



# The involvement, perceptions and challenges of the community in rural tourism development: A case of the Isithumba Village in eThekweni

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## Abstract

Rural tourism is an important means for the development of rural areas in the world. In South Africa, tourism was earmarked as being a potential economic pillar for the development of rural areas. Accordingly, the eThekweni Municipality initiated the Durban Green Corridor (DGC), which is a non-governmental organisation with the aim of reducing unemployment and poverty using rural tourism. However, in order to use the full potential of tourism in these areas, the full involvement and unique nature of the culture of the community need to be considered. This study was conducted to investigate the involvement, perceptions and challenges of the community in the rural tourism development of Isithumba Village in eThekweni. A quantitative research method, using a questionnaire, was used to collect data. A sample size of 183 households was drawn from the 349 households living in the Isithumba Valley, comprising officials, youths, and residents in the different households. The findings of the study showed that the community residents were unaware of the DGC project and its objectives, emanating from the lack of communication. The residents were very supportive of the project and its potential for employment. However, the lack of communication to create awareness about the project and its value creation to the community have created a negative perception among most community members. It is recommended that the DGC authorities raise awareness of the local residents by sharing success stories so that the people can see the outcomes and try to communicate their vision and mission

**Keywords:** community participation, community development, rural tourism, tourism, unemployment



**Image 1.** Isithumba Adventures Centre (Author's own)



## Introduction

Durban Green Corridor (DGC), an initiative of the eThekweni Municipality, is a non-governmental organisation with the aim of reducing unemployment and poverty in rural areas (DGC 2016). The aim of the project is to create employment for people living in the Inanda, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu areas and along the Umgeni River Valley. Isithumba is a village under tribal authority, where most people speak isiZulu, and it is located 35 km from the city of Durban, just off the N3 highway. The site is ideal for exploring the Valley of a Thousand Hills. Activities in Isithumba include horse riding, mountain biking, and some of the most authentic Zulu cultural experiences in South Africa (DGC, 2016). According to Ntuli (2010), most people in Isithumba Village are unemployed and have a very poor standard of living. The villagers are mostly dependent on social grants as most of them are unemployed due to their low level of education and lack of skills (Ntuli, 2010). According to the Global Poverty Research Group report, rural unemployment in South Africa rose from 44% in 2009 to over 52% in 2012 and the rural unemployment rate is higher than urban rates, which are currently 27.9 % (GPRG, 2016). In light of the above, the eThekweni Municipality identified tourism as a potential job creator in the Valley of a Thousand Hills.

Tourism, specifically rural tourism, has a positive impact on the economy of the rural sector (Chambers, 2014). Kim and Jamal (2015) assert that rural tourism is accepted throughout the world as a means for sustainable rural development. With rural communities currently facing pressing issues such as unemployment and poverty, governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have focused more on rural tourism (Ertuna & Kirbas, 2012). According to Ezeuduji (2017), rural tourism occurs when tourists visit a particularly rural area to experience and explore the culture or rural landscapes and to participate in the lifestyle and customs of the people. Rural tourism takes place within the rural village (Ghaderi & Henderson, 2012). Furthermore, the local community is referred to as people living together in a certain area and sharing activities (Akkawi, 2010). Everything happening in the business of tourism affects the local people environmentally, socially and economically in a positive and negative ways (Sook, May, Songan & Nair, 2014).

This article focuses on exploring the involvement, perceptions, and challenges of the local community in rural tourism development in Isithumba Village, in the Valley of a Thousand Hills. In this regard, first, the article tries to find out the involvement of the community in the running of the project. Second, it aims to ascertain the perception of the community toward rural tourism projects. Finally, it investigates the challenges of the community with respect to the project.

## Literature review

Tourism is important due to the many different roles it has to play in different countries. This includes the impact it has economically, socially and culturally (Shariff & Abidin, 2013). However, Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen and Duangsaeng (2014) suggest that an alternative to mass tourism is community-based tourism, which provides greater empowerment and economic benefit to individuals in local communities and can become a poverty alleviation mechanism.

Communities are increasingly choosing rural tourism as their tool for increasing their economy and sustaining their livelihoods (Ezeuduji, 2017). According to Ezeuduji (2017), the aim of rural tourism development is to improve the lives of the people in communities through their participation in a variety of tourism offerings such as creation of employment, expanded of the economic base, building of infrastructures, up keeping of the local culture and conservation of resources. Furthermore, local participation in the planning, maintenance, and implementation



of the process of rural tourism development is essential – as the outcomes directly affect local residents (Ezeuduji, 2017).

