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Local natural and cultural heritage assets and community based tourism: Challenges and opportunities

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(Submitted: 23 November 2015; Revision accepted: 26 February 2016)

Abstract

Community based tourism (CBT) is seen as an opportunity which mass tourism does not offer for, especially, rural communities to develop their natural and cultural assets into tourism activities for the benefit of the community. The point of CBT is that the community, collectively and individually, gains a livelihood from home-stay activities, tourist guiding, producing crafts from the local environment, offering traditional food and drinks, and generally organising, exploiting and maintaining the natural and cultural environment. Community tourism development includes all the functions of planning, development, marketing and management of the natural and cultural heritage, and requires community decision-making. However, the communities under review face critical challenges which need to be converted into opportunities, including own-control of facilities, security of natural and cultural resources, infrastructure, carrying-capacity of the environment, regulatory frameworks, and skills development. The research took the form of case studies at local villages, of which Noqhekwane is the subject of this article. The study revealed that sufficient natural and cultural attractions exist in Noqhekwane, but that the threats identified to both cultural and physical environments are serious.

Keywords: Challenges, community based tourism, opportunities, tourism.

How to cite this article:

Jugmohan, S., Spencer, J.P. & Steyn, J.N. (2016). Local natural and cultural heritage assets and community based tourism: Challenges and opportunities. *African Journal for Physical Activity and Health Sciences*, 22(1:2), 306-317.

Introduction

The tourism sector continues to grow despite challenges and, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) secretary-general, 'in spite of the many challenges the world faced in 2014, international tourism continued to propel ahead. At the years' close, the number of tourists travelling internationally grew by 4.4%, reaching a new milestone of 1.135 billion tourists, and capping a five-year consecutive increase since the global economic crisis of 2009' (Rifai, 2014:2). Within the concept of tourism, cultural and natural features and heritage present themselves as major tourist attractions and, consequently, can also suffer from their own success. As properly suggested

overcrowding does occur at many natural and cultural destinations and attractions, for example beaches at Durban and East London, especially during peak holiday-periods. Traffic and people congestion as a result of (mass) tourism is increasingly a problem at sites in South Africa (Brooks, 2005). As such it is important that proper management of cultural and natural attractions are practised to allow sustainability of such resources, and in this context, for example, the UNWTO published the *Guidebook for Tourism Congestion Management at Natural and Cultural Heritage Sites*, in January 2005 in Madrid (Brooks, 2005), after the International Scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism (ICOMOS) published *ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter: Principles and Guidelines for Managing Tourism at Places of Cultural and Heritage Significance* (ICOMOS, 2002). These two documents set the pattern for the management and conservation of heritage sites, and are expected to be used by organisations responsible for local natural and cultural facilities, which include United Nations-designated world heritage sites. Cultural and natural features are, therefore, important tourist attraction-assets and they need to be managed accordingly in a sustainable manner with proper capacity of the involved stakeholders.

Within the tourism sector community-based tourism (CBT) has been specifically identified as a community development tool ([Giampiccoli, Saayman & Jugmohan, 2014](#)). CBT has been proposed to have various characteristics and challenges (Saayman & Giampiccoli, pending), at the same time CBT potential is also recognised (Moscardo, 2008; [Giampiccoli, Saayman & Jugmohan, 2014](#)).

The purpose of this study is to specifically investigate challenges and opportunities of natural and cultural tourism assets and infrastructures in CBT development, and to briefly posit them in relation to carrying- and community capacity. Proper management of such assets is a prerequisite for the sustainability of CBT projects/ventures. To augment and complement the literature review the article briefly sketches a case study by Jugmohan (2015) and it is relevant as '(T)he literature does not reveal any previous research on the evaluation of CBT pre-conditions through the perspectives of its members' (Jugmohan, 2015:5).

