



Lake Fundudzi: A Sacred Lake in South Africa that is not open for Tourism Development

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Abstract

Lake Fundudzi is a very important sacred place for the Vha-Venda people, who are also referred to the 'Vhatatsindi', or People of the Pool. Vha-Venda mythology believe that Lake Fundudzi, South Africa's only natural lake was created when a passing leper was refused food and shelter by villagers. The leper cursed the village that subsequently vanished below the waters of the newly formed lake. Vha-Venda have a number of folklore derived from the lake. These include; an albino python god, ancestral spirits that inhabit the lake, a guardian White crocodile, bio-indicators of seasonal weather changes and detectable moods of the ancestors. This article sought to document the precise reasons as to why Lake Fundudzi and its environment have not been developed as a cultural tourist destination. The methodology of this study was a desk top research as well as interviews of key informants, community members and tourism industry stakeholders. The findings were that indeed Lake Fundudzi has a broad range of cultural mythology and landscape that would attract heritage / cultural tourists as well as the general tourist. However, the potential tourism destination is set in a culture that is conservative with firm beliefs in animism. These work against any notion of tourism development of Lake Fundudzi. Factors such as the sacredness of the lake, the powers bestowed to the Chief who 'owns' the lake and perform rituals on behalf of the Vha-Venda people to appease their ancestors, all combine to make even suggestions of any development unacceptable. The other findings were that although the South African Government has a sophisticated range of policies and infrastructure, the value of these to our study area are questionable. However, the article did establish that some tourism related industry would be acceptable if located some distance from Lake Fundudzi.

Keywords: Sacred, Tourism Issues, Vah-Venda Culture, Chief and Clan Powers, Closed to the public

Introduction

Sacred Lake Fundudzi is a wealth of folklore and mythology. Upon a fuller awareness of the diversity of the spiritual meaning of the lake and the sacred Holy Forest of Thathe Vondo, one is surprised by the minimal tourism development some distance from the lake and forest. In other countries, lodges and local craftsmen would be competing to sell their wares to domestic and international visitors. But this is not the case in the vicinity of Lake Fundudzi, a sacred area that is not really open to tourism development. The purpose of the article was to document the precise reasons as to why Lake Fundudzi and its surroundings have not been developed as a heritage/cultural tourist destination. This task was accomplished by first depicting the location of Lake Fundudzi. The second section outlines the methodology of the article. The third was setting the background of the magnitude and importance of tourism in



South Africa. This was followed by showing where Limpopo Province stands in terms of tourism as an international destination in South Africa, i.e. the attractions that pull in the tourists and the assets that have the potential to attract tourists but are struggling to do so. In undertaking this task, the article examined the structural issues related to tourism, the impacts of the Apartheid legacy on tourism, the entities that guide tourism development such as the Limpopo Tourism Board, The Ivory Route, the Vhembe District Municipality that is responsible for tourism development at the regional level and Thulamela Local Municipality that also has a support office, that is responsible for tourism in the study area. The aim of briefly investigating the above was to search for pointers as to why Government efforts appear to have very limited impacts in the development of areas such as Lake Fundudzi and its surrounds.

Written in tandem with the structural issues of tourism in the study area, were the 'cultural constraints' imposed on potential tourism development by the Vha-Venda people who inhabit the study area. Briefly touched upon is the traditional society and how its conservative values impact on 'outsiders' having anything to do with its sacred places. The functions of the Chief and Custodian Clan of the lake, the mythology and folklore and the seasonal bio-indicators are presented to appreciate the fuller picture of the local cultural take on Lake Fundudzi and its pristine landscape. A short section on the private tourism sector points out areas with the potential for development within this traditional tourism arena. All the above factors are discussed within the format of A SWOT Analysis, i.e. pointing out the internal strengths and weaknesses and the externally driven opportunities and treats to tourism development.

South Africa and Japan Compared

This short section aimed at giving the Japanese hosts some idea of the size, population and economic power of South Africa in comparison to Japan. South Africa is Africa's southernmost country that faces the Indian Ocean to its east and the Atlantic Ocean to its west. The total area is 1,221,037 km² or 471,445 sq. miles. This makes South Africa the 25th largest country by area. The total population was estimated to be 54,956,900 in 2015, giving a population density of 43.4 people per km² or 109.8 people per sq. mile (StatsSA 2011 census). South Africa's GDP per capita in 2015 was US\$ 5,691 (World Bank). In terms of international tourists, South Africa had 10,044,163 international tourists (International Tourism Arrivals (2017)). Japan on the other hand has a total area of 377,972 km² or 145,936 sq. mi (Facts about Japan). The population of Japan is 126,059,504 (Worldometers, 2017). In terms of GDP per capita Japan stood in 2015 at US\$ 32,477.22. Japan had 24.03 million international tourists in 2016 (Japan National Tourism Organization).

In comparison to South Africa, Japan is a little less than 30% the land area of South Africa. Put in other words, South Africa is over three times the size of Japan. However, in terms of population South Africa's population is equivalent of 44% of Japan's population. Japan's GDP per capita in 2015 was almost six times that of South Africa.

The Location of Scared Fundudzi Lake

Lake Fundudzi and its environs is found in the northern part of South Africa. It is located in South Africa's northernmost Province, - Limpopo Province. Refer to figures 1 to 4 below. Lake Fundudzi is situated in the Southpansburg range of mountains. The lake measures 5 km in length and 3 km in width when full, normally after the seasonal rains. At the time of our May 2017 field reconnaissance, the tour guide indicated that the lake level was considerably low. The southern half of Lake Fundudzi was a wetland. Refer to figure 1 below. Figure 1 is a reflection of the recent draught that has hit this part of the Southern Africa nation.

From a geological and geomorphological perspective, Lake Fundudzi was created by a landslide that blocked the course of the Mutale River. The lake and its resident crocodiles as well as the nearby forest of Thathe Vondo, are regarded as sacred by the Vhatatsindi, the 'People of the Pool' who are part of the Venda people. More about these people is presented in the following sections (Dima and Tshimangadzo, Personal Communications, May 2017).



Figure 1. Lake Fundudzi Source: Google Maps

Figure 1. Is a satellite image of unknown date. The satellite image was taken during the recent series of droughts. It shows the sunken size of the lake, with the southern half the lake is now a wetland. The satellite photo also shows the absence of any developments within the vicinity of the lake. Only three villages, Makuleni, Mulume and Tshilungwi, that are located some distance from the shores of the lake. Limpopo Tourism Attractions describes tourism in the Province has offering 'a mosaic of superb scenic landscape, a fascinating cultural heritage, an abundance of wildlife species and many nature based tourism opportunities'. In line with this article, Limpopo Attractions adds that 'Limpopo is a land of legends and myths and of ancient civilizations ... Those in search of history will find many places of archaeological significance that yielded relics dating back millions of years' (Limpopo Tourism Attractions).

Methodology

This article's methodology was based on predominantly primary information. Unstructured interviews of key informants was undertaken. Chief Vhatavhatshidi, who is the leader of the Netshidzivha Clan which is also known as the Nethathe Clan and the traditional custodian of Lake Fundudzi, was unfortunately not available for an interview. However, the study was able to interview Mr. Mashudu Dima, a Vha-Venda cultural and spiritual world expert as well as Mr. Nelson Tshimangadzo, a Certified Nature Tour Guide and Cultural Tour Guide. Both are Venda people. Further information was captured through a drive and walk guided reconnaissance of the south and east of Lake Fundudzi. The authors had prior knowledge and had made several visits of the lake and the Holy Forest and other sacred places within 50 km of Lake Fundudzi. The landscape features were captured and presented through digital photography.

