Opportunities and Challenges of Religious Tourism Development in Uganda: Policy, Planning and Institutional Perspectives

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Religious tourism is a steadily growing tourism product niche in Uganda after wildlife-based tourism. However, limited research has curtailed planning and development of religious tourism in the country. As a contribution to knowledge on his subject, this paper analyses the tourism policy, planning and institutional frameworks as a precursor to harnessing the potential of religious tourism in the country. Applying a mixed methods approach, the evolution of religious tourism in Uganda was reviewed. To examine actor perceptions and benefits of religious tourism, two case studies were undertaken with the help of a structured questionnaire and key informant interviews. A SWOT analysis was conducted to analyse the policy, planning and institutional frameworks of religious tourism. Findings reveal that in spite of limited institutional input, religious travel has organically evolved since the 1880s. Worshipers, visitors and neighbouring community at the religious sites concur that religious tourism can be developed as it generates socio-religious and economic benefits. The SWOT analysis indicates that Uganda has a high religious tourism potential with a number of sites located in different parts of the country. However, their potential is not yet fully realised due to a number of gaps in policy, planning and institutional frameworks. The paper recommends the establishment of a comprehensive policy, planning and institutional framework to guide actor coordination, infrastructure and facilities development, product diversification, sustainable financing and research.

Key Words: religious tourism, policy, religious institutions, martyrs, pilgrimage, Uganda

Introduction

Uganda is endowed with a wide range of tourism resources that include biodiversity, varied landscapes, cultural and religious heritage. Tourism is intricately linked to the country's natural history, exploration, trade and colonization since the 19th century. The arrival of Arab traders, European explorers and Christian missionaries in the country made significant impacts on the socio-political landscape of the country which has had a strong bearing on the evolution of religion, institutional building and religious tourism development. Equally important opportunities and challenges for religious tourism development in Uganda are rooted in these historical antecedents. Although the religious-based tourism market continues to account for increased domestic and international tourist arrivals, data on this market segment are limited and the importance of this form of tourism is not fully known. A survey conducted in 2013 indicated that 5%

of international tourist arrivals travelled for spiritual / religious reasons (World Bank, 2013).

Religious tourism is one of the oldest forms of tourism recorded in history (George, 2014) and religious travel is one of the fastest growing segments in tourism with significant economic impacts (Gyekye, Oseifuah, Nethengwe, Sumbana, and Dafuleya, 2014). About 60% of the world's population practices religion and it is estimated that over 25% of international travellers are interested in religious tourism (Henama & Sifolo, 2018) and about 20% of sites on the UNESCO World Heritage list have a religious or spiritual connection (UNESCO, 2019). However, there is insufficient literature on religious tourism in Uganda and Eastern Africa in general. Sampling internet-based publications reveals that in Africa there is paucity of information. There are some seminal papers on religious tourism in West Africa - Nigeria (Eele, 2017), Southern Africa (Henama and Sifolo, 2018) and North Africa - Egypt

(Ali, 2013). These studies highlight that religious tourism is a new niche in the tourism business, in early stages of development and therefore requires appropriate policy and planning frameworks.

Literature Review

Historical perspective of religious tourism

Since ancient times, travelling for fervour and religious purposes has been part of humanity and religion has been one of the oldest motives of human migration (Kociyigit, 2016). The link between religion and tourism can be considered from two perspectives: firstly as tourism motivated exclusively or partially by religious reasons and secondly as a contemporary spiritual journey (Duran-Sanchez *et al*., 2018). Historically, religious trips have been multi-functional even when religious factors seemed to predominate. The motivation for religious tourism is a combination of cultural, traditional and spiritual values which interact and lead to a decision to travel. UNWTO (2014) estimated that about 300-330 million tourists visit the world's key religious sites every year, making religious tourism a significant part of domestic and international tourism.

Religious tourism has been referred to variously in literature as spiritual tourism or faith-based tourism (De Temple, 2006; Tarlow, 2017), special interest tourism (Henama and Sifolo, 2018) or religiously motivated tourism (Duran-Sanchez, Alvarez-Garcia, del Rio-Rama and Oliveira, 2018). The terms religious tourists, spiritual tourists and pilgrimage tourists are used interchangeably to refer to visitors who wish to have a religious related experience. According to Rashid (2018), religious tourists are people who visit religious sites either for pilgrimage or for tourism. Shafei & Mohamed (2015) indicate that spiritual tourists include religious and non-religious tourists with divine underpinning to their travel, while Padin (2016), describes pilgrimage tourists are people who go on journeys that evoke passion equivalent to religious zeal

Literature reveals that the roots of religious pilgrimage can be traced from the evolution of religion. According to Rossano (2010), religion emerged about 70,000 years ago evolving through the Upper Paleolithic times (about 35,000 years ago) as human beings bonded in groups that became cohesive and competitive. Later, classical pilgrimage emerged in various regions such as in Egypt around 3000 BC where pilgrims were visiting pyramids, temples and graves of loved gods (Rejman,

