Incorporating Cultural Heritage into the Local Tourism Development Strategy in Kwa Ndebele: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to identify multiple sources to systematically search, critically appraise and synthesise the matter of incorporating cultural heritage into the local tourism development strategy in Kwa-Ndebele. A total of 39 sources were consulted to achieve the objectives of the study. The results show that cultural heritage tourism can draw a large number of tourists due to its primary significance to the community. It manifests itself through lived realities, places, and objects that give true meaning, the purpose of existence, and a sense of belonging to the Ndebele culture. The sustainability of cultures can be used for positioning the destination for its food, cultural heritage landscape, artwork and history. However, tourism development has lagged because of conflicts of interest confronting different stakeholders within the local area. There is an element of fear among the local communities that cultural integration may destroy the authenticity of local cultures and natural landscapes. Even though tourism may lead to social problems, integrating cultural heritage into local tourism development is complicated. However, no evidence shows that incorporating culture into regional economic growth can have adverse effects. The paper concludes that a concerted effort must be made to minimise the negative consequences of cultural integration while unlocking local economic development opportunities for the growth of tourism and social good. The paper contributes to the body of knowledge on incorporating cultural heritage into tourism development strategy to respond to the socio-economic needs of local communities.

Keywords: Cultural heritage tourism; local knowledge; commodification; cultural conservation; sustainability

Introduction

Cultural tourism has become one of the fastest-growing niches of the tourism industry in South Africa. This is evidenced by the increasing number of people visiting cultural sites and attractions. Mugabe (2022) argues that one of the tourist destinations that is gradually becoming a subject of cultural tourism research is Kwa-Ndebele, in Kwa-Mhlanga. Situated in the Nkangala district, the north-western part of Mpumalanga, Kwa-Ndebele is becoming the focus of cultural tourism growth, and this is all attributed to the rich history and heritage of the village (Nkwanyana et al., 2016). Cultural heritage tourism can draw a large number of tourists due to its primary significance to the community. Cultural heritage plays a crucial role in a local tourism development strategy by attracting visitors, preserving cultural identity, and driving economic growth within a region (Chikure, 2021). Cultural heritage refers to the tangible and intangible aspects of a community's traditions, customs, art, architecture, festivals,

and history. It manifests itself through lived realities, places, and objects that give true meaning, the purpose of existence, and a sense of belonging to the Ndebele culture. Unique cultural attractions, such as historic sites, museums, traditional crafts, and performing arts, draw travellers looking to explore the distinct identity of a place, enriching their travel experiences (Jopela, 2018; Holtorf, 2017). The sustainability of cultures can be used for positioning the destination for its food, cultural heritage landscape, artwork and history. Promoting and preserving cultural heritage helps maintain a community's identity and sense of belonging. By showcasing their traditions and history to visitors, locals are encouraged to take pride in their heritage, fostering a stronger sense of community and cultural continuity.

The area has a rich culture and heritage that could be commodified (Boonzaaier et al., 2017) for branding Kwa-Ndebele into a 'must visit' cultural tourism destination. It was back in 1994 when opportunities were unblocked for previously disadvantaged communities, such as Kwa-Ndebele, to showcase their cultures and stories to the world. Indeed, democratic South Africa made it possible for ordinary South Africans to be part of the mainstream tourism economy. Sustainable tourism policy has urged black people in this country to capitalise on tourism by way of starting their businesses, taking advantage of job opportunities, and advancing economically and socially. Whilst studies show that Kwa-Ndebele is a tourist destination in its own right, the tourism sector has not been able to develop in a manner that responds to some of the economic and social needs of the people of Kwa-Ndebele. Therefore, this study seeks to systematically search, critically praise and synthesise the issue of integrating cultural heritage into the local tourism development strategy in Kwa-Ndebele. Its prime focus will be the results of some studies conducted earlier on cultural heritage in this part of South Africa. It will explore the factors favouring cultural heritage development as well as a myriad of variables that may hamper such development and possible policy implications. The objectives of the study were to: discuss the role of culture in promoting local tourism development in Kwa-Ndebele; examine the level of community participation in cultural conservation and sustainability, and discuss the potential of heritage tourism in enhancing socio-economic development for Kwa-Ndebele.