Scholastic, regional and local tourism secondary data were accessed mainly through tourism internet related websites. Journals were also consulted. Arising from the fact that we were unable to locate any white crocodile or the normal coloured crocodiles, scared snakes or witness the Domba dance, we took the liberty and acknowledged Google Images for use of their resources to depict the above.

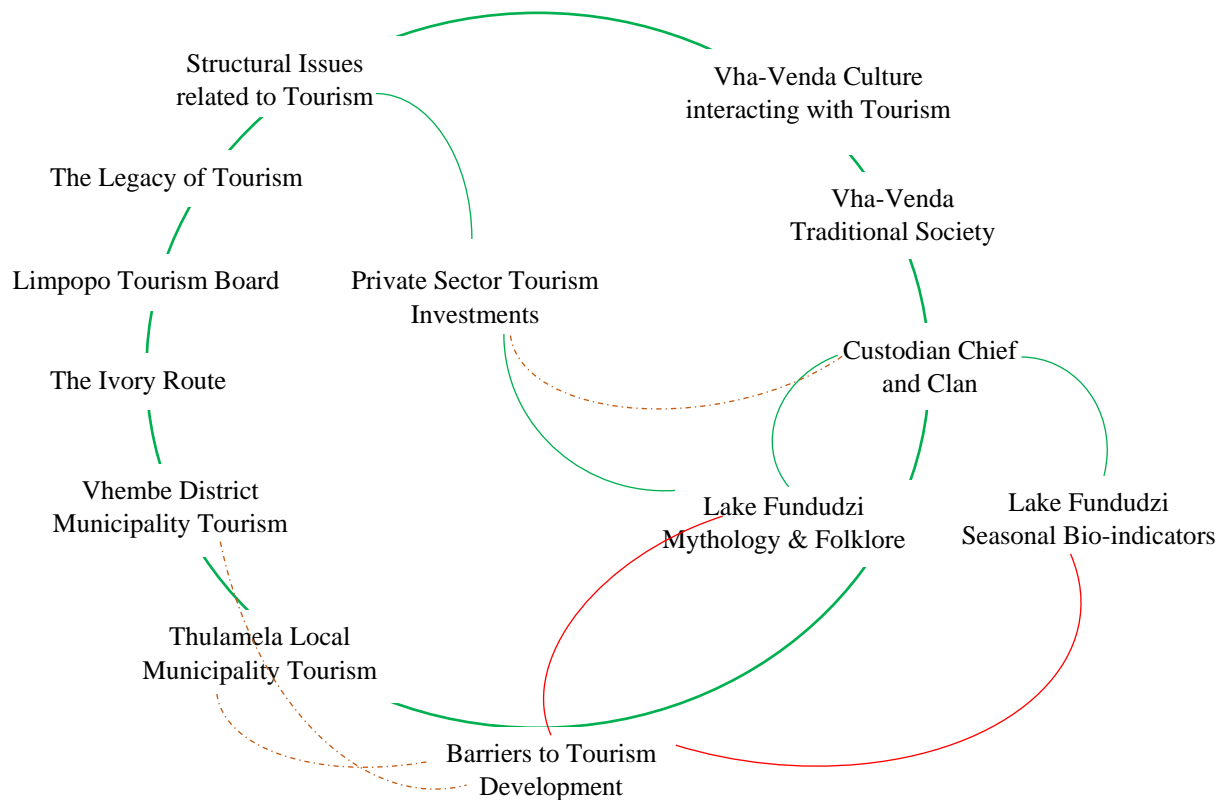


Figure 2 Tourism Development Considerations Source: Authors

The approach was to examine a number of factors that made Sacred Lake Fundudzi out of bounds for tourism development. Fig 2 is an illustration of factors that were taken into consideration. The green links are complementary, the red links are conflicting links and the dashed lines represent weak links.

Tourism Structural issues

The purpose of this section was to investigate the structural issues around South Africa's and the Limpopo Province's tourism, that may have direct and indirect impacts on the development of tourism in the region and especially the Southpansberg constituency. In this section a background of the character of tourism in South Africa is briefly outlined. This is followed by the legacy of apartheid tourism whose effects are still felt two decades after its end. Tourism in Limpopo Province, with its sub-components of Limpopo Tourism Agency, the African Ivory Route and Vhembe District Municipality and Thulamela Local Municipality are outlined in terms of their mandates with the probable levels of their success estimated.

Tourism in South Africa

The article starts by noting that the consistently leading international tourism destination in South Africa, is the Kruger National Park (KNP) (Karen Hastings, 2017). The KNP strides the Provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, Zimbabwe to its north and Mozambique to its east. KNP is within an hour and half's drive from Lake Fundudzi. However, this close proximity to



the country's prime international and to a large extent domestic tourism destination, has not assisted the evolution or the development of even the most rudimentary aspects of tourism, such as a arts and craft industry. There are reasons for the lack of synergies between the major tourism attractions and players and those that struggle to plant the seeds for tourism development. The following sections explores some of the barriers to the germination of tourism based on local landscape features that have the potential for tourism development.

International Movements of Tourists and non-tourists

StatsSA Tourism 2015 reports on South African residents and foreign tourists (travellers) who passed through South African by air, by land and through sea ports of entry/exit points in 2015 (StatsSA Tourism 2015). The Tourism report has a wide range of detailed information that includes (i) the mode of travel, (ii) the purpose of visit, (iii) the length of stay and (iv) the demographic characteristics of foreign tourists.

The following are highlights of tourism statistics. A total of 39 572 754 travellers, i.e. arrivals plus departures, entered or departed South Africa in 2015. This was an insignificant increase of 0.1% from the 2014 figure of 39 529 143 travellers. South African resident arrivals increased by minor 1.7% and departures increased by 0.6%. Foreign arrivals and departures both decreased by 0.3% in 2015. In 2015, foreign arrivals were made up of 7.3% non-visitors and 92.7% visitors; i.e. the tourists. The visitors were further categorised into same-day visitors at 36.2% and overnight visitors or tourists at 63.8%. The number of tourists decreased by 6.8% from 9 549 236 in 2014 to 8 903 773 in 2015. The distribution of tourists by region of residence followed a similar previous patterns. Thus, a high proportion at 73.8% of tourists were residents from the SADC countries i.e. South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Angola, Zambia and Tanzania; while 24.1% and 1.9% of tourists were from overseas and 'other' non-SADC African countries respectively.

The 2015 mode of travel and purpose of visiting South Africa was not dissimilar from those of previous years. Generally, overseas and 'other' African tourists flew into the country whereas tourists from SADC countries came in by road. Holidays continued to be the main reason for visiting South Africa. A large majority at 95.5% of tourists made the journey for holidays whilst business persons and students constituted 4.5% of 2015 tourists. Overseas business tourists were mainly United Kingdom residents and students were mostly USA residents. Residents of Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho made up the bulk of business tourists from SADC countries. SADC students came mainly from Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Namibia and Lesotho.

