



Township tourism as an agent for the socio-economic well-being of residents

Lovisa Sisco Ndapanda Auala (PhD Candidate)
Nelson Mandela University
P.O. Box 77000, Port Elizabeth, 6031
South Africa, 6031
Email: 216874777@mandela.ac.za
aualasisco@yahoo.com

Dr S.R. van Zyl
Nelson Mandela University
Email: Shireen.VanZyl@mandela.ac.za

and

Professor I.W. Ferreira
Nelson Mandela University
Email: Naas.Ferreira@mandela.ac.za

Corresponding author*

Abstract

The development of township tourism has created contradicting views amongst researchers with two different schools of thought emerging (Kieti & Magio, 2013:38; Rogerson, 2015:320; Booyens, 2010:377). One school holds that township tourism exploits the poor and uses their living conditions as a tourist attraction, while the other suggests it is a tool to improve the local economy by combating poverty and encouraging understanding of how other people live (Kieti & Magio, 2013:38; Rogerson, 2015:320; Booyens, 2010:377). In Namibia, the residents are often the objects of tourism development rather than the ones that spearhead the process of tourism development (Saarinen, 2010:722). While the tourists' motives to visit townships is for the social interaction with the residents in search of authentic experiences (Diekmann & Hannam, 2012:1331), authenticity is often compromised in township tours, where tourists are taken on artificial tours in the townships with little interaction with the residents (Booyens, 2010:277). Mutual respect and understanding between the residents and the tourists will reduce the situation, where residents feel they are the objects of the tourists' gazes (Frisch, 2012:336). Academic literature has shown that there is a relationship between the residents' perceived benefits derived from township tourism and their attitudes towards tourism development, where residents will support township tourism if they benefit from it (Kieti & Magio, 2013:39). According to Rogerson (2015:321), most of the academic research on tourism in Africa is focused on rural tourism development and there is a need for further investigation on the subject of township tourism. This paper presents a review of literature on township tourism and sustainable tourism, filling a small gap in the field of township tourism.

Keywords: Township, socio-economic, sustainable tourism, interaction, benefits.

Introduction

The term township tourism originated from South Africa and relates to the post-apartheid era (1948-1994) whereby tourists are educated about the racist apartheid policy by visiting townships (urban suburbs established by the apartheid regime) and interacting with local residents (Rogerson & Visser, 2007:209). However, the term is also used widely in Namibia (Buning, Legant, Schauwinhold, Steinbrink & Subenguth, 2016:14) since this country was also under South African control.



Township tourism was previously classified as a component of “heritage tourism”, “ethno-tourism”, “justice tourism”, “thano tourism”, “atrocitiy tourism” and “dark tourism” (Booyens, 2010:277). Township tourism has also been described further as slumming, poorism and philanthropic tourism (Kieti & Magio, 2013:38).

The township tourism phenomenon is currently being considered as a component of slum tourism (Koens & Thomas, 2016:2), where the motives for tourists are to see where impoverished people live (Mekawy, 2012:2092). According to a study conducted in Cape Town, eighty percent of the interviewed tourists perceived their visit to the township is an experience of the “real Africa” which they feel can only be experienced in the townships (Burgold & Rolfes 2013:165). Other authors refer to township tourism as poverty tourism, whereby poverty is used as a tourist attraction (Jänis, 2011:118).

Methodology

The study followed a qualitative research approach and interview data collection techniques was used for this study. Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 35-45 minutes were conducted with residents from Mondesa Township in Swakopmund, Namibia. Interview with Namibian tourism industry members and tourism government representatives were conducted as another source of data collection technique to triangulate the study and verify information gained from residents to improve the trustworthiness of the findings.

Snowball sampling method was used to purposefully select samples from residents of Mondesa Township in Swakopmund, Namibia. The participants included those directly and not involved in township tourism. The sample size was determined upon referrals by interviewees. Key role players in the Namibian tourism sector who influence the development of township tourism were selected using the purposeful (expert) sampling method. They were selected according to their knowledge and expertise on the subject under study. They included representatives from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Swakopmund Municipality, Emerging Tourism Enterprise Association of Namibia and tour operators conducting township tours in Mondesa, Swakopmund, Namibia. Data analysis was done through the facilitation of Atlas ti a qualitative data analysis software and deductive codes were established from the literature and themes were developed from the research questions.