The World Travel and Tourism Council's (WTTC) 2019 research reveals that the tourism sector “accounted for 10.4% of global GDP and 319 million jobs, or 10% of total employment in 2018 and domestic tourism, which represented 71.2% of all tourism spending in 2018 and had the strongest growth in developing nations, continues to support opportunities by spreading development and regional economic benefits and building national pride(WTTC, 2019). In South Africa, tourism contributed R136,1 billion – about 2.9% of the total gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 (DoT, 2018). According to the afore-mentioned, tourism, it directly and indirectly, supported about 1,5 million jobs in 2017, 9.5% of total employment, and there is potential to grow employment in the sector to 2,1 million jobs by 2028. For the SADC and sub-Saharan Africa, tourism still accounts for approximately 3.12% of GDP. According to Lehloeny (2017), this figure is small compared to the amounts the sector contributes to the economies of other regions. A total of 25 million international tourists visited the SADC region in 2015, and it is projected that this number will increase to 38.6 million in 2025. The tourism sector was also directly responsible for two million jobs and a further 5.2 million indirect jobs in the region in 2013. The overall contribution to the SADC GDP was US\$58.2 billion in 2014. The SADC’s share of tourists visiting Africa was above 47% in 2016, and within that South Africa accounted for 59% of visitors (Lehloeny, 2017:86). In the next section, the concept of rural tourism, its historical development, the theory base of the study, community-based tourism and the perception of the community towards local tourism, are discussed.

### **Concept of Rural Tourism**

There is much debate about rural tourism, as many definitions have emerged in past years (McComb, Boyd & Boluk, 2017). Before 1970, rural tourism focused on a few types of tourism like agritourism (Salazar, 2012). Today, however, there are many activities and different types of businesses in rural areas (Lo, Songan, Mohamad & Yeo, 2013). However, the main elements of rural tourism are still the same and always involve community residents and natural resources in the tourism sector (Hernández-Maestro & González-Benito, 2014). Eruera (2008) states that rural tourism includes several activities like attraction sites, services, transport, and market systems. Moreover, places where rural tourism occurs, are very small relative to urban areas, and the benefits are unequal (Gunn, 1988). Lack of infrastructure, skills and awareness are the factors hindering rural tourism development (Hall & Boyd, 2005; Lekaota, 2015). Governments have been taking tourism more seriously in order to develop the countryside; however, rural people are still not benefiting. Ghasemi and Hamzah (2014) and Rogerson (2014) reviewed core rural tourism benefits. The benefits according to them are the provision of job opportunities; improvement of societal, culture and education standards; the availability of marketing tools; improvement of local services; enhancement of income for the community; and stimulation of local economic growth.

### **Historical development of Rural Tourism**

The Industrial Revolution altered the global travel industry with the advent of cruise ships, passenger trains, airplanes and motor cars (Eruera, 2008). However, its impact on poverty alleviation and the improvement of the livelihood of the people has not been adequately studied (Eruera, 2008). Leisure time was further increased by new developments in the labour laws in Europe, with the idea that everyone who works should have a paid holiday, which increased opportunities for travel. People began to take holidays on farms and stayed in expensive accommodation (Hall & Boyd, 2005).

After the Second World War, there was dramatic growth in rural tourism as a popular enterprise (Cole & Razak, 2009). This growth was driven by transportation facilities improving to such an extent that remoteness, in time and cost, ceased to be a barrier for rural areas, and as a result, rural tourism development projects could be carried out in remote rural areas.



Other factors that can be linked to rural tourism development were higher incomes, smaller family sizes, changing demographics, lower transportation costs, improved standards of living, the peace and tranquillity of rural areas, an interest in healthy lifestyles, a growing interest in heritage, development of infrastructure, more hospitable environments for tourists, and increased leisure time (Cole & Razak, 2009:335).

In the 1960s and 1970s, rural tourism was further aided by the rising standards of living and increased ownership of motor vehicles. This improved accessibility to tourism services, with tourism being mainly demanded by the middle and upper classes in the United Kingdom (Eruera, 2008). According to Horáková (2010:62), “nature became a tourist product and rural tourism began to dominate the land uses and appearance of many rural settings”. For the afore-mentioned, “rural tourism has directly created employment and contributed to economic growth from the beginning”. In addition, several seasonal travellers were also attracted to all countries in the world to see different agricultural sceneries (Horáková, 2010).

During the 1970s, tourism research relating to rural areas was not referred to as tourism specifically, but was referred to as leisure or recreation (McComb et al., 2017). Since the 1990s, however, rural tourism has been recognised as a subject area and has received increased attention corresponding with increased development of tourism as a means of rural development among policy-makers (Randelli, Romei & Tortora, 2014:287).

According to Saule (2004), rural tourism came with the advantage of flexible adaptability for shorter or longer breaks. Changes in the attitudes of tourists also contributed to the development of quality-based rural tourism. Since the 1970s there has been a growing interest in an alternative to mass tourism (Redman, 2009). The rise of rural tourism as an alternative tourism happened for several reasons. These included a concern about the environment, the failure of mass tourism to benefit local communities positively, and a shift of interest from overseas tourists taking photographs and watching flora and fauna to tourism as a learning experience (Saule, 2004).

