# Prospects and Challenges of Positioning Harare as an Urban Township Tourism Destination

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## Abstract

Zimbabwe's tourism industry has been largely wildlife driven. However when considering the ever-changing tourist preferences and increased competition from the regional and global tourism suppliers, Zimbabwe needs to urgently diversify its tourism resource if it is to remain a competitive destination. It is against this background that this paper explores the potential for urban township tourism, as a unique and viable tourism offering for Zimbabwe, in order to augment the existing tourism products. Using a qualitative research methodology, data was collected using in-depth interviews and participant observation. Findings from this study indicate that townships in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city have a lot of potential attractions and festivals that can be harnessed for urban township tourism including buildings and places of historical significance, culture, markets, socialization areas, arts and crafts. The researchers concluded that with appropriate urban township tourism research, planning and robust product development and packaging, Zimbabwe's tourism industry can most likely be rejuvenated through township tourism particularly in the some of the popular suburbs *inter-alia* Mbare, Highfields, Epworth, Waterfalls and Warren Park.

**Keywords:** urban township tourism, tourism development, tourism potential, product diversification

## Introduction

Zimbabwe has for the past four decades relied on wildlife as its flagship tourist attraction. In 2000, the country embarked on a land reform exercise which was characterized by large scale dispossession of wildlife from commercial farms, ranches and wildlife conservancies. Consequently, international wildlife enthusiasts and tourist arrivals declined year after year (WTO, 2005; Chiutsi et al, 2011). Following a sustained threat on Zimbabwe's wildlife resources, it was observed that wildlife tourism will not be a viable niche market for Zimbabwe in the long term (Manwa, 2007). It is against this background that tourism product diversification was justified to cater for both the domestic and international markets. Mkono (2012) alluded that wildlife resources require careful management of carrying capacities to ensure long-term sustainability. Admittedly, wildlife tourism is no longer catering for the diversity of tourists, as there has been a dawn of new experiential tourism, which increasingly yearns for the integration

of tourists into lifestyles of the host communities visited. Furthermore, there were also concerns of sustainability of what are fragile ecosystems in the post land-reform era in Zimbabwe. Considering this, there is therefore a need to explore other forms of tourism, and this paper focuses on urban township tourism as a way of complementing Zimbabwe's existing tourism products. Notably, the latest tourism trends indicate that tourists are more likely to visit those destinations where they get to experience the authentic local culture (Chugh, 2018)

Urban tourism has been in existence for centuries and millennia, although it has only recently been acknowledged as a form of tourism (Grant & Scott, 1996). Proponents of township tourism argue that it affords tourists, especially those from developed countries, an opportunity to get a "feel" of life in the townships and authentic experience. It has been argued authenticity is the most sought-after attribute in the "new tourist dispensation" (Novelli, 2011). In most developing countries, including Zimbabwe, township tourism has been justified for its potential to create opportunities for women and youth from the so-called ghettos. In Africa, township tourism dates to the 1980s in South Africa where black residents organized tours to educate the whites in local governments on how the black population lived. Soweto Township is by far the biggest draw-card for township tourism given its significance in the country's fight against apartheid and township tourism has since spread to cities such as Cape Town and Durban and major successes have been recorded there. The Zimbabwean government, through the National Tourism Policy (2012), could replicate South Africa's highly successful township tourism concept. In fulfilling the study objectives, the study addressed the following questions; to what extent does Zimbabwe have the potential for urban township tourism development? The specific objectives of the study are; to explore opportunities that can be harnessed for urban township tourism development in Harare, Zimbabwe, to identify challenges to development of urban township tourism in Harare and also to explore strategies that can be adopted in developing urban township tourism in Harare.