Literature reviewed

In South Africa, the development of township tourism started before 1994 which was the year of liberation from apartheid, and the tours to the townships were often unofficial and perceived as being controversial (Frenzel, 2012:52). Township tours are now offered in most cities and towns of South Africa (Frenzel, 2012:51). According to Buning *et. al.*, (2016:32) township tourism in Namibia was first introduced in Windhoek, and specifically in the suburb of Katutura, in 1998, by a women empowerment project, called Penduka. Tourists visited the township to purchase craftwork produced by the women of Katutura, although there were no organised tours to Katutura as such at the time, only occasional visits to Penduka (Buning *et al.*, 2016:32).

Township tourism is currently a growing phenomenon in Namibia and it has spread to other towns in Namibia, namely, Swakopmund, Walvis Bay, Okahandja, Gobabis and Outjo (Buning *et al.*, 2016:16). Besides its rapid growth and popularity as a new form of tourism activity no guidelines have been created to direct the responsible development of township tourism (Booyens, 2010:273). Uncontrolled tourism development in townships may be evident in Namibia, if responsible guidelines are not developed to guide the stakeholders in ensuring that the residents’ needs are met through tourism.



Ethical debates on township tourism

In academic discourse surrounding township tourism the assumption is based on the ethical concern of a township tourism, the focus is often on poverty as the tourist attraction (Burgold *et al.*, 2013:99). Consequently certain authors expressed ethical concerns about township tourism, explaining that township tourists enjoy the “entertainment” of visiting poor people in townships (Booyens, 2010:277), while some authors use the “zoo metaphor” to portray their critical views of the practice of township tourism (Burgold, Frenzel & Rolfes, 2013:100). Others describe township tourism as a form of “social bungee jumping” (Rogerson, 2015:320).

Frenzel (2013:117) explained that township tourism can be analysed as “capitalist commodification of poverty”, whereby an exchange of money takes place to observe poverty. This means that poverty has become a value in tourism and tourists incorporate it into their experience (Burgold *et al.*, 2013:100).

A number of debates about township tourism describe it as “poverty porn” (Dyson, 2012:255).

Some authors explain that township tourism is voyeurism and the residents do not benefit from it at all (Whyte *et al.*, 2011:337). Others explain that it is a form of human interaction that benefits the residents through education and economical gain (Whyte *et al.*, 2011:337).

Empirical studies, conducted on the motivation why tourists visit slums, show that tourists want to experience a different culture and see how other people live based on a need to experience the “real life” which is usually not portrayed when visiting urban cities in the developing countries (Meschkank, 2012:145).

The impact of tourism on the residents living in townships is an area that is under researched (Booyens, 2010:277). This is confirmed by Kieti and Magio (2013:37) that there are several gaps in the academic literature on the residents’ perspectives towards tourism in townships. While recent township tourism research focused on the ethical, moral concerns and motives of tourists (Burgold, Frenzel & Rolfes, 2013:101), more in-depth exploratory research is required on the residents’ support for township tourism.

Philosophical definitions of ethics have attempted to stipulate the boundaries of what is perceived as right and wrong without considering that ethics can only receive its meaning within a particular context deeply rooted in “social expectations and aspirations” (Duffy & Smith, 2003:13).

Ethical conduct in tourism occurs during the interaction between the residents and the tourists and it can occur in the following three social contexts (Mathieson & Wall, 1982:135) -

- Tourists’ interact with the residents during a purchase or provision of services,
- Tourists’ meet with residents during a tourism activity and
- Tourists’ share information and ideas in the presence of the residents.

The level of interaction between the residents and the tourists in townships may influence their perspective towards tourism. Duffy and Smith (2003:14) raise a key proposal that the impact on the socioeconomic development of the residents is influenced by ethical conduct in tourism.

Critics of township tourism hold that tour operators exploit the residents and tour operators are profiting by using poor people’s miseries as a commodity (Basu, 2012:68). In India, tour operators selling slum tours are often called “parasites” by government officials (Basu, 2012:68).