Maziarz, Kiwatkowski and Haliniarz, 2016). Greece was popular for religious pilgrimages (Kowalzig, 2005), sport and cultural events which were attended by a large number of people at Olmpia and Nemea. Around 310AD, religious travels increased with pilgrimages to the Holy Land during the reign of Emperor Constantine (Terzidou, Stylids and Szivas, 2008). Since the 10th century, Christian pilgrimages have continued to flow from different parts of Europe to the Spanish town of Santiago de Compostela where the cult of St James is worshiped. In the mid-19th century, Lourdes became a popular destination for worshipers who visited the cave in the rocky hill of Massabielle, connected with the spirit of the Virgin Mary. As a result, various churches have been built on top of the rocky hill. At the beginning of the 20th century, pilgrims went to Fatima to receive the spirit of salvation from Our Lady of Fatima (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). Religious destinations such as Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City (Italy), Jerusalem (Israel), Mecca (Saudi Arabia), Varanasi (India) and Lumbani (Nepal) attract millions of religious travellers and other visitors annually (Fouries, Rosello & Santana -Gallego, 2014) with projections suggesting that this niche growing year on year. For instance, in the *Saudi Arabia Vision 2030*, the country targets to increase the annual pilgrims and Umrah visitors from eight million to 15 million in the coming years.

Religious tourism in Uganda: An overview

Religious tourism is a relatively new phenomenon in Uganda in spite of the existence of traditional religions and the introduction of foreign religions about 140 years ago. In the last three decades, religious tourism has gained recognition from various actors including government. Religion and religious institutions are recognised in several national legal, planning and regulatory frameworks. For instance, Uganda's 1995 Constitution (Chapter 2, Section 29, Sub-section C) provides for freedom of worship which allows establishment of worship centres in any part of the country. Therefore, religious tourism in Uganda is highly respected and protected in law and practice.

Uganda's planning and development frameworks as evidenced in the *Vision 2040 - National Development Plan II* (NDPII), the *Uganda Tourism Policy* (2015), the *Uganda Tourism Development Master Plan* (2014-2024) and the *Tourism Sector Development Plan* (2015/2016 -2019/2020) recognise religious tourism as a distinct product niche. The above frameworks underscore the potential of religious tourism in diversifying the tourism product base. However, the

frameworks neither define strategies and mechanisms for developing religious tourism nor discuss the coordination, planning and promotion in the country. Although the Uganda Tourism Board has over the years increased its focus on marketing religious events and festivals, the efforts are still fragmented given that there is no national religious tourism strategic plan to guide them. This has resulted in a lack of elaborate mechanisms for developing religious tourism products, exploitation of religious tourism resources, establishment of appropriate physical infrastructure, or building an effective stakeholder coordination and engagement platform.

In spite of 99.8% of Uganda's population subscribing to some form of religion (39.3% Catholic, 32% Anglican, 13.7% Muslim, 11.1% Pentecostal, 1.5% Seventh-Day Adventist, 0.1% Orthodox, 0.1% traditional believer and 0.2% non-believer) (UBOS, 2016), religious tourism potential has remained largely unexploited. This is due to a number of reasons: firstly the absence of a comprehensive stakeholder analysis to identify the interests, power and influence of the actors that can contribute to religious tourism development. Secondly, absence of comprehensive situational analysis and baseline data has curtailed planning and development of religious tourism. Thirdly, inadequate profiling of religious tourism sites in terms of religious tourism value, activities, facilities and services. Fourthly, religious tourism potential in Uganda has attracted limited scholarly debates resulting in scant and inadequate research and documentation.

This paper is one of the first major attempts to present an in-depth analysis of religious tourism in Uganda from policy, planning and institutional perspectives. The objectives are to

(i) examine the evolution of various religions as a precursor of the present day religious commemorations and pilgrimages

(ii) profile the religious sites in the country

(iii) evaluate the institutional policy, planning and management frameworks in relation to religious tourism development opportunities and challenges and

(iv) determine visitor and worshiper perceptions of religious tourism development.

Research Methodology

Study Area

The religious sites studied are located in Kampala city and Wakiso district in central Uganda (Figure 1). Kampala is a metropolitan city with a number of religious sites and headquarters of religious organisations while Wakiso is a suburban district surrounding Kampala city, with a number of religious sites.