**Literature review**

**Urban township tourism**

Township tourism can be understood as a form of creative tourism, which brings out the uniqueness of destinations by focusing on a host culture and the creativity of the township communities. Notable is that, the most important stakeholders in township tourism are the local people, as the whole concept of creative tourism revolves around them (Chugh, 2018). Township lifestyles and culture has been observed to have great potential because of its ability to provide an engaging experience to the visitors. Furthermore, it has been the most preferred for the connectedness it provides to both the hosts and the guests (Hall, 2007). Edwards, Griffin and Hayllar (2007) define urban tourism as tourism that takes place in urban areas while Rolfes, Steinbrink and Uhl (2009) indicate that the essential part of this tourism is a visit to the most disadvantaged parts of these cities. Gilbert & Clark (1997) posit that tourist activities in a city are wholly-integrated into other urban behavioral, functional and physical patterns, therefore, there is need to disentangle urban tourism from other urban functions.

Many authors acknowledge that township tourism is an example of special interest heritage tourism and is associated with educational and cultural tourism, justice tourism, local development, pro-poor tourism and dark tourism (see Novelli, 2011; Pirie, 2007). Booyens (2010) argues that township tourism products are mainly cultural and heritage attractions, traditional cuisine, historical insights and local arts and craft while Pirie (2007:237) says a township tour is: '*a spatially visible expression of pro-poor tourism and has become a signature of tourism sensitivity, solidarity and social conscience*'.

Nemasetoni and Rogerson (2007) noted that township tours mostly involve taking visitors to areas of poverty to see how people live and cope with daily struggles associated with historical injustices such as the apartheid system in South Africa. According to Ramchander (2004), the significance of urban townships in South Africa is their connection to apartheid social segregation, which makes them different from other deprived and slum areas of the world. Therefore, Nemasetoni and Rogerson (2007) and Ramchander's (2004) explanations for township tourism are valid only in the South African context since not all countries experienced apartheid. However, each community has its own unique historical struggles, which form part of its heritage. A good example is the rich heritage of Zimbabwe's township life which reflect the colonial footprint and its indelible marks of the revolutionary struggles amongst the locals.

Therefore, it can be noted that urban township tourism is broad in nature, and it is a subset of urban tourism with special emphasis on visiting townships depicting the history, heritage, culture, livelihoods of the people that is of touristic value. In this paper, township tourism refers to tourism in urban areas, visiting places which depict poverty, offering cultural and heritage attractions. Township tourism can be equated with experiential tourism (Smith, 2006).

### Urban township tourism potential

Law (2002) asserts that tourism in urban areas is mostly based on socio-cultural facilities, services and cultural resources. Notably, Butler (2010) opines that townships have a reservoir of resources and skills which can be used to promote tourism development. Ramothato (2000) opines that tourists visiting townships and traveling in a bus do not only want to sight see the township but also want to experience the vibes and taste the African cuisine prepared in local eateries. Reutsche (2006) analyzed the relation between tourism and urban areas and noted that visitors to cities are attracted by primary elements, secondary and additional elements where primary elements represent the main reasons that attract tourists such as cultural facilities, secondary elements such as catering facilities and examples for additional elements are accessibility. Therefore, this study sought to establish whether Harare has resources, skills, socio-cultural facilities, services and cultural resources that can be harnessed for sustainable urban township tourism.

### Potential benefits and challenges of township tours

Ramchander (2004) comments that township tourism can enhance the local economy of marginalized areas and tourists can gain an insight of one another's places and pasts. Wheat (1994) argues that the authentic experience searched by tourists can have adverse impacts on the local environment and may therefore not be sustainable while Ashworth (2004) regards the development of township tourism as the exploitation of heritage and the suffering of others for the pleasure and entertainment of visitors. Ramchander (2004) notes that there is commodification of culture in township tourism and tourists are regularly taken on pseudo-trips that do not reflect past or present realities. Thus, there is a constant struggle between market viability and authentic representations of local cultures and it is observed that locals are watched and photographed like animals in a zoo by visitors passing in coach buses. Pirie (2007) highlighted that tourists are often taken to township areas on superficial journeys and in most cases, there is very limited interaction between them and the local residents. Makatile (2000) asserts that townships are also associated with crime and security is perceived low and tourism development can be jeopardized and not sustainable in areas where crime is rife. Williams (2009) further noted that in the absence of effective planning, there are evident risks that any

tourism development will become unregulated, formless or haphazard thereby leading to unsustainable economic, social and environmental impacts.