Mayer (2007:137) explains that exploitation occurs when the parties do not gain the benefits from an activity they deserve or receive no benefits at all. Whyte, Selinger and Outterson (2011:337) explain that the residents in townships are not provided with an opportunity to “consent” or “object” to the practice of township tourism and are not involved in the planning of tours.



The tourists visiting townships are not aware of the perspectives of the residents whom they visit and this makes it difficult to determine whether a specific tour exploits or benefits the residents (Whyte *et al.*, 2011:338).

While the media and academic critics assume that township tourism is exploitative and voyeuristic, certain residents feel that tourism has given them a sense of pride and dignity (Freire-Medeiros, 2012:188).

Burgold *et al.*, (2013:102) recommend that township tourism research should move away from the “valorisation” and “commodification” of poverty and focus on political questions and ethical issues. If the focus of township tourism is moved from “ethical critique”, township tourism has the potential to develop in a manner that contributes to community development and alleviate poverty in townships (Ding, 2012: 195).

Frenzel *et al.*, (2012:8) pose the question whether the socioeconomic benefits derived from township tourism justify the lack of ethical considerations of this type of tourism.

Township tourism offers an opportunity to transform the manner in which poverty is debated so as to influence academic literature and policies on poverty (Burgold *et al.*, 2013:101). Frenzel (2013:118) explains that township tourism has a unique link to poverty compared with any other form of tourism, where poverty is the main attraction. Kieti and Magio (2013:39) support this assumption. However, it is not clear whether township tourism can be considered as a pro-poor tourism activity (Burgold *et al.*, 2013:102).

In addition, township tourism research has the ability to provide “qualitative criteria to alleviate poverty”, whereby residents develop a “sense of dignity” and “recognition” from tourists’ visits (Frenzel & Koens, 2012:202).

Burgold and Rolfes’s (2013:164) empirical case studies conducted in Cape Town in 2007 and 2008, indicated that certain tour operators are not portraying the images of townships as places of suffering and poverty, but they are rather creating positive images of the people and their cultures. Besides making money from the tours, their other aim is to transform the representations of townships by educating tourists about the positive attributes of townships. Burgold and Rolfes’s (2013:164) study further reveals that tourists have predetermined perceptions of townships before they undertake a tour, as observed earlier in the study of Meschkank (2012:156). These perceptions can be categorised under three negative attributes of how tourists describe townships as places of “exclusion, insecurity and stagnation” (Burgold & Rolfes, 2013:166).

Butler (2012:215) explains that tour operators and their guides have become the curators of township tours and use an example of townships as the museums of “cultural production”. This view is supported by Frenzel (2013:124) who shows that tour operators play an essential role in the “presentation and representation” of townships.

Burgold and Rolfes’s (2013:171) study reveals that the perceptions of township tourism as being exploitative are based on the negative connotations of township destinations as places of despair and poverty. Once the positive connotations of townships are perceived as places of “culture, development and hope”, the semantics change and township tourism has become a form of responsible tourism, whereby tourists are not seen as voyeurs but as contributors to the improvement of the living conditions of the residents through tourism development (Burgold & Rolfes’s, 2013:171).

Frenzel (2013:118) further poses the following few questions on slum tourism and poverty:

- What are the implications of slum tourism on the social construction of poverty?
- Does slum tourism make poverty into something valuable?
- Is poverty accepted as normal in slum tourism?
- Does slum tourism make poverty unproblematic?



Frenzel, (2013:118) further elucidates that poverty is a “political social problem” that occurs due to economic and political arrangements and slum tourism debates are linked to these political questions (Frenzel, 2013:118).

Sustainable tourism in townships

Exploring the perspectives of the residents living in townships and understanding their concerns can contribute to a meaningful relationship between the tourists and the residents, which is vital for long-term sustainable tourism in townships (Kieti & Magio, 2013:39). The tourists visiting townships are not aware of the perspectives of the residents whom they visit and this makes it difficult to determine whether a specific tour exploits or benefits the residents (Whyte *et al.*, 2011:338). Sustainable tourism as a concept is rooted in sustainable development and ensures that tourism development takes place with the least negative impact on the host population and the environment and by maintaining economic viability (Smith, Macleod & Robertson, 2010:170). The movement towards sustainable development has shifted tourism development to incorporate the needs of the residents who are directly impacted by tourism (Tosun, 2000:613).