Figure 1 : Map of Uganda, and Study Areas
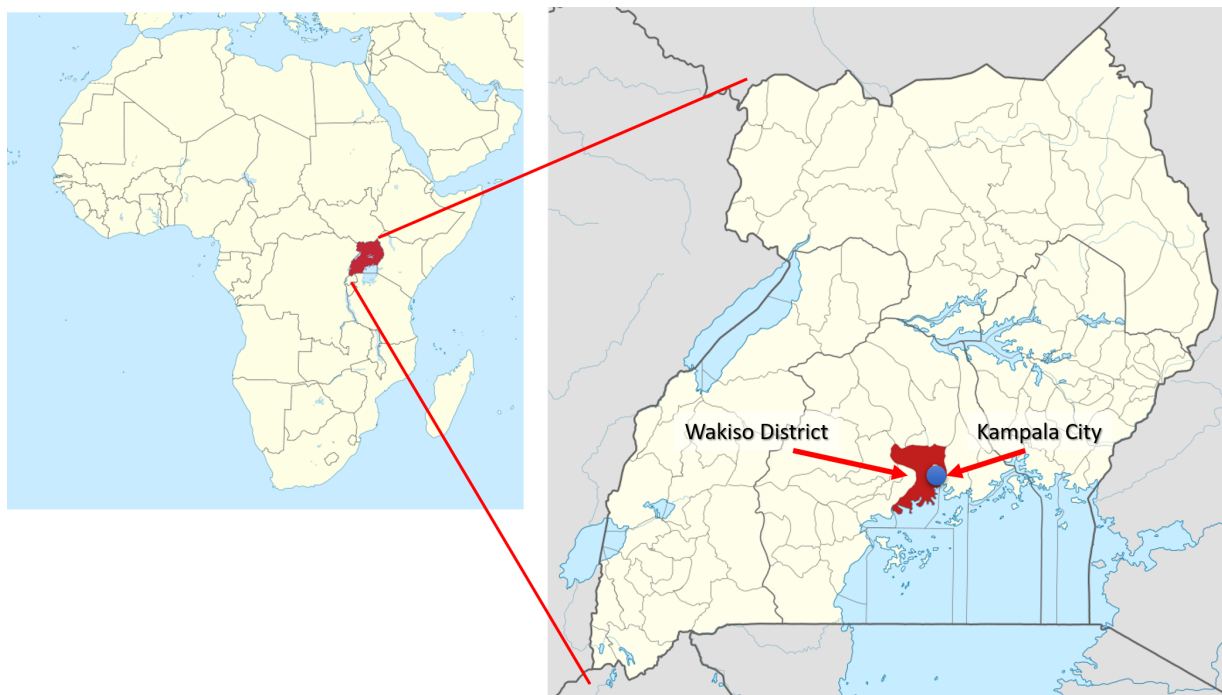
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/38/Uganda_in_Africa_%28-mini_map_-rivers%29.svg

Study design and data collection

A mixed methods approach is adopted in this paper because it allows concurrent collection, analysis and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data (Shorten and Smith, 2017). The approach also permits investigation that enriches the results and enables research questions to be answered deeply (Tashakkori, 2007) by offsetting the limitations of the different methods (Tsegaw & Teressa, 2017). Since religious tourism has diverse perspectives (Ivankova, 2006), a mixed methods approach is appropriate to show the relationships between stakeholders, policy, planning and institutional frameworks.

Data were mainly collected from respondents at purposively selected religious sites that are frequently visited and are historically significant. The selected Muslim sites were mosques all found in Kampala city - Kibuli Mosque (where Islam was introduced in 1884 and later the first mosque was built in the 1890's), Old Kampala National Mosque (biggest mosque in Uganda), and Nakasero Mosque (among the oldest mosques built in the 1940's). Given that the mosques are found in the commercial areas of the city, there was no established neighbouring community to collect data from. Data were also collected from Christian sites where martyrs were killed between 1885 and 1886 – the Uganda Martyrs Catholic Shrine Namugongo (with 22 martyrs) and the Anglican Martyrs Shrine Namugongo (23 martyrs). Given the peri-urban location of these shrines, data were collected from the neighbouring community to the shrines.

Survey methods

A structured questionnaire was administered to collect data from visitors, worshipers and the communities living around the aforementioned religious sites in Kampala City and Wakiso District. A total of 118 visitors and worshipers were randomly selected and interviewed to document their perceptions of religious tourism. Seventy-five were selected from Old Kampala, Nakasero and Kibuli Mosques in Kampala City and 43 from the Catholic and Anglican Martyrs shrines at Namugongo, in Wakiso district. In addition, 42 members of the local community living around the Martyrs shrines were randomly selected and interviewed to document their perceptions of religious tourism and its benefits. Finally, ten key informant interviews were conducted with Muslim and Christian religious leaders to gather additional information.

Document review

As revealed in the literature section of this paper, documents including journal articles, books and websites of religious organisations were reviewed to gather information on the evolution of religious tourism in Uganda, and how it has developed in terms of policy, planning and institutional frameworks. Literature was also reviewed to explore the current state of knowledge on religious tourism. Expert knowledge of the authors augmented the information gathered from various sources.

Data Analysis

Responses from the questionnaire survey and key informant interviews were categorized into themes and subthemes (Silverman, 1993). A five-point Likert scale was used to rate the perceptions of visitors and local residents about religious tourism. SWOT analysis was applied to generate detailed elements under the four SWOT components. The elements were critically examined to produce three specific themes (policy and planning, institutional arrangement, resources and attractions management) and one 'general theme' was used, combining a number of cross cutting elements.

Findings

Evolution of religion and religious tourism in Uganda

In an endeavour to describe and gain a deeper understanding of the evolution of religion and religious tourism in Uganda, this paper adopts an institutional analysis approach which scrutinises the institutional environment, the key actors, and the relationship between the institutions and actors. The approach further examines ways in which the institutional-actor relationship influences religious institutional arrangements and the effect of the actions on religious tourism development in Uganda. The introduction of religion and the evolution of religious tourism is grouped into four periods: pre-colonial, colonial, post-independence and, post-war and recovery periods.