### **Community-Based Tourism**

The involvement of local people in the development of rural tourism is an important part of achieving sustainable tourism. According to Ezeudji (2015), putting the ownership of rural tourism in the hands of local residents and letting them communicate among themselves about how they have benefited rural tourism, can be a good motivation and can create collaboration in rural tourism development. Bello, Lovelock and Carr (2018), in a study conducted in Malawi, showed that the use of appropriate community participation methods during planning processes is good for successful local participation. Public awareness, education and training influence the involvement of local residents in tourism activity (Bello et al., 2018). Literature avows that tourism stakeholders in urban and rural communities are significant, however the latter can certainly play a key role in sustaining tourism development in the context of National Economic Development (Nicolaidis, 2015).

Sharing benefits among local people could become a good motivation for them to participate in rural tourism development (Bello et al., 2018). “The amount of jobs offered to locals through tourism should outweigh those offered to outsiders and the quality of employment should be good in terms of remunerations and service conditions. If there is a desire to get the most out of rural tourism marketing efforts there must be solid collaboration with relevant tour companies, the local community, regional tourism departments and cultural and heritage sectors” (Nicolaidis, 2020:9). Furthermore, ensuring that every leader in the community understands rural tourism development is important, because leaders can easily speak to their people. They can share their knowledge about rural tourism in their communities and encourage other people to take part in making a change in their areas (Ezeudji, 2017). Kavita and Saarinen (2016) argue that ethnic groups and local residents are visibly used in the promotion of tourism, but that their role is marginalised. Therefore there is a need to





mobilise village committees, community elites, local villagers, and foreign investors in the planning and implementation, in order for rural tourism to be successful and beneficial to everyone (Zhang & Canhua, 2016).

Bello (2015) states that “lack of capacity in tourism and tourism planning for both local communities and the protected area management agencies is also identified as a problem affecting the participation of local people in rural tourism development”. According to Saufi, O'Brien and Wilkins (2014) and Bello (2015), challenges associated with community involvement include “lack of information, lack of trained human resources in tourism planning, unfair distribution of benefits, lack of coordination, a low level of education, and inadequate financial resources”. In this regard, Bello et al. (2018:63) stated that “the continued advocacy for community participation in such settings needs to incorporate clear strategies that can facilitate public participation and tourism should be promoted as a tool for local development and conservation by involving the community” (Bello et al., 2018).

Furthermore, for successful local community participation, local residents need to be given a chance to choose their representatives from the planning stage and all groups of the community need to be represented (Armenski, Dragičević, Pejović, Lukić & Djurdjev, 2011). Bello et al. (2018) state that local participation can be attained when local people get empowerment – psychologically, politically and economically. This kind of empowerment allows community residents to be involved in making decisions about the development of tourism and conservation in their societies.

Ertuna and Kirbas (2012) mention that rural tourism can harm the environment and can have an adverse impact on local communities unless it is planned and managed carefully. Furthermore, the residents' attitudes toward rural tourism and tourists can be bad for its development. Lo et al., (2013) state that when visitors have had a good experience in a community, they leave satisfied and are more likely to revisit the same place, which is very good for sustainable tourism.

According to Bello et al., (2018:64), for the full involvement of the community in tourism planning the six strategies that can be used are “public awareness and education; capacity building; use of appropriate participation methods; use of appropriate local community organisations; decentralisation of public administration; and coordination of local organisations”.

### **Decentralisation and Coordination of Local Organisations**

In the development of tourism plans, the public sector from local to national level plays a major role (Bello et al., 2018). In order to implement the locals' involvement in tourism, it is essential to decentralise the power (administrative, political, financial) of the central government to local government (Tosun, 2006). The use of Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) by the tourism planning authority need to be encouraged to facilitate community involvement in local tourism planning. As per Wells (1996:24), “local organisations which have been accepted by community residents play a big role in facilitating collaboration between local communities and planning authorities”.

### **Inclusive Local Tourism Development in South Africa**

Inclusion of local tourism development is one of the main goals of the UN Sustainable Development plan. Butler and Rogerson (2016:285) stressed that “tourism development can be inclusive and assist towards poverty reduction only if a broad array of stakeholders contribute to the creation of opportunities as well as share the potential benefits from tourism”. According to Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018), inclusive tourism is a term which emphasises the importance of including those people regarded as having less power or being marginalised in tourism production and sharing tourism benefits. The South African tourism industry in spite of its contribution to the GDP and creation of employment, enough attention was not given to



the sector (Hanekom, 2015a). To this effect, a Tourism Minister of South Africa said: “tourism is not only about the activity of tourism, rather it is about inclusive economic growth and the better life that it creates for those most in need” (Hanekom, 2015b:11).

However, to achieve inclusive local tourism development in South Africa, local governments are expected to play a major role in participating in the local economic development (LED) (Makgamatha, 2015; Rogerson, 2013).