With regard to 'other' African countries, tourists on business and study were mostly from Nigeria and Kenya. In 2015, tourists from overseas and 'other' African countries spent, on average, six and five days per month in South Africa respectively, compared to tourists from SADC who spent three days. Tourists continued to be predominantly male at 55.7% while 89.5% of the 2015 tourists were in the productive age group of 15 to 64 years. Thus the picture of South Africa's international tourism can be summarized as follows. The number has floated around 39.5 million for a few years with insignificant increases and declines in departures and arrivals. The majority of foreign arrivals at almost 93% were visitors i.e. tourists. Of the foreign visitors almost 74% were from neighbouring SADC countries who travelled by road and almost 25% flew from outside of Africa and less than 2% flew in from the rest of Africa. Spending their time holidaying was the reason for almost 96% of visitors with almost 5% being students. The majority of business tourist; i.e. those who find South Africa as the ideal place to transact business where from the economically lesser developed SADC countries. Nigeria, West Africa and Kenya, East Africa's other economic hubs made up the majority of 'other Africans' visiting South Africa. International business and holiday tourist spent just under a week in South Africa. South Africa's SADC visitors were predominantly male of working age spent a shorter

time in South Africa. The question the article poses was how could Limpopo and the Southpansberg region benefit from the above tourism profiles?

Domestic tourism

Statistics South Africa’s 2015 Domestic Tourism Survey (DTS) offers pointers to the recent tourism situation in the country (StatsSA, Domestic Survey 2015). In the background of the survey report, it is noted that ‘Tourism is regarded in the National Development Plan (2030) as one of the most important potential drivers of economic growth and job creation in South Africa. Some of the indicators covered by the Domestic Tourism Survey include the total number of trips taken within the borders of the country, expenditure incurred and types of transport used to different destinations within the country. These indicators address the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) objective, which aims at growing the contribution by domestic tourism to the country’s economy’ (StatsSA, Domestic Survey 2015:1).

In the summary of key findings of the Domestic Tourism Survey 2015, the publication focused on domestic tourism and includes information on day and overnight trips. Noticeable was that there was a general pattern of decline in domestic tourism over the past two years (2013-2014) linked to South Africa’s economic stagnation and re-prioritisation of spending by consumers as they adjusted to these unfavourable conditions (StatsSA, Domestic Survey 2015:4). The following statistics were telling; the number of day trips decreased from 54.4 million in 2013 to 48 million in 2014 and decreased further to 44.3 million in 2015. Overnight trips also declined from 50.8 million in 2013 to 47.3 million in 2014 and 45,4million in 2015. Total expenditure on domestic overnight trips increased from R68.5 billion in 2013 to R71 billion in 2014. A different pattern was seen in 2015 with a decrease in expenditure to R61.9 billion. Expenditure on day trips also increased from an estimated R35 billion in 2013 to R38.6 billion in 2014 and decreased to R24.9 billion in 2015. The increase in expenditure between 2013 and 2014 on overnight trips was largely driven by increased spending in the higher living standard measure subgroup (LSM 8–10). In 2013, 2014 and 2015, Gauteng, Limpopo and Western Cape were the most popular destinations for day travellers. Tourists who undertook overnight trips mostly preferred visiting Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. Most of the money spent during the most recent day trips was spent in Gauteng, whereas most overnight expenditure occurred in Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. To complete this brief review of tourism in Limpopo, the following two graphs were generated from the Domestic Tourism Survey 2015.

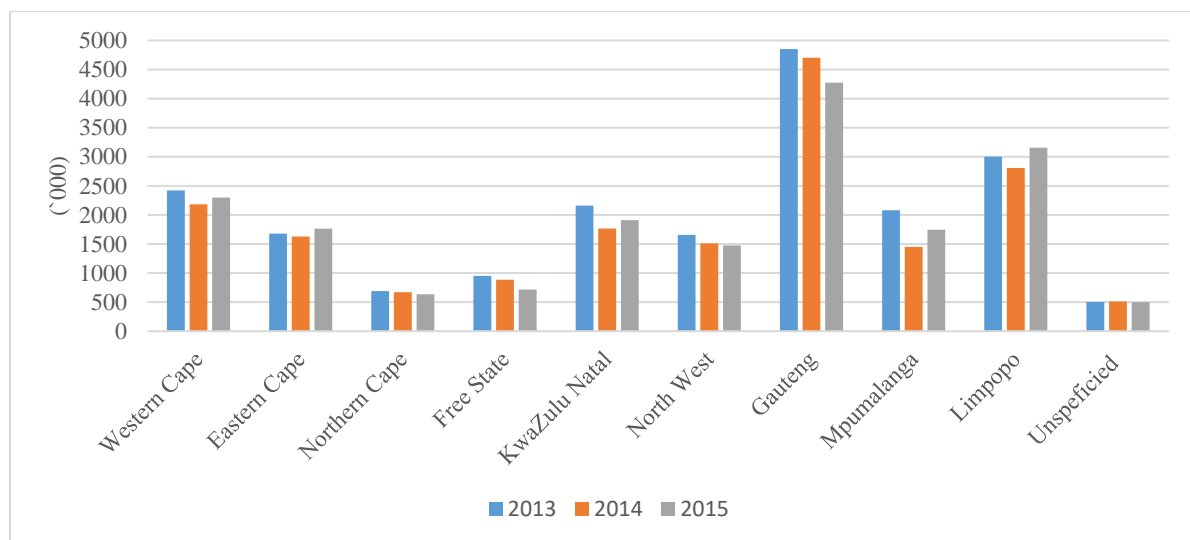


Figure 3. Province of Destination by recent trips 2013, 2014 & 2015 **Source:** StatsSA Domestic Tourism Survey 2015

The first was the Province of destination by most recent day trips, January–December, 2013, 2014 and 2015. From figure 3 Limpopo Province in the three year time period was only second to Gauteng Province in this domestic movement. This is a favorable indicator as a destination for day trips.

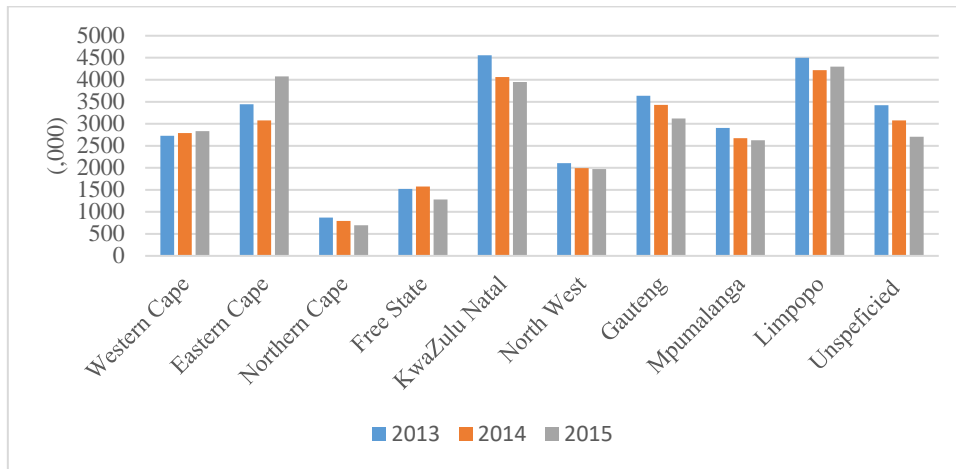


Figure 4. Province of Destination for Overnight Trips 2013, 2014 & 2015 Source: StatsSA Domestic Tourism Survey 2015

The second graph was the choice province of destination by most recent overnight trips, January–December, 2013, 2014 and 2015. Refer to figure 4 which shows that Limpopo Province is a leading destination at par with KwaZulu Natal for overnight trips. This shows a good standing for the Province. The issue is then how can this be exploited to increase tourism numbers and expenditure? To conclude on the performance of the Limpopo in relationship to other provinces, the percentage distribution of the main purpose of most recent day trips by province of destination, January–December, 2015 was included in this analysis. Refer to figure 5.