Pre-colonial period (before 1880s)

In this period, African traditional religions were dominant with tribes worshiping gods at designated sites. The key institutions and actors were the traditional religious leaders and community leaders such as clan heads, chiefs and kings. In Buganda, for example, the Baganda worshiped only one god, *Katonda* whose shrine was at Butonda in Kyagwe

Table 1a: Profiling of key religious tourism sites in Uganda			
Name and Location of Site	**Religious tourism significance**	**Key religious tourism activities**	**Level of tourism facilities and services development**
Uganda Martyrs Catholic Shrine Namugongo (Wakiso District)	• Site where 22 Catholic martyrs were killed between 1885 and 1886 • beatified by the Pope in 1920 and later canonized in 1964, becoming the largest group of saints ever canonized by the Catholic Church	• Annual religious pilgrimage • Year round visits to shrine • Weekly prayers • Religious retreats • Events and celebrations	• Iconic Martyrs church (basilica) 1000 sitting capacity – Figure 2 • Pavilions with 8000 sitting capacity and open amphitheater (4000 sitting capacity) • Visitor interpretation facilities • Recreational gardens • Support facilities (restaurants, accommodation etc.) within the site provided by the church and around the site by private sector
Anglican Martyrs Shrine Namugongo (Wakiso district)	• Site where 23 Anglican martyrs were killed between 1885 and 1886	• Annual religious pilgrimage • Year round visits to the museum • Weekly prayers • Events and celebrations • Religious retreats	• Church of Uganda Martyrs Museum • Visitor interpretation facilities • Recreational gardens • Support facilities (restaurants, accommodation etc) developed by the church and private sector around the site
Munyonyo Martyrs Shrine (Kampala city)	• Site where the first four Christians were killed in 1886 and later canonized by the Pope in 1964.	• Annual religious pilgrimage • Prayers • Events and celebrations • Meditation	• Church (capacity of 1050 seated inside and 500 outside) • Visitor interpretation facilities • Support facilities (restaurants, accommodation etc) developed by private sector around the site
St. Mary's Rubaga Cathedral (Kampala city)	• Principal seat of Catholic church since 1914 • Cathedral established in 1924 • Cathedral houses remains of first African Catholic Bishop (Archbishop Joseph Kiwanka1899 – 1966)	• Prayers • Year round visits to the cathedral • Meditation • Events and celebrations	• Cathedral with capacity of 5000 people seated • Recreational gardens • Support facilities (restaurants, accommodation etc) developed within the site by the church and around the site by private sector
St. Paul Namirembe Cathedral (Kampala city)	• First Constructed in 1890 • Oldest Anglican diocese in Country – started 1897 • Principal seat of the Anglican Church	• Prayers • Meditation • Year round visits to the cathedral	• Cathedral with capacity of 4000 people seated • Visitor interpretation facilities • Support facilities (restaurants, accommodation etc.) developed within the site by the church and around the site by private sector • Recreational gardens
Kibuli Mosque (Kampala city)	• Principal seat of the Muslim faith when Islam was introduced in 1884 • Site of first mosque in late 1890's but Current mosque built 1951	• Prayers • Meditation • Year round visits to the Mosque	• Prayer mosque • Limited interpretation facilities

Name and Location of Site	Religious tourism significance	Key religious tourism activities	Level of tourism facilities and services development
Old Kampala National Mosque (Kampala city)	• Among the largest mosques in Africa • Unique architecture	• Prayers • Meditation • Year round visits to the Mosque	• Mosque with seating capacity for 35,000 (Figure 3) • Visitor interpretation center • Conference hall • Library
Kigungu landing site (Wakiso district)	• Lakeshore Site where first Catholic Missionaries landed in 1879 • Commemoration celebrations on 17th February each year	• Prayers • Meditation • Year round visits to the site	• Prayer House • Commemoration monument of the two missionaries • Limited visitor facilities
Baha'i Temple (Kampala city)	• The only Baha'i temple in Africa, built 1961	• Prayers • Meditation	• Worship House • 52 acre recreational gardens
Bishop Hannington site (Mayuge District)	• Site where first Anglican British Missionary was killed on orders of Buganda king in 1885 with 45 of his helpers	• Annual prayer celebrations • Occasional Prayers	• Limited visitor facilities and services • Commemoration church and resort center under construction
Paimol site (Agago district)	• Site where two martyrs were killed in 1918 (beatified by Pope in 2002)	• Annual martyrs celebrations • Prayers • Meditation	• Small Martyrs Shrine • Paimol memorial church • Limited support facilities • Inadequate interpretation facilities

Table title (at top of table): **Table 1b: Profiling of key religious tourism sites in Uganda**

(now Mukono district) (Kasozi, 1981). The King of Buganda (Kabaka) was seen as the religious head of the worshipers (Malaba, 2006).

Foreign traders arrived to present day Uganda in the 1800s and introduced religion. Islam was introduced and spread by Arab traders in the 1840s (Mukasa-Mutibwa, 2016). The first Arab traders reached Buganda in 1844 (Kasozi, 1981) and a few years later the Christian missionaries penetrated into the interior of Eastern Africa following the pathway opened up by explorers such as Speke who arrived 1862 and Stanley in 1875. The first Christian missionaries arrived at the shores of Lake Victoria in 1879. It can be argued that the Arabs traders and the early missionaries were the first foreign religious tourists in Uganda. The first religious Martyrs are recorded in this period when over 70 Moslem faithful were burnt to death in 1877 at Namugongo. This was after they defied the leadership of Kabaka Mutesa 1 (who had converted to Islam and assumed headship of the religion in his kingdom) arguing that he was not fully observing the practices of Islam, including being circumcised (Ssemugabi, 2018).