Within this milieu the article proposes issues of decision-making, infrastructure, control of assets, scarcity of tourism resources and carrying-capacity that are seen relevant in the positive management of cultural and natural attractions assets. Natural and cultural assets are considered within the heritage concept for the purpose of this article where:

Heritage is a broad concept and includes the natural as well as the cultural environment. It encompasses landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, as well as biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural

practices, knowledge and living experiences. It records and expresses the long processes of historic development, forming the essence of diverse national, regional, indigenous and local identities and is an integral part of modern life. It is a dynamic social reference point and positive instrument for growth and change. The particular heritage and collective memory of each locality or community is irreplaceable and an important foundation for development, both now and into the future emphasis in the original document (ICOMOS, 2002).

Literature Review

Tourism and environment are closely related where tourist-activities rely heavily on the natural and cultural environment (Goh, 2015). Tourism is promoted as a development tool and it is relevant to culture and heritage as such, and one of the key concepts of the *ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter Principles and Guidelines for Managing Tourism at Places of Cultural and Heritage Significance*, which indicates that domestic and international tourism is one of the foremost vehicles of cultural exchange, providing personal experience of that which has survived from the past as well as the contemporary life and society of others. It can capture the economic benefits of cultural resources and is an important generator of economic development, when managed successfully. Tourism should bring benefits to the host community and be planned to avoid adverse impacts on the authenticity and physical expression of the cultural heritage. Poorly managed or excessive tourism can have negative effects on the local community and their places of cultural significance (ICOMOS, 2002).

Conventional tourism has been suggested to be not without problems towards its relation with cultural and natural heritage, indicating that conventional tourism is subject to the same problems encountered in the past in natural and cultural heritage especially when 'conventional' tourism is controlled, managed and owned by external resources, often resulting in a leakage of income (and sometimes resources) to these external sources away from the local communities (Wearing & McDonald, 2002). Thus criticism of 'mass tourism' during the 1970s gave rise to interest in 'alternative tourism' during the 1980s' and within this context '(C)ommunity-based tourism (CBT) emerged during this era as a subset of alternative tourism and is regarded as especially sustainable from a social perspective emphasising local community management and empowerment' (Le, Weaver, Lawton, 2012:362). As such CBT is seen as a 'more sustainable form of development than conventional mass tourism [and] is not detrimental to their [community] culture, traditions or indeed, their day-to-day convenience' (Timothy, 2002:150) and 'CBT initiatives also encourage respect for local traditions and culture as well as for natural heritage' (SNV, 2007:9). Importantly in CBT, the community is at the heart of the tourism development process. Thus a proposed definition given by a participant at a conference of the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the

Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC) indicated that all CBT should be (local) community owned, managed and controlled for the benefit of that community where the community makes the decisions, which are decisions following the bottom-up approach involving the main community role-players (COMCEC, 2013). Linking community role in CBT with natural and cultural matters Nelson (2004:3) specifically proposes that '(C)ommunity-based tourism refers more specifically to tourism activities or enterprises that involve local communities, occur on their lands, and are based on their cultural and natural assets and attractions.' Along the same lines Suansri (2003:14) suggests that CBT must consider 'environmental, social, and cultural sustainability', managed by the community-owners and allowing tourists' to increase their awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life (Suansri, 2003:14). CBT has also been linked to peace building in a context of trans-disciplinary research (Upadhayaya, 2015) and it has been as potential strategies for forest-dependent communities through the proper valorisation of local natural and cultural resources (Burgin & Zama, 2014). CBT should not be considered as a one sector-type of tourism, but that CBT offers a range of activities and facilities involving local communities, and will 'include home-stay families, community tour guides, craftsmen, performers, community leaders, local restaurants, farmers, and other interesting roles. Guests may stay with a local family in a home-stay or a community-owned lodge, or even a community campsite' (Hasan & Islam, 2015:290).

CBT aims to empower disadvantaged people and therefore 'is mostly directed towards fostering development in disadvantaged contexts' (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015:29), where it has been proposed that '(W)ithin a globalisation perspective, developing countries have certain advantages in terms of their unique product offerings, often associated with pristine natural resources and cultural heritage; this includes the demand for wildlife tourism, especially in Africa' but caution needs to be exercised from spoiling natural attractions from over-zealous developers. 'Unfortunately the 'naturalness' of an area, of the communities and their culture, is what attracts many tourists to these places' (Jugmohan, 2015:14).