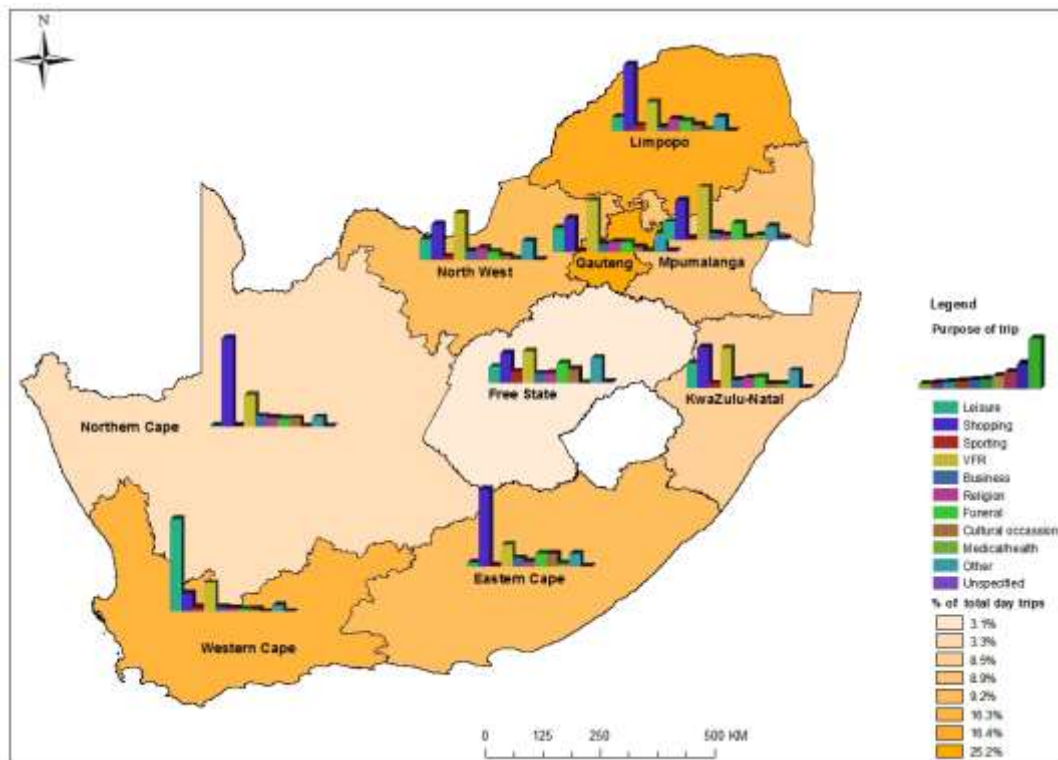


Figure 5 Main Purpose of Recent Trips Source: StatsSA Domestic Tourism Survey 2015



StatsSA concluded that the main purpose for which day travellers undertook trips to particular provinces was shopping to places such as Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Free State, North West, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. It was noted that travellers overwhelmingly visited Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal to visit friends and relatives. The only province in which leisure was the most stated reason for travel was Western Cape (StatsSA, Domestic Tourism Survey, 2015:21).

With respect to the main purpose of day travellers to Limpopo, travel for shopping has been the leading reason, followed by visiting friends and relatives. Day travels for leisure is very low in Limpopo. This does not auger well for the kind of tourism that many be branded around Lake Fundudzi.

The Legacy of Apartheid Tourism

The legacy of apartheid or separate race driven tourism development is the often the cited reason why after two decades of the post-apartheid period, tourism based on indigenous 'assets' has not developed to any significant extent. Whether it is comparing the numbers of tourists attracted, the earnings made, the management, diversity or the success of enterprise etc. the contrasts could not be more glaring between institutions owned and managed by South Africa's white population verses those owned and managed by its black population.

Although not the first to write about the consequences of apartheid on tourism ownership and development, Rogerson clearly articulated what the legacy of apartheid tourism development was. In short it was noted that this meant that 'A special feature of the South African tourism economy, which is a legacy of the apartheid period, is that the overwhelming majority of tourism enterprises and of the tourism economy as a whole is under the ownership of the white minority' (Rogerson, 2004). The race separateness of tourism development set the South African society to perceive tourism as a 'White peoples' undertaking. However, we suspect that this race based conceptualization of tourism is gradually wearing off.

In the post-apartheid (1994 onwards) the South African government recognised that that this unequal ownership structure in tourism, like other sectors of the economy, needed to be addressed through programmes of transformation that consolidated support for the development of black owned tourism enterprises, especially of small tourism enterprises.

Writing in 2000, Anyumba studied and contrasted the application of technology in tourism networking and management in the Southpansberg region where Lake Fundudzi is located, between what were essentially former White and Black population areas. He noted that after 5 years of national geographical re-integration, that very little in terms of tourism developments had taken place in the former Venda and Gazankulu Homelands in the Northern Province (now Limpopo Province). The study's conclusion was that there were the presence of a considerable range of tourism assets and a countryside internet superstructure in the Southpansberg region. However, there was a clear divide between the lead in tourism in former white race areas. But even more surprising were the great number of natural, mythological features and cultural (waterfalls, sacred landscapes, hot springs, thermal mountains, regal villages, battlefields etc.) in the former black areas that were completely untouched in terms of tourism plans or developments. The presence of these diverse features and the potential to extend ITC infrastructure for the benefit of tourism could not guarantee the success of tourism where the physical and organisational infrastructure was absent or underdeveloped (Anyumba, 2000).

At about the same time, Jennifer Briednhann and Steve Butts reviewed the emerging tourism policy in South Africa and their potential and consequences (Briednhann & Butts, 2001). They



felt that the formulation and adoption of appropriate tourism policy had been achieved by the Government. Reference was made coherence of national policy, empowering regions and local communities, entrepreneurial development, environmentally friendly tourism and sustainable tourism. However, they had issues with the fact of Government funding of tourism. They observed that 'no amount of funding will solve the current impasse unless a kind of planning order was in place and be continuously monitored. What was amiss was 'the lack of a clear and communicative organisational structure from national to local community level, direct lines of responsibility, and targeted and accountable funding.' (Briednhann J. & Butts. S, 2001)

Limpopo Province Tourism

The background of Limpopo Province Tourism lies in the South African Government's gradual restructure of tourism. According to Nthabiseng Tsoanamatsie (2014), 'The South African White Article on Tourism of 1996 stated that: It was South Africa's vision and mission to develop the tourism sector, in order for the sector to play an important role in the life of every South African and contribute significantly towards the improved quality of life for all.'

The National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) was formulated to inspire and accelerate the sustainable development and growth of the tourism industry for the period 2010 to 2020. According to Tsoanamatsie, 'The other national policy documents that recognize the importance of tourism include: Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy of 2012 – 2020; the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) of 2009; the New Growth Plan (NGP) of 2010; the Industrial Policy Action Plan 2 (IPAP2) as well as National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030'. By 2014 Tsoanamatsie further noted that Limpopo was then fourth out of the country's nine provinces in terms of the number of foreign tourists. However, that these visitation of Limpopo not entirely accompanied by high expenditure; given the fact that Limpopo is currently number six in terms of money spend in the province by foreign tourists. Furthermore, the type of tourist visiting Limpopo did not stay for long periods of time as the province was then the last in terms of the length of visits by foreign tourists.