Colonial period (1880s – 1962)

Buganda Kingdom was at the vanguard of interacting with the early Arab traders and missionaries. In order to get a foothold in spreading their respective religions, the Arab traders and missionaries converted the Kabaka and his chiefs and later used the administrative structures to convert as many people as possible. The religion selected by the King was more or less the official religion in the kingdom. This resulted in fusion of religion with administration and politics that later stunted the development of religious tourism in Uganda.

By the 1880s, the Church Missionary Society from Britain, Catholic White Fathers from France and Muslim traders from Zanzibar had successfully converted a large number of people in Baganda, including the chiefs and servants in the Kabaka's court. The competition between foreign religions to convert more people set the stage for fierce religious and political rivalry (Byrnes, 1990). A four-year civil war ensued in which different religious groups tussled to

Figure 2: Uganda Martyrs Catholic Shrine church - Namugongo

Source: https://www.independent.co.ug/uganda-martyrs-day

gain political control of the kingdom by enthroning a king who supported their religious denomination.

The King at the time - Kabaka Muwanga - realised that his kingdom was on the verge of disintegration with multiple divisions and conflict created by religion, especially the Christian converts whom he considered a threat since most of them no longer obeyed his authority on religious matters (Kasozi, 1981). The persecution of Christians in Buganda started in 1885 and climaxed on 3rd June 1886 when the King ordered the killing of 45 Catholic and Anglican converts who had refused to denounce Christianity at Namugongo (Malaba, 2006). To date this event is commemorated and celebrated at Namugongo shrine during 'Uganda Martyrs day' which attracts 2.5 to 3 million pilgrims.

The colonial period is characterised by intensive missionary activity and can be considered to have laid a foundation for religious tourism in Uganda. It witnessed the arrival of various missionaries into the country and the establishment of churches and mosques, religious founded schools and hospitals across the country. These establishments and the sites of martyrdom have a huge potential for religious tourism.

Figure 3: Old Kampala Mosque

Source: https://visitkampala.net/kampala-lisitings/old-kampala-national-mosque

Post-independence period (1962 – 1986)

This period is marked by Uganda's independence from British rule that was attained on 9th October 1962. However, with the fusion of religion and politics, most parties were formed with religious inclinations, a situation that further galvanised divisions within the community on political and religious lines (Museveni, 1997). This constrained the development of a structured and formal religious tourism policy and planning framework since government as the key actor could not offer support to a particular religion. The competition of the various religions to have more converts meant that there was limited space to establish a framework to jointly develop religious tourism.

This period was later characterised by political instability when the country witnessed civil strife, wars and military coup d'états (Okoth, 1993). The political environment and wars negatively affected the economy and the development of the tourism industry declined. The military rule, mainly during the reign of Iddi Amin (1971-79) affected religious institutions as some leaders were murdered for opposing the regime. For instance, the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, Rwanda and Boga Zaire, the late Janan Luwum, was killed in 1977 (Kyemba, 1977). The state suppressed religious institutions and in the process constrained the role that could have helped to develop and promote religious tourism in the country.

Table 2a : SWOT analysis of Religious Tourism in Uganda	
Strengths	**Weakness**
Policy and planning Freedom of worship constitutionally guaranteed in country Recognition of religious tourism in existing tourism policy, planning and development frameworks	**Policy and planning** Lack of religious tourism policy and guidelines Inadequate planning and regulatory frameworks to guide religious tourism promotion and development
Institutional arrangement Diverse religious denominations with recognised and organised institutional structures Religious institutional coordination mechanism – under the Inter Religious Council of Uganda	**Institutional arrangement** Limited main streaming of religious tourism in existing institutional structures Limited coordination of institutions promoting and developing religious tourism
Resources and attractions management Rich religious heritage across the country rooted in early missionaries work Diverse, unique and internationally significant religious attractions– including the Baha'i Temple, Catholic and Anglican Martyrs Shrines in Namugongo Religious sites under well-established management structures Diverse and significant religious events (some gazetted as public holidays) – such as Martyrs Day celebrations Availability of visitor support facilities (accommodation, restaurants, souvenir shops etc.)	**Resources and attractions management** Lack of religious tourism destination management guidelines Lack of specialised training in religious tourism product planning, development and management Inadequate religious tourism marketing and promotion Limited adoption of business models in managing tourism destinations Narrow range of religious tourism products - main focus on spiritual annual pilgrimage events and less on heritage, art, music, architecture, experiential tours Inadequate visitor centres and support facilities at religious sites – such as interpretation, sanitation, special needs facilities Limited statistics and data on religious operations (tourist numbers, length of stay, expenditure patterns etc.) to inform visitor management strategies Inadequate knowledge and skills for conservation and preservation of some religious sites especially in rural areas Limited mapping and documentation of religious tangible and intangible heritage
General theme Large domestic market for religious tourism activities and events Increasing support from central government to develop religious sites and related infrastructure	**General theme** Limited awareness of religious tourism structure and operations Limited religious tourism packages designed by tour operators Uneven distribution of support infrastructure concentrated mostly in or near main urban centres Lack of a formal religious tourism financing mechanism Existence of religious conflicts among some faiths in the country
Note: The themes are presented as sub headings and the elements are presented in bullets	