### **Benefits of Community Involvement in Tourism Planning**

Community tourism planning advocates that the community approach to tourism development is needed to promote sustainability (Bello et al., 2018:2). This emphasises the idea that when people are gaining from participating in tourism-related activities, they are more likely to assist in the preservation of the cultural heritage and the provision of caring for tourists in the local area (Bello et al., 2016). Bello et al. (2018:2) further state that “when local communities are involved in the tourism planning process, they have a sense of ownership of the development plans and they provide the necessary support to tourism development-related activities thereby increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the plans”. Furthermore, it is difficult for different stakeholders involved in the planning process to argue, since the viewpoints are shared with everyone (Hardy, Beeton & Pearson, 2002; Jones, 2007; Reid, Mair & George, 2004).

Having knowledge about certain things like the traditional culture, the psychological attitudes and indigenous resources in the area is crucial when it comes to the planning processes, as it enables meaningful participation in decision-making (Bello et al., 2018). This gives local residents a chance to decide what will work for them based on the information about their area. Here it easy to make decisions that almost everyone in the community agrees with.

### **Perception of the community**

Before 1970, very few researchers were writing about the views of the people when it came to the development of tourism. However, after this period and until today, researchers have focused much attention on the good and bad effects of tourism in a community (Getz 1994).

Analysing the perceptions of the community with regard to the impact of tourism is important as it is strongly related to the community willing to support tourism development (Bestard & Nadal, 2007; Huh & Vogt, 2008). People view tourism as having good economic benefits that outweigh the negative impacts. Hence, for residents to perceive tourist activity in a positive way, they have to be involved in the process (Bestard & Nadal, 2007; McGehee & Andereck, 2004).

Ko and Stewart (2002:46), after doing research in the undeveloped Jeju Islands of Korea, stated that “locals attitudes toward tourism are directly associated with the stage of development of the host community”. Lepp (2007:24) indicated that “in Uganda, the local community has a positive attitude toward tourism because it is considered to be a factor of development generating incomes, so increasing agricultural production and good fortune”. According to a study conducted in North Carolina, the reasons that the community uses to support tourism activity is related to their personal interest. Furthermore, according to the same study, “the female population positively perceives the cultural dimension represented by the development of arts, craft and household items, while youngsters perceive improvements in social life and recreation facilities” (Wang & Pfister, 2008). The support for sustainable tourism and the community involvement in tourism activity is highly influenced by the perception of the community on tourism’s project benefit to them (Lee, 2013). Hence, to avoid or minimise the negative impact of tourism and maximise its benefits, it is imperative to understand the perception of the local community towards tourism (Stylidis, Biran, Sit & Szivas, 2014).



## Collaboration Theory

The collaboration theory of Gray (1989) has been widely used in tourism literature. The success of any project largely depends on all parties involved forming a working relationship and channelling their energy into a common goal. Concerning the subject under discussion, all stakeholders, project managers, locals, and lawmakers need to work together to achieve community participation in rural tourism. Based on this premise, the theoretical framework used in this article is the collaboration approach. As postulated by Gunn, no successful establishment was ever built in isolation, and there is a great need for all involved to come to the party (Gunn, 1988). Gunn (1988) also emphasised the importance of a clear organisational structure that enforces cohesion and unity among all parties involved. Collaboration offers a dynamic, integrative approach, which is essential for community-based tourism planning. This is critical due to the interdependence of all stakeholders involved.

Jamal and Getz (1995:184) assert that “collaboration can be used effectively to resolve conflict or advance shared visions, where stakeholders recognise the potential advantages of working together”. According to the aforementioned, the collaboration theory comprises three stages. First is the problem-setting stage where the different people involved and the problems are identified. The second stage consists of direction-setting where future collaborative interpretations are identified and shared, to gain a sense of collective drive. The third stage comprises implementation, making sure that everything is done well, and coming up with solutions and plans when necessary. This theory is relevant because the Durban Green Corridor is embarking on a new stage of involving local residents in their project. The issue of collaboration will, therefore, need to be reviewed as a lack of collaboration among key community stakeholders may result in the failure of successful rural tourism development.

## Research Methodology

A quantitative research method using questionnaires was used as a primary tool for data collection. The questionnaire for this study comprised closed-ended questions and one open-ended question which is aligned to answering the research questions. The population comprised a community of 343 residents in Isithumba Village. A sample of 183 participants was selected using a systematic random sampling method and questionnaires were administered to each one of them. All completed consent forms and questionnaires were immediately put inside the bag that the researcher carried. To ensure confidentiality, the names of participants were not disclosed in the research. Excel and SPSS version 25 were used for coding and analysing the data collected respectively.

## Result and discussions

One hundred and eighty-three (183) questionnaires were administered, and one hundred and ten (110) were retrieved and analysed, comprising a response rate of 60.1%, which is deemed to be adequate for data analysis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

## Reliability Statistics

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha reliability

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
.475	.502	4

Source: Primary data

The lower Cronbach's coefficient alpha score (Table 1) for the participant's perception measurement, according to Pallant (2013), is predicted to be low (.475), because of the small number of items in the scale.