The conclusion was that 'The tourism sector was vital for the Limpopo economy with a 5.4% total tourism spend as % of GDP in 2012. It was further deemed essential that all key stakeholders and policymakers in Limpopo needed to promote the tourism sector and strengthen its growth for the benefit of its people' (Tsoanamatsie, 2014).

Limpopo Tourism Agency (LTA)

The Limpopo Tourism Agency 2016 Report states that the purpose of the LTA is to "Promote and Offer Quality, Sustainable and Diverse Tourism Experience". Its responsibilities are to see that 'all tourism development, management and activities shall deliver on all areas of economic, social, environmental and personal, growth sustainability' (Limpopo Tourism Agency 2015/16 Report). If one takes into account the legislative mandate of the Limpopo Tourism Agency, then one can begin to understand the web that relates to tourism.

For the benefit of the reader, the following are the LTA's functions and powers. (i) Develop and implement a tourism marketing strategy within the framework of the provincial tourism strategies; (ii) Undertake and facilitate tourism research; (iii) Support tourism transformation and capacity building programmes; (iv) Enhance and enable tourism investment opportunities on provincial nature reserves; (v) Enhance the integration of tourism programmes through the establishment of formal partnerships with municipalities; (vi) Initiate tourism product development in provincial nature reserves; (vii) Provide hospitality services in provincial nature reserves; (viii) Subject to the Provincial Finance Management Act (PFMA) and other applicable legislation, establish strategic partnerships with community cooperatives,



organizations, government structures and tourism organizations for enhancing tourism marketing; (ix) Establish and maintain a database containing information relating to: Existing tourist attractions, infrastructure, facilities, services, location and access; Natural and cultural attractions that may be developed as tourist attractions in the province; and New areas of tourism activity and potential sites for these activities and Advise the MEC on any matter relating to the tourism industry; and perform any other function the MEC may assign or delegate to the Agency.

According to the 2015/16 Report internal re-organization left the Limpopo Tourism Agency with a single mandate of marketing Limpopo as the tourism destination of choice. The report further adds that Limpopo Tourism had been on the growth trajectory over the past years and this saw the province scoop the first position when it was announced the most visited destination in the domestic tourism arena. This was probably accounted for by tourists visiting Kruger National Park rather than other Limpopo destinations. It was also reported that the Limpopo Tourism Agency hosted 2015/2016 Domestic Tourism month in partnership with South African Tourism.

The African Ivory Route

Different parts of South Africa have been branded for specific type of regional tourist. Whilst some of the regional brands like the Garden Route have been around for a long time, the African Ivory Route (AIR) is comparatively young. The AIR was conceptualized in the late 1990s and was operationalized in the year 2000.

The African Ivory Route website states that the route 'was established with the adventure traveler in mind. A selection of unique and off the beaten track (camp) destinations were a more important consideration than ease of access... and may require 4 wheel drive vehicles' (African Ivory Route, 2017). The policy regarding camps were to have small 10 bed camps. The combination of smallness and the offer of game viewing on foot or from the camp's game viewing vehicle and schedule in accord with the tourists' preferences... 'would allow for a very personalized experience.' (African Ivory Route, 2017). The African Ivory Route was aimed at the individual adventurer and not the mass tourism market that perhaps would suit these incipient tourism regions.

Vhembe District Municipality (VDM) Tourism

Vhembe District Municipality is one of the 5 districts within Limpopo Province. Under the Vhembe District Municipality are four Local municipalities of Musina; Collins Chabane; Makhado and Thulamela. Lake Fundudzi lies within Thulamela Local Municipality. Under the provisions of the Municipality Structures Act of 2000, tourism is vested in District Municipalities, even though local municipalities can have parallel tourism departments.

The Vhembe District Municipality is divided into the following four sections; (i) Finance Department, (ii) Technical Services, (iii) Cooperative Services and (iv) Development Planning. Development planning that would be involved in plans and developments around Lake Fundudzi is divided into the following three sections; (i) Geographical Information Services (GIS), (ii) Spatial Planning and (iii) the Local Economic Department (LED).

The LED is responsible for (i) Agriculture, (ii) Enterprise Development and Tourism. The Tourism Department in turn is responsible for (i) Marketing the Vhembe District as a Tourism Destination, (ii) organizing and attending tourism exhibitions locally and internationally, (iii) Assisting Cooperatives, including community tourism cooperatives, (iv) Funding tourism projects and (v) Youth in Business Competition. Under Youth the latter Vhembe District Municipality organize young people who own tourism business in competitions.



The VDM organogram would appear to be simple in relation to tourism business development. However, the concern of this article was whether this layer of Government adds value to tourism enterprise. The open ended interview of officers responsible pointed out that VDM was a Government entity received funding from the government and was always available to assist emerging business owners. However, it was pointed out that most staff members do not have qualifications in tourism. This makes it problematic for staff members to communicate and educate community members with regards to tourism. A major challenge that VDM faces has been the mismanagement of Government funds from time to time (Frank Moffat et al, in press).

Thulamela Local Municipality (TLM) Tourism

The organogram structures of Thulamela Local Municipality are more or less similar to those of District Municipality described above. TLM has the reputation of managing their tourism business better than the District Municipality. Personal communications with officers that are known to the researchers stated that their compelling strengths lay in four areas. The first is that they are able to deliver the best services because they only focuses only on tourism in Thulamela Local Municipality. Secondly, there always have sufficient budget to market Thulamela as a destination. Third, the TLM involves and supports tourism business owners in local tourism exhibitions. Last but not least, the municipality liaises with LEDET (Limpopo, Department: Economic Development, Environment and Tourism) to develop signage for tourism attractions in Thulamela. However, our informants stated that the accessibility to most attractions were not guaranteed. That it was a challenge to work with Chiefs, who are traditional leaders in most of South Africa's former black rural areas. The tourism challenge was that the Chiefs were responsible for most attractions. Last but not least, was that the municipality did not fund tourism projects (Personal Contacts, June 2017)

Views of key informants

The two Key Informants, Mr. Mashudu Dima, a Vha-Venda cultural and Venda spiritual world expert as well as Mr. Nelson Tshimangadzo, a Certified Nature Tour Guide, Certified Cultural Tour Guide and a Venda spiritual world expert conceded that Government had put in place responsible structures and authorities with specific mandates regarding the development of tourism locally. However, the mutual feeling was that there was limited success on part of tourism development that touched communities in a sustainable manner. Their views were that there are some developments, but their impacts in attracting tourists and employment creation could be better structured or organised. It is asserted that tourists are too few and far in between. The two also identified the local people's entitlement attitudes in which the Government is seen as the solution to all problems and wishes. They were disappointed that villagers extend the 'begging bowl' whilst doing little to improve their circumstances. Another problematic area they identified was the mismatch between what the tourist may be willing to buy and the types of handicrafts produced. They noted that Venda wooden sculptures traditionally tend to be very large in size. For the craftsmen large sculptures are equated with earning a large income at once. However, the advice is that these products ought to be small and portable. No tourist in their right mind would buy these artifacts not only because of their sizes but also the expenses of flying them out of South Africa. The craftsmen, one suspects are unawares of these after sales expenses for the tourist. Mr. Dima and Mr. Tshimangadzo categorically stated that craftsmen do not adhere to expert advice.