**Sustainable Tourism development**

Butler (2010) notes that community participation and capacity building are central to any approach that seeks to spread the economic benefits of tourism projects. Marien and Pizam (1997) maintain that sustainable tourism cannot be successfully implemented without the direct support and involvement of communities affected by it. Milne (1998) however, warns that local participation is often expensive to run and may cause the locals to have great expectations which could be more than the real outcomes of a project. Empowering and enabling people, is the key element to development rather than directing and controlling people and perpetuating dependence on hand outs, Erskine (1996). Sweeney and Wanhill (1996) posit that increased awareness and understanding of tourism within the community for behavior and attitude change of local communities towards tourists is important, rather than treating sustainability as the optimal tradeoff between economic development and the environment. Therefore, there is need to clarify on locals participation in tourism development.

Booyens (2010) believes township tourism is not necessarily a viable and responsible tourism development option unless various tourism stakeholders make concerted efforts. For instance, the government has an obligation of establishing adequate infrastructure to create an enabling environment for tourism development and developing a regulatory framework within which the industry should be developed and operated, (Collins and Snel (2008). The local government could help communities maintain some control over tourism development in their area (Spenceley, 2008). Therefore, the government plays a vital role with regards to tourism development through infrastructure development and policy. Mbaiwa et al (2007) queries among other things whether there any prospects for sustainable urban tourism in developing countries. Therefore, this research sought to establish the potential for urban township tourism development in Harare, as to date there are no studies that have empirically addressed how township tourism can be developed sustainably in the cities and towns of Zimbabwe.

**Methodology**

This exploratory study was conducted in urban Harare. Harare was chosen since it is the capital city of Zimbabwe with lot to offer in terms architecture, history of the country and cultural diversity. Primary and secondary data was used in this study. Primary data was collected using face to face in-depth interviews and direct observation. Secondary data used included published and unpublished documents and existing literature on the history of Harare, existing and potential attractions, facilities and services.

According to a Central Statistical Office (2012), the population for Harare is 2 123 132.The sample for this study comprised of key stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry and purposive sampling was done to choose key organizations which include the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), Harare City Council, Zimbabwe Council for Tourism (ZCT), National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), Combined Harare Residence Association (CHRA),  college and university tourism and hospitality lectures and tour operators. The researchers also specifically targeted the heads of research and development for organizations included.

The researchers sent a request to conduct research and those organizations and individuals who showed interest to participate in the research were interviewed. A total of eight in depth face to face interviews were conducted with key informants. Appointments for interviews were done and interviewees were given the interview guide to familiarize themselves with the questions and look for support documents where applicable. Interviewees were given a brief explanation of the study at the beginning of the interview and responses were noted as the interview progressed. Each interview lasted between 20 to 30 minutes as in-depth information was required. Observation was informed by responses from interviews conducted. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze data obtained from the interviews.

## Results

### Understanding of urban township tourism

Respondents were asked to explain their understanding of urban township tourism and some of the responses include:

> '..tourism in urban townships ; a form of tourism in residential areas in towns which involves the marketing of the local residents' lifestyle and culture, sampling of cultural products of urban townships; tourists visiting urban cities for entertainment and recreation; visiting urban areas on tours for the purposes business, leisure and other reasons; movement of people from their usual area of residence to townships in search of leisure, rest and any other tourism related activity and there is no remuneration at places visited.'

These results indicate diverse opinions with regards to urban township tourism. The absence of a universal definition for township tourism makes it difficult for one to clearly explain township tourism. It can however be noted that due to the diverse needs and expectations of tourists, there is need for diverse attractions that are appealing in townships to satisfy the different needs and expectations of tourists.