## Demographics of participants

As shown in Table 2, most (64.5%) participants are female while the remaining 35% are male. Most of the participants (52.7%) are under the age of 34 and only 20% are above the age of 50. Eighty-nine out of the 110 participants (80.9%) are unemployed, while, expectedly, 70.9% are single.

**Table 2.** Demographic attributes of respondents Source: primary data

Demographic variables		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	39	35.5	35.5	35.5
	Female	71	64.5	64.5	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Age	18-24	12	10.9	10.9	10.9
	25-34	46	41.8	41.8	52.7
	35-50	30	27.3	27.3	80.0
	50+	22	20.0	20.0	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Marital status	Single	78	70.9	70.9	70.9
	Married	20	18.2	18.2	89.1
	In Partnership	2	9.1	9.1	98.2
	Widowed	10	1.8	1.8	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Employment status	Employed	21	19.1	19.1	19.1
	Unemployed	89	80.9	80.9	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

## Rural Tourism awareness among respondents

Participants were asked close-ended questions to answer about the meaning of rural tourism, and if they had heard about the Durban Green Corridor and its meaning. The result is displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Rural tourism awareness among respondents Source: Primary data

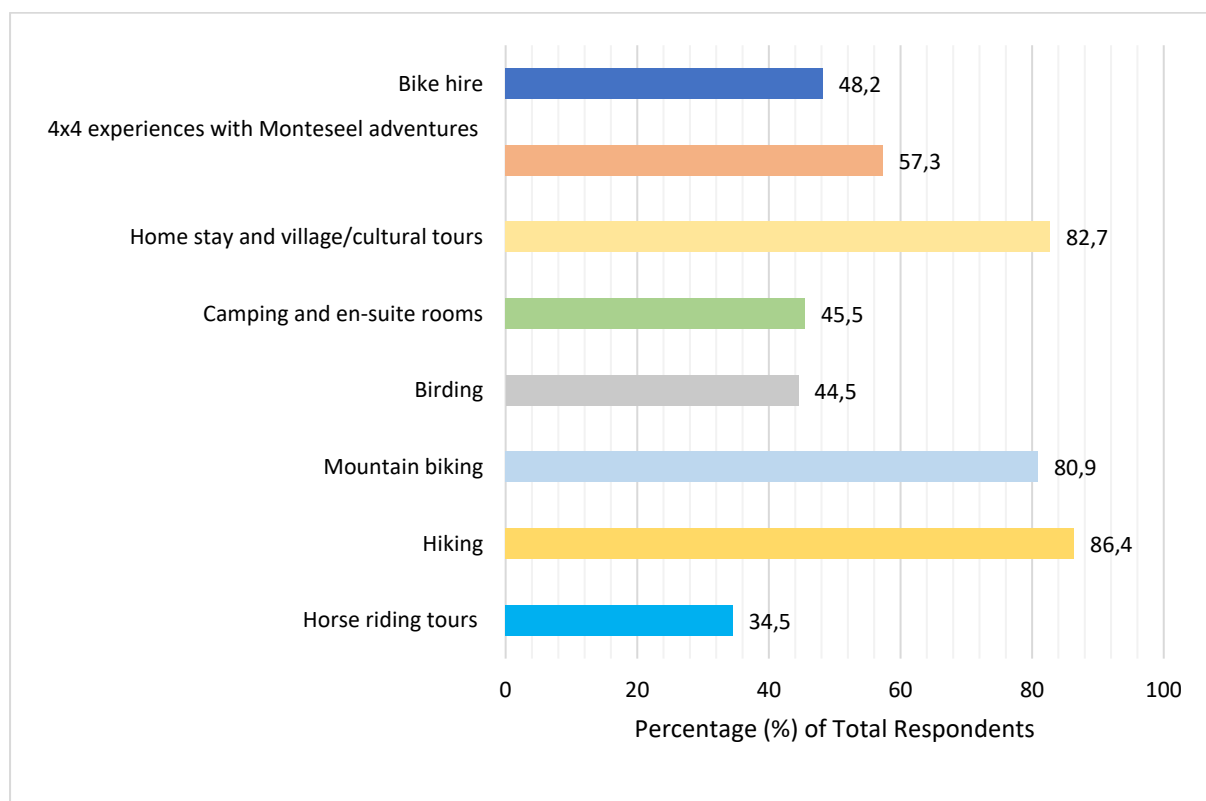
Responses on awareness questions		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The meaning of rural tourism	Correct responses	63	57.3	57.3	57.3
	Incorrect responses	47	42.7	42.7	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
Have you heard about Durban Green Corridor?	Yes	64	58.2	58.2	58.2
	No	46	41.8	41.8	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
The meaning of Durban Green Corridor	Correct responses	61	95.3	95.3	95.3
	Incorrect responses	3	4.7	4.7	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	



The results in Table 3 show that most (57.3%) respondents didn't know the correct meaning of rural tourism, although 58.2% have heard of Durban Green Corridor (DGC). Among those that have heard of DGC, 95.3% know the correct meaning of DGC. Similarly, in most research, the description of the role of local communities and the importance of their views and opinions in the whole planning and development process seems to be unclear (Muganda, Sirima & Ezra 2013). The local people's role in participating in making decisions is determined by the participatory approach being used in that area (Muganda et al., 2013). Their power to be able to participate depends on the particular approach being used.