Sustainable tourism is further understood as a type of development which ensures that the residents, tourists and the tourism industry experience positive impacts from tourism, by contributing to cultural understanding among tourist and residents, conserving cultural heritage, income opportunities for the stakeholders, broad participation in tourism by residents, while maintaining a suitable balance between the economic, environmental and sociocultural impacts to guarantee long-term sustainability (UNWTO, 2017c). Butler (1999:12) defined sustainable tourism as a form of development which remains viable over a long period and does not “degrade or alter the environment both human and physical in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and wellbeing of other activities and processes”.

Sustainable tourism is guided by the principles of conserving the natural heritage and biodiversity in respect of the sociocultural authenticity of the residents by contributing to the intercultural understanding and tolerance (UNWTO, 2017c). It provides fairly distributed socioeconomic benefits to all the stakeholders by creating employment and income-generating opportunities and social services to the residents for poverty alleviation (UNWTO, 2017c). Despite the fact that the concept of sustainable tourism has attracted the attention of academics and tourism practitioners over the past 25 years, there is still no consensus on its actual definition and sustainable tourism is defined using a “soft approach” to tourism development (Sharpley & Telfer, 2016:61). Several authors claim that the concept has been understood from “modernist and post-modernist assumptions that the world is predicable, linear and stable” (McCool, Butler, Buckley, Weaver & Wheeler, 2013:21).

Garrod and Fyall (1998:200) took a different approach to sustainable tourism. They explain that there is no need to deliberate further on the concept of sustainable tourism, the development of the practical implementation of the concept is needed (Garrod & Fyall, 1998:200). Garrod and Fyall (1998:200) criticised the UNWTO codes of conduct of sustainable tourism as being too basic and open for interpretation, with no methods to monitor the achievement of sustainable tourism.

Research and discourse on the topic of sustainable tourism continue to grow despite the ambiguity among the stakeholders about the meaning of the concept (Butler, 1999:19). In addition, there is evidence in tourism literature that all types of tourism are often labelled as sustainable tourism (Butler, 1999:19).

Janusz and Bajdor (2013:524) developed guidelines for the practice of sustainable tourism and are characterised by the following principles (Janusz & Bajdor, 2013:524):



- Appropriate management processes to preserve the natural resources and biodiversity.
- Understanding and respect of the local population's cultural and traditional values.
- The ability to manage both the economic, social and environmental impact of tourism development for the success of sustainable tourism.
- Damage to the natural environment destroys the attractiveness of an area for tourism and in the long run tourists will stop visiting the area diminishing the income potential from tourism.
- Social cultural heritage plays a crucial role in tourism and by preserving the culture of the community it will benefit the residents.
- Tourism development that does not follow sustainable tourism principles often results in social and environmental costs which in the long term outweigh the financial benefits.

Ramchander (2004:176) conducted a study in Soweto Township in Johannesburg, South Africa and confirmed that the perspectives of the residents are influenced by the costs and benefits derived from tourism. The result of Ramchander (2004:176) study revealed that residents of Soweto were divided between those who gain economic and employment benefits from tourism and were more positive towards township tourism than those who did not benefit from township tourism and hold negative perspectives towards township tourism. Academic literature has also shown that there is a relationship between the residents' perceived benefits derived from township tourism and their attitudes towards tourism development, where residents will support township tourism if they benefit from it (Kieti & Magio, 2013:39).

Booyens (2010:281) further proposed that tourists should be educated on responsible behaviour and on respecting the residents by encouraging more interaction, moving away from their coaches and mingling with the locals so as to forge a more humanistic interaction. An example of successful interaction between the residents and the tourists is practiced in Haiti, whereby tourists live with the residents in their homes and experience their day-to-day living through the Beyond Border's transformational travel programme (Whyte, Selinger & Outterson, 2011:338). In this regard, the residents provide consent in advance and an agreement is signed with terms and conditions to be followed by the tourists and the residents (Whyte, Selinger & Outterson, 2011:338).