Vha-Venda Culture Interacting with tourism

The purpose of this third section of the article is to come to terms with the Vha-Venda Culture as it relates to its sacred lake. This section starts with a brief background of the Venda people and their culture. This is followed by the mythology and folklore centered on the sacred lake Fundudzi. The complexities of the custodianship of Lake Fundudzi are also examined, before a verdict on the potential for tourism development is spelt out. Only after a comprehension of the Vha-Venda culture is one able to understand the impasse of tourism development around not only Lake Fundudzi, but also for example in tea and forest plantation developments around other sacred sites in Venda. This section informs on the interaction between the Venda culture and South Africa's tourism structural issues, which is the subject of the discussion in the fourth section of the article.

Vha-Venda People and Culture

The Vha-Venda or the Venda live in the northern part of South Africa in the Limpopo Province. They have been described by John Mackenzie as people 'who (are) led by traditional chiefs and headmen.' Furthermore, 'belief in ancestral spirits and animism remains strong'. Men and women in Vha-Venda society belong to specific age-grades that regulate their position in society' (Mackenzie, 2005). Similar to many traditional and modern societies, the Venda believe that when a person passes on, only the body that dies but the spirit lives on in the world of ancestors. However, contrary to the widely held paternalistic beliefs of the male as the natural communicator with God, the Vha-Venda believe that only females, i.e. the women can take a clan or society's messages to their ancestors. This arises from the notion that women are spiritually clean and men are not. Therefore Vho Makhadzi (or the woman) are the ones that perform rituals. The Makhadzi offers finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*) as a prelude to talking to ancestors. Rituals take place in a rhythmic cycle throughout the year. Some are undertaken as when one visits Lake Fundudzi anytime. Yet others take place in the Southern hemisphere's 'autumn' in September leaves are falling from trees. Similar to other traditional societies, the conversations with their ancestors is to do with ensuring rainfall, bounty harvests, plenty of animals and children. The fullness of the lake and its color are said to reflect the temper of the ancestors, and the possibility of rain. Rituals are undertaken for Venda children. Mature children in turn have their own ritual reception, which is referred to as the first reception.

The second reception is for elderly people and the third reception is for husbands and wives. As already noted Vho Makhadzi performs the rituals mostly in September of the Gregorian calendar. Linked to a close relationship with their traditions, the Vha Venda people have traditional schools. The Musevetho is the circumcision bush schools where boys become men. Naturally these are under the custodianship of men. This ritual is an annual rite of passage.



Figure 6. The Domba Dance Source: Google Images



The Python dance is a visual and audio spectacle (Figure 6). The dance is linked with the mythology of the Albino Python God resident in the Thathe Vondo Holy Forest to the east of Lake Fundudzi (Figure7). The Albino Python God that lives in the surrounding mountain, is believed to protect the sacred lake. Ago old secret and sacred sacrifices are made to this god by the responsible clan. Homage to the Python God is held annually by performing a puberty dance. The python dance is known as the `Domba`. In the performance of the Domba a string of many girls clutching on to each other dance in a rhythm imitating the movement of a snake to the beat of drums. Vha-Venda tradition has it that a young lady cannot get married without first learning how to dance the Domba. When it is the time for a young lady to get married, the Makhadzi will give the right girl a bracelet as a token to indicate that she is engaged.

In brief the rural Vha-Venda can be `classified` as traditional and conservative in their world view. This does not exclude the notion that the urban and modern Venda will follow customs and traditions without question. There are exceptions such as those who proclaim Christianity. Christian and Islamic values are a barrier to the understanding and performance of some traditional rites on part of many Vha-Venda. However, the traditional leadership and the social hierarchy is closely observed in the interaction of society with Lake Fundudzi (Anyumba, 2003) and other sacred sites dotting the Venda landscape.

Lake Fundudzi's Mythologies and Folklore

As already noted above from a geological perspective Lake Fundudzi is the only natural lake in South Africa. The lake was formed when a significant landslide blocked the flow of present River Mutale. However, from a Venda perspective, Lake Fundudzi takes on a different meaning from modern geological postulations.

The Vha-Venda people are also referred to the `Vhatatsindi`, or `People of the Pool`. This has linkages to their reverence of Lake Fundudzi. As already noted above Lake Fundudzi is one of Venda's most important sacred places. Vha-Venda mythology and folklore believe that Lake Fundudzi was created when a passing leper was refused food and shelter by villagers at the Mutale River. The leper cursed the village that subsequently vanished below the waters of the newly formed lake.

The Venda link the lake with mythologies and a hierarchy of ancestral beings. At the highest level is `Nwali`, the god of the Venda people before the impacts of Christian missionaries in this part of South Africa in the 19th century. Tradition has it that Nwali lives in a cave in Tate Vondo, a Sacred Forest to the east of Lake Fundudzi. Folklore has it that when Nwali travels from the cave to Lake Fundudzi to `bathe` this is accompanied by awesome lightning and thunder (Nelson Tshimangadzo, Personal Communications, 2017). Perhaps in close hierarchical ranking with Nwali is the Albino Python god. We established that although the colour is yellowish-white, the Venda refer to it as `albino`. This god lives in the forests and escarpments that surrounds the western and north eastern sectors of Lake Fundudzi (Tshimangadzo, Personal Communications, May 2017).

There are also ancestral spirits that inhabit the lake. The Venda chief and clan can tell the mood of the ancestors, supposedly by changes in the environment around the lake. There is the mythology of the Guardian White crocodile (Figure 8). What is of interest is that Lake Fundudzi has a reasonable population of `normal` crocodiles. It is also claimed that there is no record in living memory of any attacks of human beings on the shore or in the lake by these crocodiles. Indeed those brave enough swim with the crocodiles.



Figure 7. A White Python
Source: Google Images



Figure 8. A White Crocodile.
Source: Google Images



Figure 9. A View of Lake Fundudzi
Source: Google Images



Figure 10. The Fundudzi Supplication
Source: Authors

One of the folklore aspects is that the consequences of ignoring the leper's plea for food. The referred to village in the legend of the creation of the lake is at the bottom of Lake Fundudzi (Figure 9). Apart from the village, its former inhabitants have become half-human zombies (Zwididwana) that inhabit the lake. Those who perform the rituals claim to have sighted these zombies. There are further claims that in the early morning it is possible to hear the sound of drums from rocks that at times is above the level of the lake and the cries and bellowing of the drowned people and cattle. There are other rituals that those visiting Lake Fundudzi must/should perform. A visitor must turn one's back to the lake and must pray as one looks at the lake through their legs. We were informed that in this way even if one errs by doing the unacceptable by the lake unknowingly, the spirits of the lake will not punish the errant (Figure 10).

Custodianship of Lake Fundudzi

The Venda Clan is the spiritual custodian of Lake Fundudzi. The Chief of the clan, is responsible to keep the Lake and its environment spiritually clean and will keep away people and developments that he considers detrimental to the spiritual upkeep of the lake. The Chief with his group is responsible for making blood sacrifices to the gods of the lake and sacred forests.