An example of this is that in those countries that are still developing, all the processes of making decisions often come from the top, and are controlled by the government and different organisations. The power of community residents to take part in making decisions then becomes questionable (Muganda et al., 2013).

Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate the type of tourist activities in the region. As Figure 1 illustrates, the home stay, village/cultural tours, mountain biking and hiking were the major tourism activities that the respondents were aware of:



**Figure 1.** Tourism-related awareness among respondents Source: Primary data

### Participation of the respondents in the project

Table 4 (below) shows that most (71.8%) respondents have not previously participated in tourism project activities, and 78.5% are willing to become involved. Some (67.3%) of respondents indicated that they would love to participate in the project as an employee. A similar proportion (67.3%) claimed not to have received a previous invitation from DGC authorities to attend tourism project meetings, and 89.2% are willing to be invited.



**Table 4.** Respondents' participation in the project activities Source: Primary data

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency (n = 110)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Previous participation in project activities</b>			
Yes	31	28.2	28.2
No	79	71.8	100.0
Total	110	100	100
<b>Willingness to get involved, if never participated</b>			
Yes	60	78.5	78.5
No	19	21.5	100.0
Total	79	100	100
<b>Respondents would love to participate as</b>			
The owner	1	1.8	1.8
An employee	74	67.3	69.1
An entrepreneur	23	20.0	89.1
Others (too old/no response)	12	10.9	100.0
Total	110	100	100
<b>Previous invitation by the DGC authorities to attend project meetings</b>			
Yes	36	32.7	32.7
No	74	67.3	100.0
Total	110	100	100
<b>If not previously invited, would you like to be invited?</b>			
Yes	66	89.2	89.2
No	8	10.8	100.0
Total	74	100	100

Though the Durban Green Corridor (DGC) took over operating Isithumba Adventures in 2011', with the aim to create job opportunities in the area, unemployment in the area is still high. Eighty-nine percent in this study are unemployed. Although 62 respondents reported that the project creates jobs, it only benefits a few in terms of employment. Some of the respondents could not even write or read. This shows a lack of education.

Not only could such individuals not be hired by the Isithumba project, but they could experience problems entering the workforce, which inevitably leads to unemployment and poverty. National\_Treasury (2017) states that "education and skills remain at the heart of the country's employment crisis". Many young people who have no or little education are unemployed because there are no job openings that could give them work experience. The IMF (International Monetary Fund) indicated that putting more focus on education and skills development is very important, especially when looking at employment in South Africa (IMF, 2018).

Furthermore, 67.3% of respondents reported they would love to participate as employees in the project. This shows that people in Isithumba are expecting a job instead of creating one for themselves. With the lack of education and shortage of skills in the area, it seems a challenge for the people in the area: neither to be employed nor to create jobs for themselves. Some (70.9%) of the respondents believe that being involved in the whole planning process of the project is what is needed to be able to participate in the project. Also, 59.1% believe



that training, sufficient coaching and discipline are also needed in order to fully participate. According to King and Stewart (1996:298), “areas that need special attention are training, capacity building, business skills, access to finance, negotiating skills, marketing, natural resource management, and monitoring and evaluation of tourism projects”.

According to Zhang and Canhua (2016), the lack of participation of rural communities and the loss of the dominant role of the local villagers make tourism development not only have limited influence in promoting the local society and economy but also in the protection of the countryside culture. Viljoen and Tlabela (2006) concluded that the lack of community involvement in the tourism industry is a challenge that needs to be addressed.

According to the afore-mentioned, the South African government has developed strategies and policies to address this issue, but they have not been fully implemented in the case of the DGC project. In addition, according to Lekaota (2015) and Nicolaides (2020), an important aspect of rural tourism management is focusing on local people so that they can participate and work in tourism development. The involvement of local communities at all levels of the development process, could solve existing problems in tourism development and increase motivation and collaboration in rural tourism development (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Public participation methods such as workshops, focus-group discussions, community meetings and surveys using questionnaires may be used during the tourism planning process (Bello et al., 2018).

Finally, it is recommended that the involvement of more people and the use of all communication tools is better to enhance the participation of the community (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). The association between rural tourism awareness and the community’s participation in the project was tested using the Chi-square test (Table 5).