Table 2b : SWOT analysis of Religious Tourism in Uganda	
Opportunities	**Threats**
Policy and planning Recognition of religious tourism in the policy, planning and development frameworks as an option for tourism product diversification Increasing opportunities in religious tourism investment	**Policy and planning** Prolonged inter and intra-state regional conflicts in Eastern Africa Repeated terrorism threats and attacks Prone to disasters such as disease outbreaks
Institutional arrangement Coordination platform offered by the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda Focus on religious tourism in the planning and development units of religious institutions Wide religious institutions, local and international networks and partnerships	**Institutional arrangement** International ideological religious disagreements, conflicts and extremism tendencies
Resources and attractions management Increased enthusiasm of public and private actors to plan, develop and promote religious tourism related programs and activities Increasing tourism related support facilities and services near religious sites Existence of tourism marketing mechanisms (such as tourism exhibitions) Untapped power of digital technologies in documentation, promotion and management of religious heritage	**Resources and attractions management** Existence of highly competitive international religious tourism products (as compared to top religious tourism destinations such as Rome, Jerusalem, Mecca etc)
General theme Increasing global trend of religious related travel Un or under-utilised tangible and intangible religious history and heritage Increasing number of domestic and international tourist arrivals over the years Strong political will and support for the development of infrastructure and facilities in and near religious sites Documenting and packaging traditional religion in an Afro-positive narrative Developing synergistic and complimentary tourism products – such as linking religious and cultural tourism Increasing safety and security measures at religious destinations Job creation and employment Increased tax revenue to government from support facilities and services provision More arrivals given the increasing free movement of persons across borders	**General theme** Declining Christian population in Europe and America (Uganda's key tourist source market)
Note: The themes are presented as sub headings and the elements are presented in bullets	

Post war and recovery period (1986-2019)

During this period the National Resistance Army / Movement took over power in January 1986 after a five year protracted guerrilla war. Political parties were banned and a unitary movement government system was established to rebuild the country. The ban lasted for nearly 20 years and uncoupled politics from religion. It can be affirmed that the recovery phase opened a new chapter in the development of religious tourism in Uganda. Religious institutions have become more politically neutral, they operate in a conducive socio-political environment and government is extending support to religious institutions without seeking political favours.

Over the years, religious tourism has increasingly gained recognition as stated in the policy, planning and development frameworks mentioned earlier. As a result, organised and elaborate religious tourism is organically developing such as the annual Uganda Martyrs day and pilgrimage at Namugongo. Actors such as Uganda Tourism Board, with travel and tour companies, among others have come on board to support the marketing and promotion of religious tourism events. Government has continued to support religious tourism through development of the improvement and development of site facilities and infrastructure for instance, road networks, water and electricity connections, among others.

Table 3: Visitor and worshipers attractions at selected Mosques

Attractions	Frequency	Percentage response
Attending prayers	45	25.0
Learning the Quran	40	22.2
Learning more about Muslim culture	62	34.4
Architecture of the mosque	33	18.3
Total	180	100.0

Over the four period stated above, a number of religious tourism sites have emerged and their profiles in terms of religious tourism value, activities, facilities and services are presented in Table 1.

Policy, planning and institutional perspectives of religious tourism in Uganda

SWOT analysis (Table 2) reveals that Uganda has a number of strengths and opportunities with regard to policy and planning, institutional arrangement, resources and attractions management. The key strength is the constitutional grantee of freedom of worship which has enabled religious organisations to develop strong institutional structures and preserve the religious heritage. Favourable policy framework, increasing awareness and public and private sector actors' support have provided the impetus for development of religious sites that currently attract worshipers and tourists. The country has opportunities for the development of religious tourism as exemplified by its recognition under the *Uganda Tourism Policy* (2015), *Uganda Tourism Development Master Plan* (2014-2024) and the *Tourism Sector Development Plan* (2015/2016 -2019/2020). Further opportunities are presented by the existence of well-

structured religious institutions that have, over generations, conserved and managed religious sites and heritage. Additional opportunities include increasing global trends of religious related travel, recognition of religious tourism in the policy, planning and development frameworks of Uganda, engagement of public and private sector actors in planning, development and promotion of religious tourism and the availability of digital technologies for documentation, promotion and management of religious tourism.

Furthermore, a number of weakness and threats exist that need to be addressed if the full potential of religious tourism is to be realised. The weaknesses include lack of religious tourism policy and development guidelines, weak resource and attraction management structures, and uncoordinated institutional approaches, which have hindered the competitiveness of religious tourism products. The main threats are negative destination image due to prolonged regional conflicts, terrorism and disease outbreaks, the declining Christian population in Europe and America which are the major sources of religious tourists, and international religious ideological disagreements, conflicts and extremist activities.

Visitors, worshipers, and community perceptions of religious tourism development

Interviews conducted at Old Kampala, Nakasero and Kibuli mosques revealed that visitors and worshipers came for religious motives such as prayers (25%) and learning the Quran (22.2%). Visitors were also attracted by the desire to learn more about Muslim culture (praying, dress code, halal food) (34.4%) and appreciating the mosques' architectural design (18.3%) (Table 3).