### Perceptions of what constitutes an urban township tourism product

Respondents were probed on what they reflect on as constituting urban township tourism and the main aspects noted were that the township tourism product should have something to do with culture and heritage of the nation. These results concur with Booysen (2010)'s assertion that township tourism products are mainly cultural and heritage attractions, traditional cuisine, historical insights and local arts and craft. Respondents noted that the history, politics of a nation should constitute the urban township tourism product. These include physical attractions and architecture of buildings especially those of historical significance that can entice tourists such as halls and stadiums where meetings were convened during the liberation struggle. Examples of townships which have buildings of historical significance noted are Mbare and Highfields which are the first black townships to be established in Harare, Zimbabwe. Mbare and Highfields townships have socialization areas and stadiums that were instrumental in the execution of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. A township, Warren Park, was also given as an example of what should constitute township tourism because of the presence of the National Heroes Acre where Zimbabwe's fallen heroes are laid to rest. Respondents indicated that cultural products such as traditional foods, entertainment, for example traditional dances, arts and crafts are important in township tours. Sporting and recreational facilities, sightseeing of the townships and religious (African traditional religion, Christianity) were also noted as what constitutes township tourism.

**Potential tourist attractions in Harare townships**

Potential attractions for township tourism were established based on what respondents viewed as what constitutes urban township tourism. From the in-depth interviews conducted, the majority of the respondents, approximately 88%, indicated that there is great potential for urban township tourism development in Harare. Respondents noted that Harare has townships that can offer attractions and services of touristic value which include places of political and historical significance, culture, vibrant socialization and eating out places. Interviews with ZTA have shown that ZTA has realized potential in this area hence the launch of township tourism in October 2012 in Highfields. The following townships were noted as offering important attractions of touristic appeal: Mbare, Highfields, Epworth, Warren Park and Waterfalls. These townships have socio-cultural facilities and services that can attract tourists in large numbers and this concurs with Law (2002)'s assertions that tourism in urban areas is mostly based on socio-cultural facilities and services. Each of the mentioned townships are further discussed in terms of the products and services that they offer according to information obtained from the study conducted.

Respondents indicated that Mbare is a potential tourist attraction because of its link to the history of the nation, buildings, socialiasation areas such as stadiums and vibrant markets. One respondent noted that, "urban township tourism in Harare, Zimbabwe would be incomplete without the inclusion of Mbare since Mbare is one of the black townships that were established for black settlement in Harare." It was noted that Matapi flats and Mbare hostels, which were built in the 1940s, were built to accommodate local male workers, however, nowadays, families reside in the flats. The researchers had an opportunity to visit the flats which are characterized by burst sewer systems, strong stench from uncollected refuse, poor sanitation and congestion depicting acute poverty by residents. Thus, taking tourists to such a place would be instrumental since they can see these areas of poverty and have an experience of how some people in this township live, (Nemasetoni and Rogerson, 2007).

Respondents also indicated that Mbare has attractions for urban township tourism in form of vibrant markets. It was noted that Mbare has the largest fruit and vegetable market where farmers deliver their fresh crops every morning. There is also a flea market, Mupedzanhamo, a Shona word loosely meaning 'the finisher of quandaries" or "end your woes", a market for cheap second-hand clothes where vendors sell anything from skirts and shirts to used underwear. Mupedzanhamo is a street boutique, colloquially known as *kotama boutique (i.e. bend down boutique.)*, since one must bend down when shopping and the place is a hive of activity with many buyers and sellers. Respondents also mentioned that there is Magaba, loosely translated mean *metal tins*, which is a market place for affordable metal work and other craftsmanship such as cooking pots, cups, bathing basins, carpentry work and even coffins. Therefore, Magaba would entice tourists by the products that are sold by the entrepreneurs in Mbare. Mbare also has the curio market, which is the Mbare's most famous attraction, the largest market for traditional artwork, including soapstone sculpture and mbira instruments.