CBT development is a multi-task approach where '(T)he processes involved in CBT include all aspects of planning, development, marketing and management of resources and facilities for this form of tourism. Primarily, visitor provision includes access to cultural heritage and rural and natural areas, guide and interpretative services, accommodation, catering, sales of produce and handicrafts, and transportation' (CBI, 2015:6). As such '(C)ommunity participation in decision making and sustainable use of natural and cultural resources is a characteristic of CBT. However, lack of capacity is a limitation linked to community and tourism development' (Jugmohan, 2015:38). Often difficulties arise in the relationship between CBT development, local community

members and external factors and ‘(W)hile the notion of CBT stresses that many of these projects and products are indeed focused on a local community (and its natural and cultural heritage), in practice, they are seldom controlled and managed by that community; “community-centred tourism” would actually be a more accurate term’ (Salazar, 2012:11). The Department of Tourism in South Africa highlighted a number of zones, especially along the Eastern Cape Wild Coast, for community-based tourism enterprises (horse-riding trails for example) within pristine natural resources. Development was (and still is) restricted by a lack of entrepreneurial skills, capacity-building, transport and other infrastructure, and a lack of local resources (Goh, 2015).

While it will not be discussed in this article, it is worth mentioning (to more fully cover the issues of natural and cultural resources in CBT) another issue related to natural and cultural assets in CBT and is related to guiding, the interpreter to the tourist of such assets. It is recognised that ‘(G)uides are indispensable to convey to tourists the richness of local natural and cultural Heritage’ (Salazar, 2012:15) as such guiding ‘constitutes a strategic factor in the representation of a community, next to influencing the quality of the tourist experience, the length of stay and the resulting economic benefits for the community’ (Salazar, 2012:15). Thus guiding should be an important element in the interpretations and deliveries of local natural and cultural resources-knowledge to visitors.

Within this context the issue of tourism carrying-capacity becomes relevant as carrying-capacity comprises various dimensions, including natural and cultural factors (Häusler & Strasdas, 2003; Suansri, 2003; Calanog, Reyes & Eugenio, 2012), however, it has been indicated that ‘(I)t is much easier to establish indicators for carrying capacity in the fields of ecology and economics than for carrying capacity regarding social and cultural changes’ (Häusler & Strasdas, 2003:37). In addition, carrying capacity should be seen as a precondition in CBT operations, monitoring and evaluation, thus ‘(T)he carrying capacity of the environment or the community (i.e. the ability to absorb the impacts of tourism in the area) should be decided on in advance, and impact indicators to measure change should be built into each part of the project’s operations’ (Asker, Boronyak, Carrard & Paddon, 2010:36).

In some cases carrying-capacity in community based environmental tourism (CBET) can also be seen as a difficult and contradictory matter, such as in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) countries, where proposing that when it comes to CBET the carry-capacity of the destination/attraction could be a restraining issue as eco-tourism depends on ‘small’ numbers of tourists with a specific interest in what is on offer at the site. Thus a balance must be found by areas with natural and/or cultural heritage to accommodate tourists, while protecting the interests of the communities offering these sites, but allowing for community development (Raj Khanal & Tahir Babar, 2007).

In addition, it is important to foster specific legal frameworks for legislative support of the effort on communities. Within this context legislative frameworks are essential to maintain the competitive yet sustainable tourism attractiveness of the site. Both the private sector (for the development of the facility) and the local community (for the management and control of the site) need to comply with the regulatory framework (UNWTO, 2014). In Uganda, for example '(T)he *Tourism Policy and Master Plan* provides a detailed overview of the tourism sector defining the Governments' development objectives in tourism and providing guidance on how to achieve its vision and national development objectives in areas such as management and regulation, infrastructure development and protection and preservation of natural and cultural heritage' (UNWTO, 2014:46). Within Tanzania suggestions on the potential of cultural tourism to unlock potential for community development have been advanced by proposing decent management and control of natural and cultural facilities for all local communities to establish micro tourism enterprises, selling locally produced goods and services to discerning tourists. Specific product-development, marketing and capacity-building should lead to diversification of natural and cultural facilities in CBT, and provide a decent income and living for these communities; Tanzania, over the past two decades, is therefore a good case in point (UNWTO, 2014). It could be that specific policies and legislation in CBT could also be proposed and within them specific attention to issues related to natural and cultural resources advanced.