Table 4: Worshipers and visitors perception towards religious tourism at mosques					
Socio-religious aspects of religious tourism at the Mosque(s)	Percentage response rating				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Initiates establishment of more visitor facilities and services	17.3	33.3	12.0	8.0	29.3
Promotes preservation of Muslim culture	30.7	52.0	4.0	2.7	10.7
Promotes overcrowding at the mosques	10.7	36.0	9.3	26.7	17.3
Commercialises Muslim faith	6.7	6.7	34.7	21.3	30.7
Creates division among worshipers	2.7	10.7	48.0	24.0	14.7

Socio-religious aspects of religious tourism at thes hrine		Response (%)				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Should be further developed as a religious tourist destination	WV	62.8	25.6	00	2.3	9.3
	NC	78.6	4.8	4.8	7.1	4.8
If promoted for religious tourism will lead to commercialisation of the Christian faith	WV	9.3	18.6	44.2	14.0	14.0
	NC	14.3	9.5	16.7	54.8	4.8
Should improve planning and management for sustainable religious tourism	WV	65.1	25.6	2.3	00	7.0
	NC	73.8	14.3	2.4	4.8	4.8
If developed for religious tourism will lead to establishment of more visitor facilities and services	WV	44.2	34.9	9.3	00	11.6
	NC	73.8	4.8	9.5	4.8	7.1
Should be marketed as a unique religious tourism attraction	WV	53.5	23.3	9.3	4.7	9.3
	NC	64.3	14.3	2.4	11.9	7.1
WV=Worshipers and Visitors, NC=Neighboring Community						

Table 5: Worshipers, visitors and neighboring communities' perceptions on promotion religious tourism at Namugongo Martyrs' shrine

A majority of worshipers and visitors 'strongly agreed' and 'agreed' that religious tourism promoted the preservation of Muslim culture and justified the establishment of visitor facilities and services. A large number also 'disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed' that religious tourism commercialised the Muslim faith and created divisions among worshipers. However, they concurred that increased number of visitors would lead to overcrowding at the mosques (Table 4).

Results of key informant interviews revealed that religious tourism had economic gains such as creating jobs at the mosques that helps to improve livelihoods. Interviewees expressed the fear that religious tourism may escalate the prices of Muslim souvenirs. The high percentage of respondents who were uncertain (answered 'Don't know') of the socio-religious benefits may have been first time visitors.

At the Christian Martyrs Shrine, Namugongo the majority (72%) of respondents were tourists, while only 28% were Christians who came for prayer and to participate in religious conferences and workshops. The tourists were attracted to the shrine by the history of the martyrs' bravery and sacrifice of their lives for religion, the unique architectural design of the basilica and the cleansing power and blessings from use of the 'holy water' spring on the site.

The worshipers, visitors and neighbouring community's perceptions of the effects of religious tourism are presented in Table 5. The majority 'strongly agreed' and 'agreed' that planning and management of the shrine should be improved and the site developed as a religious tourist destination. This is feasible considering that Namugongo is a quiet Kampala suburb where the Catholic and Anglican churches are located near each other. They also strongly agreed that the shrine should have more visitor facilities, services, and be marketed as a religious tourist attraction. On the other hand, the majority 'disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed' that religious tourism would commercialise the Christian faith. Results of interviews with key informants revealed that religious tourism has contributed to improved livelihoods through an improved road network, business establishment and employment of local people in guest houses, restaurants, and souvenir and retail shops.

Discussion

Reviewing the evolution of religion in Uganda has revealed that over the years religious tourism has organically grown without an explicit planning and development framework. The key drivers of religious tourism activities are prayer and meditation that attracts large numbers of visitors on specific pilgrimage and worship days. This implies that, like other tourism markets, religious tourism experiences seasonality (Duran-Sanchez, Alvarez-Garcia, del Rio-Rama and Oliveira, 2018), which poses a challenge to the planning, development and realisation of its full potential. In spite of the seasonality, the religious sites

can be developed to sustain religious tourism throughout the year. This can be attained by promoting other attractions such as art, music and experiential tours through home stays among others (Simone-Charteris and Boyd, 2010). To achieve this, an explicit religious tourism policy, planning and institutional framework is crucial (Benur and Bramwell, 2015).

Given the thin divide between religious and cultural tourism (Odum, Uchema and Ngozi, 2018), religious tourism in Uganda can complement cultural tourism that is interlinked with nature-based tourism. The combination would offer a richer experience to tourists interested in experiencing the local culture (Odum, Uchema and Ngozi, 2018).