**Table 5.** The relationship between rural tourism awareness among respondents and the community’s participation in tourism-related project activities Source: Primary data

Variables	Previous participation in Project activities			Chi square	P value
	Yes Freq. (%)	No Freq. (%)	Total Freq. (%)		
The meaning of rural tourism					
Correct Response	17 (36.2)	30 (63.8)	47 (100.0)	2.587	0.108
Incorrect Response	14 (22.2)	49 (77.8)	63 (100.0)		
Total	31 (28.2)	79 (71.8)	110 (100.0)		
Awareness about DGC					
Yes	25 (39.1)	39 (60.9)	64 (100.0)	8.952	<b>0.003*</b>
No	6 (13.0)	40 (87.0)	46 (100.0)		
Total	31 (28.2)	79 (71.8)	110 (100.0)		
The meaning of DGC					
Correct Response	24 (39.3)	37 (60.7)	61 (100.0)	0.885	0.347
Incorrect Response	2 (66.7)	1 (33.3)	3 (100.0)		
Total	26 (40.6)	38 (59.4)	64 (100.0)		
Previous invitation by DGC authorities to attend project meetings					



Yes	16 (44.4)	20 (55.6)	36 (100.0)	6.993	<b>0.008*</b>
No	15 (20.3)	59 (79.7)	74 (100.0)		
Total	31 (28.2)	79 (71.8)	110 (100.0)		

As indicated in Table 5, there is no statistically significant association between previous participation in the project and both the meaning of rural tourism ( $P=0.108$ ) and the meaning of DGC ( $P=0.347$ ). However, there is a statistically significant association between previous participation of respondents in the project and both the participant's awareness about DGC ( $P=0.003$ ) and the participant's previous invitation to attend the project meeting ( $P=0.008$ ). This is an indication that for the communities to be involved in the local development projects, their awareness and participation in meetings are of paramount importance, as the result from Table 4 indicated that 78.5% of the respondents would like to be involved in the project if they were aware of it.

### Project Perception among Respondents

Respondents' were asked about their perception on four aspects of the DGC project and their responses were recorded (Table 6) using a five-point Likert scale. With regard to the first participation statement posed to them, 60.0% of respondents agree and strongly agree that community members are given a chance to comment and make decisions during meetings. However, the remaining 40% of participants do not agree with the statement.

Almost all (99.1%) of the respondents agree and strongly agree that to actively participate in the tourism project, community residents require training, sufficient coaching and good discipline in order to help them give good customer service to the visiting tourists.

Apart from the participation and training requirements, almost all (97.3%) the community members wanted to be involved in the planning process of the whole project in order for them to participate in the project with their full heart. In general, 96.4% of the respondents believe that the DGC project has improved the lives of the community through job creation.

Finally, 94.5% of the participants indicated that they would likely recommend the same type of project to a similar tourism initiative in another area. This is an indication that Isithumba residents are very positive about the project.

**Table 6. Project perception among respondents**

Variables	Measures	Frequency (n = 110)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Community members are given a chance to comment and make decisions during meetings	Agree	38	34.5	34.5
	Strongly Agree	28	25.5	60
	Disagree	16	15.6	75.6
	Strongly Disagree	1	0.9	76.5
	No Response/Neutral	27	24.5	100
To actively participate in the project, community residents need training, sufficient coaching and good discipline because they take in visitors	Agree	44	40	40
	Strongly Agree	65	59.1	99.1
	Disagree	1	0.9	100
	Agree	29	26.4	26.4