Methodology

This article deals with a study in South Africa of a CBT project in relation to local natural and cultural resources and local capacity. These matters are linked given that '(C)ommunity participation in decision making and sustainable use of natural and cultural resources is a characteristic of CBT. However, insufficient capacity is a limitation linked to community and tourism development' (Jugmohan, 2015:38). In addition, going beyond local natural and cultural resources and local capacity it seems important to check the matter related to local infrastructures, as infrastructures usually also determine the tourist-access and tourist-attractiveness of the area. In addition it can be important to consider that physical/natural and cultural tourism assets and infrastructures are seen as a pre-condition in CBT development (Jugmohan, 2015).

The village of Noqhekwane is located about 5 km from Port St. Johns, and boasts a range of natural and cultural attractions (mostly based on the Mpondo people-culture); its access is by gravel road, but '(T)he village is difficult to access with small cars especially on rainy days' (Jugmohan, 2015:93), and the villagers have been involved in CBT for a numbers of years (Giampiccoli & Hayward Kalis, 2012; Jugmohan, 2015). While the history of CBT could also elucidate CBT matters in the village, it is here proposed that natural and cultural

resources are mostly not linked to the history of the project; as they are ‘naturally’ endowed they are not given by the CBT history itself but they are there with or without CBT. This article focuses on aspects of local natural and cultural resources and infrastructures seen from a community perspective. Proper local natural and cultural resources and infrastructures are seen as a relevant pre-condition in CBT development (Jugmohan, 2015). At the same time, the CBT member’s awareness of these is relevant in CBT, as CBT should be controlled and managed by them. The study took the form of intensive interviews with all 17 members involved in the CBT project in Noqhekwane, and all respondents agreed that Noqhekwane ‘had sufficient physical and natural assets to attract tourists’ thus physical and natural assets can be interpreted as a pre-condition opportunity (Jugmohan, 2015:142). Table 1 specifically indicates the most interesting attractions as perceived by CBT members.

Results

Table 1: Most interesting natural attractions as perceived by CBT members

Physical and natural assets	Frequency
Fishing – natural swimming pool	1
Vulture colony	1
Forests, river	9
Waterfalls	1
Animals	1
Rural life and attractions in the village	3
Sea	10
Nature and culture	8
Caves	7
Friendly people	1
Crime free	1

Source: Jugmohan (2015:143)

Results on cultural attractions as perceived by CBT members are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Interesting cultural attractions as perceived by CBT members

Cultural assets	Frequency
Culture	1
Traditional food tasting	5
Meeting people	1
Traditional dance	13
Ingadla – women’s dresses	1
Camping / sea	1
Architecture	1
Accommodation rondavels	10
<i>Sangomas</i> and traditional healers	6
Beadwork	1

Source: Jugmohan (2015:145)

As far as cultural assets are concerned it was found that ‘cultural tourism is one of the most important components of CBT, and adding that culture, history and archaeology form the main attraction of a community’ (Jugmohan, 2015:144)

In Noqhekwane all respondents believe that the village ‘was attractive to tourists in terms of dance, food, and architectural style..’, consequently cultural assets ‘can therefore be regarded as an *opportunity* for CBT’ (Jugmohan, 2015:145).

In relation to infrastructures all respondents ‘agreed that government should improve the infrastructure for the benefit of tourists’ in Noqhekwane (Jugmohan, 2015:141). However, the pre-condition *infrastructure* can be considered a *challenge* and an *opportunity* in Noqhekwane. The roads leading to Noqhekwane can be difficult to access with small cars, so the CBT project cannot target the greater market. Nevertheless, project members can turn this challenge into an opportunity by targeting a niche market of 4x4 owners. CBT projects at the development stages are unable to handle large numbers of tourists therefore targeting a niche market should control the influx of visitors. The Noqhekwane CBT project can benefit further by specifically encouraging visitors to use their horse and hiking trail (HTT) from the Port St Johns riverbank to their village. Road infrastructure in the province is severely underdeveloped, and impedes optimal tourism development. Much of the road network is gravel, particularly in rural areas; consequently the tourism potential is unexplored in these areas’ (Jugmohan, 2015:141).