Another proposal by Booyens (2010:285) is to encourage sustainable tourism in townships is through volunteerism which fosters a better understanding and interaction between the tourists and the residents and makes township tourism more responsible and "less voyeuristic" (Booyens, 2010:285).

Witz (2011:383) explains that the study of relationships between the tourists and the residents in townships and the impact on residents is not adequate to analyse the practice of sustainable tourism in townships. The author explains that tourism is also the production of "systems of knowledge and making of signs and values" which should be considered in the study of township tourism (Witz, 2011:383). The concept of sustainable tourism has changed the tourism paradigm resulting in the incorporation of sustainable tourism into the tourism policies, planning guidelines and development practices in the public and private sector (Sharpley & Telfer, 2016:42). A number of critics have also shared their views that sustainable tourism lacks practical implementation and practice and has failed to address community concerns (Bramwell, 2015:205; Halstead, 2003:7). This has resulted in stakeholders who have no consensus in the understanding of the term "sustainable tourism" or who have their own understanding of what it should be; thus, creating barriers in tourism development and planning (Budeanu, Miller, Moscardo & Ooi, 2016:288).

A number of authors argue that the conceptualisation of sustainable tourism development has failed to address the needs of residents in developing countries (Bramwell, 2015:205,



Halstead, 2003:7). As a result, it is losing its meaning and is often simply used as a marketing device to increase market growths rather than incorporate sustainability principles within tourism development (Bramwell, 2015:205, Halstead, 2003:7).

Theoretically, there is a deficiency of new knowledge regarding sustainable tourism within the study of township tourism, the impact of tourism on the residents living in townships is an area that is under researched (Booyens, 2010:277), and sustainable tourism research have avoided new insights that risk the need for restructuring the traditional tourism practices of sustainable tourism (Bramwell, 2015:207).

Other authors claim that the implementation of sustainable tourism fails when there is a lack of understanding of the interdependency of the three aspects of sustainable tourism, namely an environmental aspect, a sociocultural aspect and an economic aspect (Cárdenas, Byrd & Duffy, 2015:255). The aim is to create a balance among the three aspects to achieve sustainability (Cárdenas *et al.*, 2015:255). The stakeholders' participation is one aspect of sustainable tourism that can only be achieved if they understand the problems and concepts of sustainable tourism development to participate effectively and to change tourism (Cárdenas *et al.*, 2015:256). While Butler (1999:17) argues that without performance indicators to measure the progress of sustainable tourism development, the use of the word sustainable tourism loses its meaning. This loss of meaning results in an uncertainty whether one is moving towards achieving sustainable tourism or moving away from it (Butler, 1999:17). Tosun (1998:598) conducted a study in Urgup, Turkey on the "roots of unsustainable tourism development at a local level". Tosun's (1998:606) study reveals that to achieve sustainable tourism, national and local objectives and priorities need to be integrated and aligned. In most instances, international tour operators have the bargaining power to shape tourism development in developing countries because they have an influence on the global tourism demand (Tosun, 1998:606). The dependency on international tour operators makes it difficult for developing countries to reject or oppose tour operators' decisions for fear of losing economic benefits that are gained from international tourism (Tosun, 1998:606). As a result, sustainable tourism development in developing countries may not be possible without the close cooperation with international tour operators (Tosun, 1998:606).

Another factor described by Tosun (1998:607) that influences the participation of residents in tourism development is a lack of financial capital, unfavourable tourism market conditions, and a lack of understanding the business culture of tourism makes it difficult for residents to enter and sustain themselves in the tourism industry as entrepreneurs (Tosun, 1998:607). Tosun's (1998:607) study further reveals that participatory tourism development approaches are regarded as time-consuming and requires significant effort to implement. As a result, only a few elite within the community end up benefiting and participating in tourism (Tosun (1998:607).