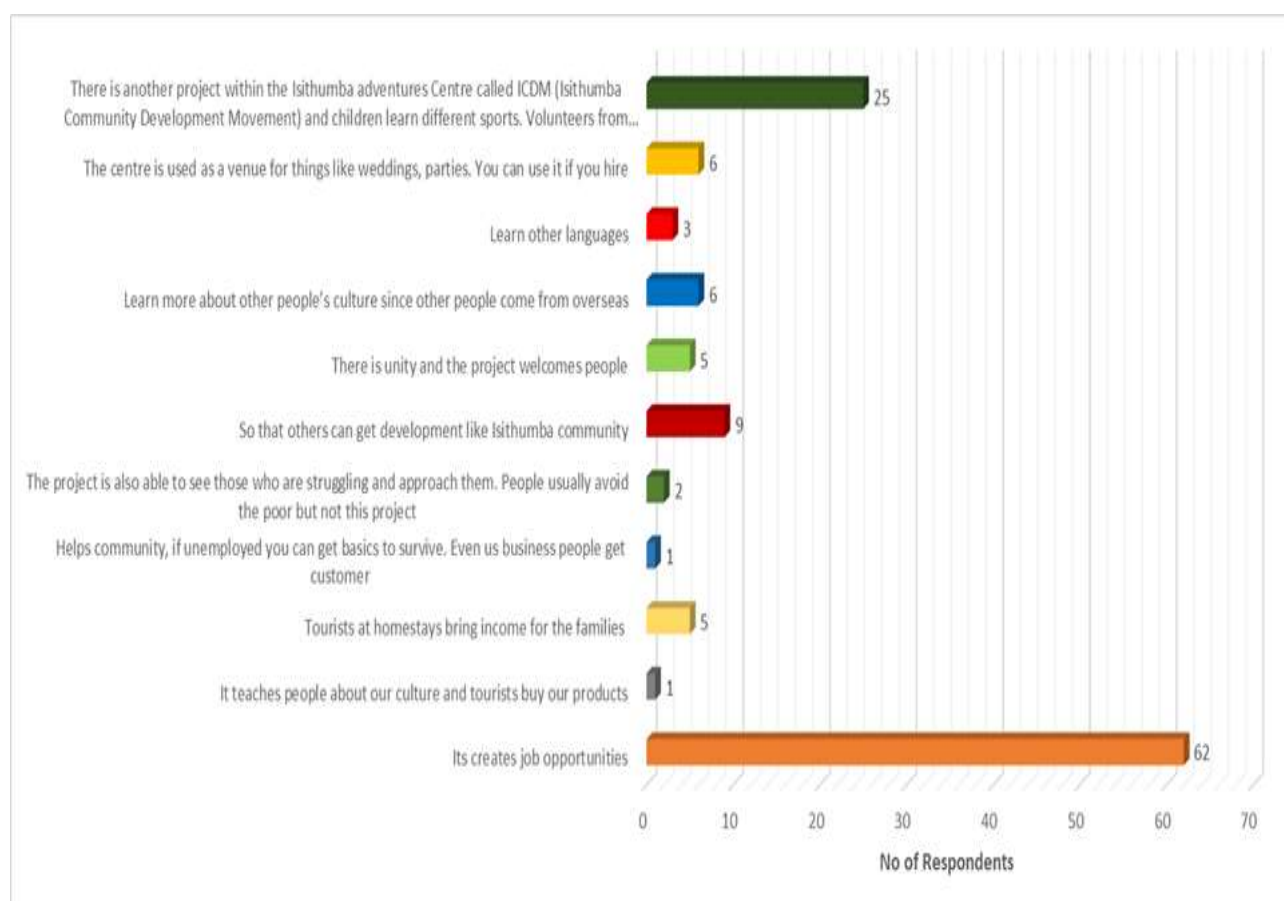




To actively participate in the project, community residents must be involved in the whole planning process.	Strongly Agree	78	70.9	97.3
	Disagree	3	2.7	100
The DGC project has improved the lives of the people in Isithumba through job creation	Agree	60	54.6	54.6
	Strongly Agree	46	41.8	96.4
	Disagree	1	0.9	97.3
	No Response/Neutral	3	2.7	100
If you were to make recommendations to DGC, would you recommend that an initiative of a similar kind be established in another area?	Yes	104	94.5	94.5
	No	6	5.5	5.5

Source: Primary data

As 94.5% of the respondents are willing to recommend the DGC project for other areas, they were further asked the reason behind their recommendation. The result in Figure 2 indicates that the main reason (62%) why people are willing to recommend DGC to establish a similar tourism initiative in another area was the creation of job opportunities in local communities. The second (25%) equally important reason for their recommendation was the opportunity that it may create for children to learn about the sport due to different tourists' activities.



**Figure 2.** Major reasons why respondents are willing to recommend DGC to establish tourism initiatives in other areas Source: Primary data



## Challenges of Community Participation in Isithumba

Two challenges were found to prevent the Isithumba people from participating in the project. The first one is awareness about DGC, and the second is being invited to attend the project meetings. Looking at Table 4, most (87.8%) respondents who had not heard about DGC, had no previous participation in project activities. This is because there was not enough awareness of DGC. In addition, residents do not get invitations to attend meetings called by DGC, while 79.7% of those who were not previously invited by DGC authorities to attend tourism project meetings had not participated in the past. Increasing awareness of what DGC and rural tourism are, and also sending out invitations, could be a solution.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This article investigated local community participation in rural tourism development in Isithumba Village. The project does not benefit most people in the community, as expected; currently, only a few households benefit from it. The reason for this, as indicated in the findings, is that the community does not know about DGC and how they operate, and only a few get invited to attend project meetings. The community does not benefit from the project because they are not fully involved. Those who are directly involved have benefited in terms of job creation and entrepreneurial opportunities. For the remaining community members, the project is not, however, beneficial. However, the project has raised hope for the community in terms of the economy, as it offers the potential to create employment and to alleviate poverty.

## Recommendations

To increase the participation of Isithumba residents in the project and for it to benefit everyone, some issues need to be considered. The two major challenges preventing local people from participating in this village are lack of awareness about DGC and the issue of not getting invitations to attend project meetings. The researchers recommend that DGC authorities raise awareness in local residents about who they are and what they do. They need to do this by calling meetings and explaining thoroughly to the community about DGC. They can also share the success stories with the community members so that the people can see the outcomes. The DGC should also send timely invitations and include everyone – because the project is for Isithumba residents.

The government must ensure that projects in rural areas exist and survive, so they can help reduce poverty and create employment. The government need not control such projects; it should only play a role in supporting them. Controlling everything will interfere with the objectives of the projects. The government, however, needs to play a prominent role in ensuring that everything required to develop such projects is available. The main requirements could be financial assistance, provision of information, training, sufficient coaching, and discipline on how to fully participate in rural tourism projects.

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