It has been established that Harare has great potential for urban township tourism because of the presence of socialization areas in many townships. Examples of townships with stadiums that are potential for urban township tourism are Mbare and Highfields. It was noted that Bob Marley had a musical show at Rufaro stadium when Zimbabwe got its independence in 1980 and Zimbabwe's topflight matches are also hosted at Rufaro. Stodart hall is Mbare's biggest community hall and is used for film shows and as a place of last vigil for deceased national heroes. Respondents also noted the presence of Mai Musodzi Hall, one of Harare's oldest theatre centre, named after one of the pioneer women who spent most of her time educating

other women. Findings from the in depth interviews demonstrated that Highfields has Gwanzura stadium which hosts premiership soccer matches and the Zimbabwe Hall which is a centre for public and private functions which can entice tourists. Highfields also has Mushandirapamwe hotel where freedom fighters held several of their meetings as they planned the execution of the liberation struggle as well as Cyril Jennings Hall for its historic underground mobilization exercises for the armed struggle.

Other socialization areas that are a potential for township tourism which were mentioned include kwaMereki, Warren Park and kwaZindoga in Waterfalls which are eating out places, popular for braai. Thus, tourists can have an opportunity of consuming food and beverages that are consumed by locals at these socialization areas. Respondents noted that many churches have mushroomed in the townships from traditional to Pentecostal, n'angas (witchdoctors) of African Traditional Religion, nyau (zvigure) dances from Malawi origins are found in abundance in these old townships.

Respondents also noted that Highfields, the second oldest high-density suburb in Harare which was established during the colonial era, has potential attractions for urban township tourism. One respondent said, "…*Highfields possesses all the ingredients needed for urban township tourism, from iconic landmarks with historical significance and houses that were the bedrock of the country's struggle for independence*…" It has been noted that many nationalists have houses in Highfields, amongst them is house number 447, New Canaan, a house with bullet-riddled walls in Old Highfields, which is the former official residence of R.G Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe. The house bears the marks of a foiled assassination attempt on the leader of the liberation struggle. Interviews with officials from NMMZ and ZTA highlighted that their organizations have a partnership to ensure that these houses of historical significance are upgraded and that township tours should incorporate the houses. Respondents noted that the 'star rally' campaign for the first democratic elections in Rhodesia was held at the Zimbabwe grounds in Highfield and in November 2007, the "Million Man March" was also held there. Zimbabwe grounds has leisure facilities including swimming bath, open to the public, tennis and basketball courts.

Respondents also mentioned the presence of other attractions which are ideal for urban township tourism in Harare, which include and attraction in Warren Park, the National Heroes Acre, where the nation's fallen heroes are laid to rest and Epworth and the new settlements which depicts slum dwellings and the art gallery and the national museum. Although the majority of the respondents showed that they are enthusiastic about tourism in Harare's townships, some echoed sentiments that something extremely beautiful should be built in the townships to attract tourists. They felt that what the townships already have is not fascinating enough and that there is no culture that is unique of people found in Harare, Zimbabwe.

**Challenges with development of urban township tourism in Harare, Zimbabwe**

Respondents noted several challenges with urban township tourism development in Harare Zimbabwe. Firstly, it was noted with concern that urban township tourism has not been integrated in the national planning agenda hence the idea may simply remain a wish. There are no appropriate community structures which can facilitate community involvement in tourism development initiatives and this concur with Butler (2010) that community participation is central to tourism ventures.

Respondents indicated that, generally, the infrastructure in Harare, especially in the old townships is very bad. Townships generally have an underdeveloped transport system; the townships are difficult to access due to poor roads characterized by potholes and traffic congestion. It has also been noted that there are challenges with supply, with one of the respondents referring to Zimbabwe electricity supply authority (ZESA) as "Zimbabwe Electricity Sometimes Available" since some residential areas are going for days without electricity which affects night life in townships.

Accommodation in these old townships is heavily congested and respondents felt that bringing tourists to the area would result in the exhaustion of the existing facilities. This concurs with results found by Mbaiwa et al. (2007) in a study for problems and prospects for the development of urban tourism in Gaborone and Maun, Botswana, in which it was noted that developing countries, have problems of poor roads, an underdeveloped transport system, traffic congestion and a lack of social services to attract tourists. Respondents also indicated that city council and interested parties such as Environmental Management Authority (EMA) may challenge township tourism development and may order demolition of potential attractions such as Mbare flats since the flats have already been condemned, and labelled as being no longer suitable for human habitation and are merely a health hazard. Respondents also cited an example where a popular socialization area, kwaMereki, Warren Park was closed in the past due to health scares. Respondents showed concern over the destruction of some landmarks such as buildings and places of historical significance, for instance, there have been calls for the reshaping of the Africa Unity Square from its current shape which depicts the Union Jack. Future generations would not have tangible evidence of what length the former colonizers had gone to in their bid to define Zimbabwe as theirs. Consequently, aspects of historical significance will be distracted and nothing to show in future.