Although there are a number of actors and institutions that play major roles in the development of the tourism sector in Uganda, the religious tourism sub-sector has not achieved its full potential. This can be attributed to policy and planning gaps that constrain a coordinated religious tourism development. The key actors are religious institutions that oversee religious resources, sites and organise religious events. However, the institutions still develop religious tourism independently in spite of them being members of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) – a faith-based organisation uniting religious institutions. For instance, Uganda Martyrs day is concurrently but separately celebrated by the Anglican and Catholic communities at Namugongo shrine even when the two churches are located about one kilometre apart in the same area. On the other hand, Juma prayers for Moslem Martyrs (who can be considered as the first Martyrs killed in 1877) are held at the Namugongo Martyrs Mosque on a different day. Pursuit of individual efforts will in the long run affect the quality of the religious tourism product and tourist experience. Other factors that constrain full exploitation of the religious tourism potential include inadequate religious tourism development guidelines and regulations, limited consideration of religious tourism in the implementation of tourism policies and inadequate integration in development plans, inadequate human and financial resources, weak marketing and promotion strategies, and limited tourist facilities.

Inadequate financial resources have hindered the development of religious tourism in Uganda yet, when the resources are effectively harnessed religious tourism is a source of revenue for the destination (UNWTO, 2011). At the moment, religious institutions in Uganda have not exploited this opportunity apparently to avoid being seen as commercialising religion. Given the large numbers of visitors participating in the religious events, it is feasible to raise substantial revenue by charging each visitor, for instance, one US dollar per entry. Since Uganda Martyrs annual celebration attracts about two million visitors this would raise about $US2 million (equivalent to 7.3 billion Uganda shillings at the current exchange rate). The money would help to offset the costs of organising the event, considering that in 2019 the Catholic Church had a budget of 900 million Uganda shillings (USD 246,000) to commemorate Martyrs day on 3rd June. The extra funds can be utilised to improve facilities and services at Namugongo site and to develop other religious sites across the country. This illustrates how imperative it is to widen the financial resource base and to institute more innovative ways of financing religious tourism development in the absence of a comprehensive religious tourism policy and development plan.

As already noted, there are several institutions engaged in development and promotion of religious tourism. The Government of Uganda is a primary actor in this regard. Already the government, through the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, has developed a Tourism Policy and a Tourism Development Master Plan that specify the need to develop religious tourism. Although the plans emphasise support for religious institutions to package and promote religious tourism, there are inadequate resources and guidelines to operationalise the strategies. The limited government support for publicity is given to the Uganda Tourism Board and funds for improvement and development of site facilities are not formally allocated. In order to ensure sustainable funding, there is a need to bench mark with other destinations that have formal religious tourism arrangements such as Mecca (Hajj) and Jerusalem (holy pilgrimage) among others (Henderson, 2011; Woodward, 2004).

Worshipers, visitors and the community at the Mosques and Uganda Martyrs shrine - Namugongo agree that religious tourism should be developed and promoted by providing more visitor facilities and services. This will help to accommodate larger crowds and tap the socio-religious and economic benefits. However, frameworks and guidelines are needed for actors to invest in facilities and businesses and contribute meaningfully to development of religious tourism. Currently, there are two categories of visitors

that come to the religious sites: the worshipers and the tourists. Quality facilities are needed to meet the expectations of these visitors. To achieve this, there is a need to establish a systems-based and comprehensive religious tourism development policy and planning framework that clearly defines stakeholders' roles and responsibilities and outlines religious tourism development procedures and standards.

Development of religious tourism in an *ad hoc* and uncoordinated manner has resulted in development of few religious sites in urban areas while the majority of rural-based sites have remained largely undeveloped. For instance, Bishop Hannington site in Mayuge district, the Polish church in Budongo forest and Paimol Martyrs Shrine in Agago district among others have remained undeveloped in spite of their religious significance. Viewed in this context, it is logical to suggest that the lack of a comprehensive policy and development plan that supports integrated actors' participation has constrained the efforts of positioning Uganda as a competitive religious tourism destination.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Religious tourism in Uganda has organically evolved over the years with institutional actors operating independently. As a result, the full potential of religious tourism, as revealed by the strengths and opportunities identified in the SWOT analysis, may not be realised. In addition, a number of weaknesses and threats have also been revealed, which are linked to the independent manner in which the actors are operating. Irrespective of the differences in religious faith, worshipers, visitors and the neighbouring community concur that religious tourism, if well planned and managed, can have positive socio-religious and economic impacts without eroding the religious and spiritual values. Therefore, absence of a comprehensive policy, planning and institutional framework, will make it difficult to sustainably and competitively develop religious tourism in Uganda.

In order to realise the full potential of religious tourism in Uganda, this research recommends that:

1. A religious tourism policy and institutional framework should be developed through a stakeholder consultative process to ensure maximum input, participation, ownership and utilisation of networks and partnerships for promoting religious tourism. The framework should provide policy guidelines and clearly spell out institutional roles.

2. An integrated planning framework should be developed to guide site development, infrastructure establishment, facilities and services standards, and overall religious tourism monitoring and evaluation.

3. A coordination mechanism needs to be established to bring together the various actors. The Inter Religious Council of Uganda already offers a coordination platform for religious institutions to work together but this organisation needs to engage with actors such as the Ministry Tourism Wildlife and Antiquities and its agencies including Uganda Tourism Board in addition to tourism trade associations, academia, the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social development, and the Ministry of Local Government among others.

4. Product diversification strategies should be put in place to ensure continued visitor flow at religious sites. This will help to reduce visitor seasonality mainly caused by over reliance on a small number of religious events.

5. An innovative and sustainable financing and investment mechanism should be put in place to provide adequate resources for development and promotion of religious tourism in Uganda.

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