In a Celebration of World Environmental Day in 2001 in Thohoyandou, the `capital' of the Venda, University of Venda researchers who were trying to establish the relationship between deforestation taking place by Lake Fundudzi and the siltation of the lake were openly rebuked for having not contacted the Chief for such research work. The fact that the researchers were Afrikaners (white South Africans), may have made matters worse. The custodianship of the lake and the forest from time to time is contested, especially when the clan head passes on. Although these places are firmly under Traditional Authority custodianship, there are from time to time, conflicts with Government's plans for tourism development as well as local people's needs to create self-employment. Examples include sand dredging along tributary rivers and deforestation in search of wood fuel, despite very high levels of rural electrification.



To conclude this section the question is what does the traditional belief system of the Venda mean in terms of tourism development around sacred places? In other words what can be done and what cannot be touched? It is reasonably clear that in the circumstances where society's traditions are cohesively adhered to in what others may view as fairly conservative in outlook, keeping sacred places untouched from 'outsiders' will prevail. We can speculate that it is self-evident that with the level the Venda society views their sacred spaces supported with powerful mythology and folklore, traditional clans that claim ownership of sacred places and chieftaincies with powers as custodians of these sacred spaces, significant transformations of sacred places into bustling tourism destinations is not going to happen, unless society abandons their beliefs or the custodianship by chiefs is corrupted or undermined.

However, on a more pro-tourism note by our Venda cultural experts, there was the opinion expressed that it was possible to have tourism around the sacred lake, but that it would have to be some acceptable physical distance away from the lake. This we felt was speculative. The person to give the answer to this would be Chief Vhatavhatshidi, who is the leader of the Netshidzivha / Nethathe Clan, the traditional custodian of Lake Fundudzi.

SWOT Analysis and discussion

The purpose of this section was to undertake a broad SWOT Analysis of all the tourism structures and Vha-Venda cultural factors considered above. In the SWOT Analysis framework indicators are entered and these became the basis of the discussion around the sacred lake that is not open to tourism development.

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis can only highlight critical issues that have been identified in the body of the article. Their results are the basis for the discussion that follows in section 4.2 to 4.6.

Table 1. SWOT Analysis of Tourism Structures and Vha-Venda Cultural Factors

| Items | Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| South Africa and Japan | The two countries have embassies that do exchange ideas including tourism. | South Africa's stagnant economy (at less than 1% GDP per annum) not growing tourism numbers. | Learn how Japan incorporates its sacred places as tourism destinations. | Poor economic performance impacts negatively on South Africa tourism numbers. |
| Location of Lake Fundudzi | Approximately one and a half hours from Kruger National Park – South Africa's No.1 tourism destination. | Not linked to tourists who visit Kruger National Park. Under developed and obstacles to tourism development. | Develop staged safari to or from Kruger National Park that includes these study areas. | If not incorporated in main stream tourism, tourism potential will remain unknown. |
| Access to Lake Fundudzi | Local people freely give directions. Also volunteer untrained guides avail themselves to tourists. | Poor road signage through Thathe Forest and local villages. Need 4X4 drive, no support for the physically handicapped | Improve knowledge of the many bush and mountainous vehicular routes. | May tourists unknowingly err on the culturally unacceptable |
| International Tourism | Insignificant numbers of international heritage tourists. Tourism driven by SADC visitors. | Lake Fundudzi appears to be unknown to high paying tourists. | Kruger National Park is literally 'next door' that could be linked with the lake. | Without 're-invention' international tourism market will by-pass the region. |



| Items | Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Domestic Tourism | Basically driven by South Africans. | Sluggish national economy is detrimental to domestic tourism. | The opportunities to re-invent the tourism wheel must be sought. | Poor South African economic performance has negative impacts. |
| Legacy of Apartheid Tourism | Lessons on what must not happen to tourism development must be learnt. | Still the excuse for a negative attitude to tourism. | Lessons on what support mechanisms worked and what did not work must be pointed out. | This legacy can be dismissed as historically irrelevant. |
| Limpopo Tourism | Good tourism numbers from the onset – 1994. | Poor international tourism expenditure. | Re-invent and incentivize Limpopo tourists. | Policy inertia will kill the seeding of new tourism |
| Limpopo Tourism Agency | The mandate is all comprehensive | May be subject to internal conflicts of interest. | De-banking some of its functions may be necessary | Lack of significant transformations for the small tourism players |
| African Ivory Route | The idea of a circuit for tourist that offers opportunities for development and linkages with other routes | Does not cater for mass tourism. Remote and rough even for 4 wheel drive. Small clientele base | Needs to be evaluated and be reinvigorated | Low tourist numbers may be insufficient for sustainable tourism |
| Vhembe District Municipality | There a large number of geophysical assets that remain to be developed as destinations | Weak on technical staff to support tourism. Repeated mismanagement of funds | Incorporate tourism's private , tertiary sector , PPP | Without fundamental changes, it is difficult to justify its existence |
| Thulamela Local Municipality | Focused and favorable reputation in the execution of tourism | Traditional Chiefs, the custodians of the majority of rural tourism assets are a challenge to deal with | Education of Chiefs and the communities on the potential of cooperation & partnerships | Tourism 'shot in the foot' by political territoriality |
| Views of Key Informants | They have both world views – steeped in Venda culture but also aware of tourism's structural issues | They may not be taken seriously by the constituency that needs to listen and learn from them | They can be the link between the world of the Venda and that of the Private Sector | They may be ignored by traditionalists and modernists to the detriment of the situation |
| Vha-Venda People & Culture | They have a very cohesive cultural and traditional belief system in place | The urbanite Venda and youth unschooled in tradition may gradually erode the culture | Get the youth to understand the Venda values and generate new products that the world can consume | There may be a conflict of cultures between the conservative elders and the youth in how to handle opportunities presented |
| Mythology & Folklore | A conservative but cohesive basis of belief | Beliefs are already challenged by Christian Venda. Beliefs may be eroded by young generation unawares or indifferent to the culture that supports the beliefs | There are great opportunities for production of these mythological figures – books, animation, the arts, sculpture, painting, theater, cinematography etc. | Since these myths and folklore are sacred, there may be a conflict in opening them to opportunities noted |
| Custodianship of the sacred lake | There are other world heritage sites that are sacred and are open to the world that the custodians of | The custodianship of the sacred lake may be the subject of contestation as the Chief passes on. The custodian is a human being subject | The opportunity to accept that change is inevitable and accept the first small steps in the transformation, as in the depicting the | If there is no movement, then the status quo will remain as is, without any gains |



| Items | Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats |
|---------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| | Fundudzi may be made aware of. | to the temptation of venality | characters of their sacred mythology | |
| Private Service Providers | The private sector is already engaged in a limited way in camps, treks, cycling, 4x4 adventure tourism | The private sector is not involved to the extent they could be involved | The private sector can make a difference with the right networks which they have | Unless welcome the private sector will stay away. |

Discussion

The following discussion is based on the SWOT Analysis above. It collates the Strengths, the Weaknesses, the Opportunities and Threats that are noted above, one at a time.

The Strengths of the Arguments.

From the preceding section the collective strengths of tourism and the culture of the Vha-Venda are evident. These are positives that the existing situation can learn from. The strengths of the finding are as follows. Japan that has hosted the 2017 International Conference on Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism that inspired this article has a number of World Heritage sites that are sacred to the Japanese and open to the non-Japanese. These have the potential to offer lessons for South Africa in general and the Venda in particular. The Sacred Lake Fundudzi, the subject of this article is in close in time and distance from South Africa's leading tourism destination, - the Kruger National Park. This is a positive position for the lake.