Tosun's (1998:607) study propose that education and training in entrepreneurial skills and tourism are important. Residents should get free consultation services to help them run small tourism businesses and tourism entrepreneurs should be encouraged to employ the locals (Tosun, 1998:607).

Residents need to be empowered through participation in tourism by giving them an opportunity to consider the following questions about tourism as proposed by Ramchander (2004:97):

- What type of tourism activities do the residents allow in the community?
- How can the residents ensure that the benefits from tourism are filtered to the needy?
- What kind of measures are in places to ensure tourism is managed and controlled carefully?
- How do the residents ensure that tourism does not have a negative impact on the culture and livelihood of the residents?



In Namibia, Saarinen (2010:717-722) conducted a study in Katutura Township in Windhoek to explore the residents' perspectives on tourism in 2007. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of the data collection method using the systematic sampling technique to identify the participants at each of the preselected locations accessible to the residents (Saarinen, 2010:717-722).

The findings revealed that the "unequal power relations" between the hosts and the guests are evident in Katutura Township (Saarinen, 2010:717-722). The residents of Katutura perceived the tourism benefits as a means of individual household income from which they could benefit directly (Saarinen, 2010:717-722). They are not concerned about the benefits of tourism through community development projects (Saarinen, 2010:722). Saarinen's (2010:717-722) study has revealed that in Namibia, there is a division between the residents who benefit from tourism and those who do not benefit from it and their perceptions and attitudes towards tourism are influenced by this division. Saarinen (2010:717-722) found it interesting that the residents' perspectives of tourism impacts are not related to their knowledge of tourism activities or their encounters with the tourists.

Cárdenas *et al.* (2015:258) conducted a study in five North Carolina counties in the United States of America on the residents' awareness of the impact of sustainable tourism development. The study propose the need to educate the residents on sustainable tourism, while focusing on the awareness of the cost and benefits of tourism development (Cárdenas *et al.*, 2015:258). The authors further stressed the importance of the stakeholders involved in tourism development, as well as the participation of the residents to enable them to make informed decisions on how tourism should empower them (Cárdenas *et al.*, 2015:258).

Tourism development that does not allow residents to participate threatens the quality of life of the residents and the residents may develop resentment towards tourism (Hall & Lew, 2009:182). An early work of Murphy (1985) on the residents' participation in tourism was based on the assumption that the residents are the most affected by the impacts of tourism and during the tourism planning process, the stakeholders need to incorporate the residents' "perspectives, preferences and priorities" by encouraging local participation (Roberts, 2017:377).

Van Niekerk (2014:82) proposed that to encourage the residents' participation in tourism, the government needs to implement legislation that enforces the residents' participation during the tourism planning process. The legislation must ensure that all the stakeholders involved in the tourism development practice follow the set procedure to include the residents in tourism (Van Niekerk, 2014:82). Sharpley and Telfer (2016:59) found that the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's (UNWTO) guidelines and management practices for sustainable tourism development may not be applicable to all the destinations and all the forms of tourism. Another concern about the concept of sustainable tourism is that it has been developed from developed countries' perspectives, which have better economic, legislative and political structures, making it more challenging to implement sustainable tourism in developing countries (Tosun, 1998:608).

Conclusion

The benefit of conducting research studies in tourism offers an opportunity to create knowledge and new understanding of the benefits derived from tourism and the socioeconomic equality potential experienced through tourism (Jamal & Robinson, 2009: 2-6). The understanding of the relationships between tourists and residents contributes to the broad understanding of global tourism development challenges and therefore tourism offers an opportunity to find joint meaning on global issues (Jamal & Robinson, 2009: 2-6). This then encourages the practice of sustainable tourism development.



Township tourism possesses the ability to contribute to positive human exchanges through interaction between residents and tourists. By sharing a positive cultural exchanges, stronger relationships are built between the tourists and residents, which may provide for the long term sustainability of township tourism. The positive personal transformational effect on residents through their interaction with tourists is contributing to residents' socio-economic well-being in varying degrees. Consequently, township tourism is able to quantitatively and qualitatively manage the alleviation of poverty in townships (Frenzel & Koens, 2012:202). Fostering understanding and mutual respect among peoples of the world is critical, and township tourism does just that.

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