meet the assumed consumptive interests of western tourists. The host community's thinking was seen as dovetailing with Goffman's 1959 theory of cultural impersonation (Saarinen and Rogerson, 2015) which creates conflict according to Coser's theory (Yang *et al.*, 2013). There exist perceived and imagined (by the host community) fluctuating alliances between stakeholders because the cultural tourism agenda is driven by agents external to the indigenous community.

Conclusions

The study came up with a number of conclusions based on the stated research objectives and themes that came out of the interviews. The host community at Great Zimbabwe National Monument (GZNM) was aware of the existence of partnerships and networks. It was however apparent that the partnerships and networks fell short of the host community's expectations due to among other factors lack of trust. This resulted in host communities' level of participation remaining very low. The host communities derived benefits from partnerships and networks in cultural tourism which were mainly in the mould of employment creation coupled with reduction of levels of idleness among the youth and other vulnerable community members. The formation of partnerships and networks was mainly impeded by lack of trust, especially among local people. The major concern of the host community was that partnerships and networks were being championed by agents outside their localities, whose motives were not clearly defined.

Areas for further research

Partnerships and networks provide a possible chance for cultural tourism to be elevated to the same level as that of nature and wildlife tourism. It is proposed that further researches be undertaken to come up with a partnership and network model that gets embraced by all stakeholders in cultural tourism based on mutually beneficial outcomes.

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