Despite the absence of clear directional signage, the local people will happily give directions of accesses to Lake Fundudzi. South Africa has attracted and continues to pull in a large number of international tourists annually since it became a democratic state in 1994. The majority of the international tourism drivers are its SADC neighbors in close proximity with South Africa. South Africans citizens have driven domestic tourism in large numbers since the end of Apartheid South Africa. The number of travellers is encouraging as it relates to the national population. Whilst the Legacy of Apartheid was repugnant and unacceptable as a political and business model, in the democratic dispensation state in which South Africa now finds itself, the lessons of apartheid tourism offers must not be ignored. The South African Government and the National Department of Tourism, through a number of laws have the right assortment of tourism entities from National to Provincial, such as the Limpopo Tourism Agency with clear mandates of what to do to further develop tourism. The African Ivory Route can be considered as the regional tourism brand that can provide the basis of further evolution of the heritage or cultural tourism of the region. The Southpansberg region that includes the sacred lake, still has a number of geo-physical and human history features that can be the basis of offering a diversity of heritage tourism development. The Venda culture which is still relatively conservative and cohesive is the firm basis of determining what tourism intervention can take place that would be meaningful to them as a cultural group. The Custodian Chief and Venda Traditional structures are thus in control of the kinds of interventions that would be acceptable. The mythology and folklore provides the strength of belief in the sacredness of the lake. There are other World Heritage sites that have been globalized that the custodians of the sacred lake can be made aware of. Tourism development is not necessarily negative. Tourism's private sector is already affiliated to the tourism projects that are operate in the region.

The Weaknesses of the Arguments



South Africa's poor economic performance for the past few years is stagnating tourism numbers and tourism growth. Locally road signage that lead to Lake Fundudzi are very poor. It is difficult to find Lake Fundudzi on local maps and even tourism attraction maps. Vehicular routes in close proximity to the lake can be very confusing. The approach through the R523 and through the numerous routes in the sacred Thathe Forest and the related commercial tree plantations definitely requires a local guide. A 4x4 vehicle is a must. One must be prepared to trek some distance in difficult bush and the routes do not accommodate the physically challenged.

Lake Fundudzi is not sufficiently marketed at the international, national and even regional levels, and is thus unknown to the millions of tourist who by-pass it as they head to the magnificent Kruger National Park and to Gauteng Province. Unfortunately the legacy of apartheid tourism as 'a White people's thing' is still an excuse for inaction for participating in tourism development. The African Ivory Route as a brand does not cater for the kind and numbers of tourism clientele that would make a difference in sustainable tourism with the kind of tourism operations in the region. Some Government agencies do not have the correct i.e. qualified technical people in its tourism departments thus resulting in weak technical support in tourism with communities and other stakeholders.

The key informants who stride the spiritual and material world of the Venda and tourism may be, and in many instances are not, listened to by decision makers. Therefore those best equipped to guide the way forward are ignored. There is the danger that in time the folklore and mythology may be eroded through the ignorance of the next generation of the Venda. Christian Venda and the urbanite youth already have doubts of their folklore and will not perform the necessary rituals at the lake, because they stand opposed to their spiritual beliefs. The custodianship of the sacred lake may be the subject of contestation, especially at a time when the Chief who 'owns' the lake passes on. The Chief can also be the subject of pressure to accept 'culturally unacceptable' tourism developments. A determined corrupter will find a willing corruptee. Tourism's private sector is not involved in linking the lake with other regional tourism as an additional tourism offering.

Opportunities presented in the Arguments

Japan with its numerous sacred sites and World Heritage Sites can offer lessons to South Africa on how to incorporate these spiritually sensitive locations into tourism destinations. Opportunities should be explored around how to link Lake Fundudzi to the main stream tourism routes such as those to the Kruger National Park along the R524 and tourist from SADC countries, many of them who use the N1 Highway, both which are in close proximity to the lake. If tourism is to take place, local road signage, maps and GPS digitization of route are candidates for ICT intervention.

From the point of view of the apartheid legacy of tourism, there are lessons to be learnt on what worked and what did not work. There are always lessons that can be learnt from the negative. The African Ivory Route needs to be re-examined, given that it is 17 years in operation and may be revamped to take into account the linkages that need to happen, such as linking Lake Fundudzi with the Kruger National Park and other Southpansberg tourism routes. Where Government entities, such as municipalities lack the requisite technical expertise, they should consider of municipally sanctioned 'out of the box' thinking to incorporate other stakeholders in their tourism business plans or communications with communities or the private sector. The Key Informants are in a position to link the Venda world view of their culture and sacred areas with that of commercial tourism. They should be utilized to bridge existing knowledge gaps. There is the opening for the youth to understand the underlying cultural values so that they can conceptualize of products to sell to an awaiting tourism and entertainment world. There are great and opportunities if the commercialization



of the Lake Fundudzi's mythological figures and folklore can be approved by those traditional leadership who are in charge to depict them in books, animation, the arts, sculpture, painting, theater, cinematography etc. The Royalties would be a great source of revenue for communities. Change is inevitable as in a younger generation of Venda who will embrace transformation, the Custodian Chief and other tourism stakeholders must be prepared in advance for what is perhaps inevitable. With the right incentives the private tourism service providers can be induced to offer services that are missing at community level tourism.

Threats embedded in the Arguments

The prevailing poor South African economic performance for the past few years has had stagnating impacts on domestic tourism and possibly the roll out of new tourism ideas. Without the re-imagining of the international tourist market as it impacts the Southpansberg, the region will not gain from the tourist traffic will continue to bypass Lake Fundudzi and other assets with the potential for tourism development. In the rush to usher in tourism development, there is the threat of unknowingly going into territories that would stop any development of tourism.

The apartheid legacy of tourism can be dismissed as having no lasting lessons to offer today's tourism. This would however be an erroneous route to take. The African Ivory Route brand could be under threat because it may not be the right brand to uplift the small tourism enterprises in the Southpansberg region. Non-performing Government entities are not useful. There is the threat of their demise, as has happened to the former Mutale Local Municipality that the Demarcation Board did away with. The study's key informants may be ignored in terms of their understanding of the situation. There is the potential cultural conflict between the conservative elders and the youth upon the realization of the commercial opportunities highlighted herein. Since the lake is sacred, there is the real threat of a fallout in commercializing the items that relate to the folklore and mythology of the Venda. If the custodianship of the lake remain under its current 'rigid' chieftain dispensation, then the status quo will prevail with no movement to attract the tourists and generate employment and income that are part of tourism development. Unless the private sector and 'outsiders' are welcome for what they can contribute, they will stay away from the tourism issues they may be able to assist in resolving.

Conclusions

This study set out to determine why the Sacred Lake Fundudzi located in the northern extremity of South Africa has not developed as a significant tourism destination. Virtually any place in the world which is rich with the range of mythology and folklore that is related to the Sacred Lake, would have readily developed a steady stream of heritage tourists paying homage to the place throughout the year. The Loch Ness and its discredited dinosaur in Scotland readily comes to mind. The article has pointed out to an agreeable extent the reasons why the potential for tourism development is curtailed. There are two opposing forces that may be loosely referred to as 'traditional' forces and 'modernization' forces that have not found out how to co-evolve, co-develop and co-exist for mutual and sustainable benefit. The last word, is that if these legitimate but opposing 'world views' do not accept the need to make inroads and understand one another, then it is going to be the proverbial case of 'gold everywhere, but nobody can see it and thus not mine it.'

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