Furthermore, respondents noted that crime is high, and security is low in Harare's townships. For instance, in Mbare, there are lots of criminal activities and drug abuse. One respondent had this to comment, '...*crime is rife in Mbare flats such that one can sell you a pot with hot porridge, just stolen from the stove.*' and this shows the extent of crime. Respondents added that Mbare has a market by the name Siyaso, literally meaning "leave it like that", where one can buy anything imaginable and most gadgets sold there are believed to be stolen. Therefore, if tourists are to visit the areas, they would be easy prey for the unsuspecting visitors. These findings concur with Makatile (2000)'s assertion that townships are associated with crime and are perceived as places where security is low. In addition, some of the key stakeholders indicated that urban township tourism is a relatively new phenomenon in Harare, therefore there can be challenges with regards to lack of knowledge on what is involved and experienced to effectively package the tours. Some respondents believed urban township tourism is a politically motivated initiative an example which was given, was that individuals who are buried at the National Heroes Acre are mainly those who are loyal to the ruling party, ZANU (PF), hence, including these for township tours would not be sustainable in future. Therefore, there could be lack of commitment by some politicians to participate since they feel that there is no gain for them from urban township tourism. Respondents also noted that there is generally little support with regards to developmental projects in the country due to financial constraints among other reasons and most projects die prematurely and history may repeat itself for urban township tourism development.

**Strategies to develop a vibrant urban township tourism product**

The following strategies were noted as ways of ensuring development of a vibrant township tourism product.

- There is need for thorough research on urban township tourism development and learning from countries such as South Africa where meaningful profits have been realized from tours. Tour operators should come up with exciting tour packages that can entice people to come to the townships, the itinerary should be able to link urban townships with other attractions in and around Harare.
- Zimbabwe should be guided by its national tourism policy in its developmental efforts at the same time   adhering to legal requirements to develop urban township tourism.
- There is need for robust stakeholder engagement. Key stakeholders should be educated on urban township tourism, its importance to the economy to ensure meaningful participation at all levels.  This concurs with Marien and Pizam (1997) that sustainable tourism cannot be successfully implemented without the direct support and involvement of communities affected by it.
- Funding should be availed for various projects including rehabilitation of road networks linking the townships. The infrastructure in Harare generally requires upgrading such as renovation of buildings, revolution of social services including improvement in water and electricity supply, construction of more appealing and attractive attractions such as museums and cultural villages, recreational and sporting facilities.
- There is need for adequate safety and security in urban townships to ensure successful urban township tourism development.

**Conclusions**

There is great prospects for urban township tourism in Harare, Zimbabwe.  Potential attractions of touristic value that can be harnessed for urban township tourism development in Harare include townships such as Mbare, Epworth, Highfields, Warren Park and Waterfalls. These range from the buildings depicting the political struggle and developmental history of the nation, various stadiums, exhibition of arts and culture, markets and vibrant eating out places. Other attractions include the National Heroes Acre in Warren Park, the museum and art gallery. Key stakeholders view Harare residential areas as potential township tourism destinations but there is need for stakeholders' buy-in which include the government, the private sector (including tour operators) and local communities. There is need for concerted effort from various stakeholders for township tourism to be a success. Rampant crime, heavily congested infrastructure, erratic supply of water and electricity, the possibility of some of the potential attractions being demolished or closed and a lack of a framework for sustainable urban township tourism pose a series of critical challenges for tourism development. There is thus need for improvements in infrastructure, amenities and safety and suitable security measures should be put in place. Tourism players should be innovative in creating township tours that provide unique visitor experiences for urban township tourism to be a success in Harare, Zimbabwe.

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