It can be said that local members see positively the natural and cultural assets of the village as potential tourism attractions, however, lack of infrastructures does jeopardise this potential. The positiveness of tourism attractions is confirmed; to the question if ‘*The CBT offers enough attractions to attract tourists*’ 15 Noqhekwane respondents agreed that Noqhekwane did offer enough attractions for tourists (the other two respondents were neutral in the answer) (Jugmohan, 2015:149).

Linking these issues with matters related to carrying capacity - threats to physical and cultural environments based on number of tourists – it is interesting to note that a variety of answers is present. Table 3 indicates the level of awareness related to natural and cultural threat based on increase number of tourists.

It would appear that while full agreement among community members is present in relation to their natural and cultural assets, discordance is more accentuated in relation to the threat that increased numbers of tourists can posit upon such natural and cultural assets. Table 3 largely reveals that local community members do not see threats in the increase of tourism on their natural and cultural assets. This local perspective could be dangerous; if ‘extremised’ the

increase in the number of tourists will be more likely to pose threats to natural and cultural assets if not properly managed, and proper capacity of the CBT members should be seen as of paramount importance in this context. However, in Noqhekwane, education and capacity-building to overcome challenges of excessive tourist-numbers and expanding CBT, has been found as a challenge and more training is proposed (Jugmohan, 2015). In this context it is seen as relevant to the need to properly facilitate CBT members to understand and evaluate (monitoring and evaluation) the impacts of tourists on natural and cultural resources. Without proper management of such resources (the same resources upon which tourism is based), not only could the natural and cultural assets be damaged but CBT could prove unsustainable as the resources upon which it is based will decrease their attractiveness potential. Lack of proper education and capacity can jeopardise the growth and sustainability of the CBT.

Table 3: Threats to the physical and cultural environments perceived by CBT members

Threats to the physical environment	Answer	Frequency
I think the increase in the number of tourists could damage the natural environment	Disagree	15
	Neutral	2
	Agree	-
The increase of tourists in the CBT project will improve the local natural environment	Disagree	3
	Neutral	-
	Agree	14
I think if the number of tourists increases, the village will have more water problems	Disagree	15
	Neutral	2
	Agree	-
I think if the number of tourists increases, there will be more scarcity of fish to be fished	Disagree	11
	Neutral	-
	Agree	6
Threats to local culture		
I think if the number of tourists increases, it could change my way of life	Disagree	16
	Neutral	1
	Agree	-
I think if the tourist numbers increase, this could give problems to the village	Disagree	16
	Neutral	-
	Agree	1
The increase of tourists in the CBT project will improve the village	Disagree	-
	Neutral	-
	Agree	17

Source: Jugmohan, 2015:164, 166.

Conclusion

This article proposes matters relating to natural and cultural (and infrastructures) assets in relation to CBT development. This has been done also by mentioning the connection of such assets to carrying-capacity and local living-capacity. Natural and cultural assets are fundamental factors in attracting tourists to specific areas and communities as such these assets need to be properly managed to enhance the long-term sustainability of any CBT development. Unfortunately, most communities lack specific capacity and understandings on matters related to carrying capacity. This mismatch can jeopardise natural and cultural assets and CBT development and sustainability.

The article emphasises that while natural and cultural assets are present and recognised by local communities involved in CBT development, the danger of increasing the number of tourist without proper capacity seems overlooked or is not fully understood. At the same time local community-members recognise that weakness of infrastructure is an obstacle to CBT development, so proper capacity building is a relevant, and possibly fundamental, factor that could enhance CBT long-term sustainability favouring (improving) proper management of the natural and cultural assets. The article strives to establish that local resources face challenges and opportunities and needs to be properly managed, and as tourism assets they need to be fully included in the facilitation programme aimed at favouring community capacity building.

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