Methodology

The methodology posited below is intended to primarily answer the research question, namely, what is the best approach to integrate cultural heritage into the local tourism development strategy in Kwa-Ndebele? A systematic review of multiple studies consulted were those published between the period 2000 and 2023. The studies conducted before 2000 were excluded from the study due to low quality, some did not provide key background information and did not help establish the context of this review. Some did not have the outcomes of interest to it. Those consulted had grey literature such as technical reports and web-based case studies that were key in terms of solving the research question. The publications consulted, comprised, inter alia, the following: The register of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA Declared Sites, 2020) was consulted for a list of heritage sites; publications, journals, government reports and Acts on Kwa Ndebele were primarily used to identify sites of heritage significance and information about the location of the study site, its history and potential use of the heritage assets were gathered to elucidate the topic further. The following themes were considered: cultural heritage sites and attractions; cultural heritage assets; tourism development; Ndebele culture; destination branding; cultural authenticity; commodification; cultural integration and local economic development. The period of twenty-three years was deemed reasonable to make this study more manageable. Time and resource constraints were also factored in as a limitation as the issue of consulting more sources was time-consuming.

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to identify multiple sources to systematically search, critically appraise and synthesise the matter of incorporating cultural heritage into the local tourism development strategy in Kwa-Ndebele. The purposive sampling technique is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants (Tongo, 2007). In this study, the researchers decided what needed to be known and set out to find sources that could provide the information sought. It is typically used in qualitative research to identify and select the information-rich cases for the most proper utilisation of available resources (Etikan et al., 2016). As this is a qualitative review, three approaches were used to conduct it, namely: The first approach involved the identification of multiple sources dealing with cultural heritage in Kwa-Ndebele, therefore thirty-nine were used for this purpose, the second approach revolved around the analysis and discussion of the results of the multiple studies previously done to unpack cultural heritage landscape as a development strategy in Kwa-Ndebele, and the third approach had to do with the drawing of some reliable inferences from the multiple sources, and finally giving conclusions and recommendations. It is worth noting that the final synthesis revealed that not much has been done in terms of how cultural heritage could be incorporated into the local tourism development strategy in Kwa-Ndebele. Therefore, the outcomes of high-quality studies conducted in other parts of the world were used to generate more reliable inferences and to cross-check and validate the results. Content analysis was employed to analyse the themes emerging from the primary sources.

Literature review
The tourist gaze and authenticity
The concept of authenticity has always been an issue subject to a lot of debates and research by scholars in the tourism space. It is often the expectation of tourists, whenever visiting cultural villages, to receive an authentic cultural experience. By simple definition, an authentic cultural experience refers to an experience that is mainly emergent, unscripted, and unique (Rickly et al., 2018). While cultural villages, such as Kwa-Ndebele, pride themselves in providing 'real' and 'genuine' tourist experiences, there is always criticism that these tourism centres stage their variety of activities to amuse their guests. Boonzaaier et al. (2017) argue that the cardinal critique of cultural villages has been the commodification of local cultures and add that it leads to the superficial representation of the local cultures as they simulate and transform daily activities to suit the tastes and demands of the travellers much to the detriment of the needs of the indigenous people. Consequently, an attraction's offerings are not displayed consistently and authentically (Masilela et al., 2023). This is attributable to the adverse impact of globalisation which is entrenching modern lifestyles and eroding traditional norms and values. Nevertheless, incorporating cultural heritage into the local tourism development strategy in Kwa-Ndebele still enhances people's identity and cultural values (Masilela et al., 2023). It can unleash socio-economic benefits provided policies are in place and improved. Employment opportunities can be achieved through setting up cultural villages. There is also a need to spread the distribution of the cultural sites spatially to serve as many diverse needs of the resident community, the tourists and product owners (Masilela et al., 2023)- thus attaining sustainable cultural heritage development through knowledge empowerment and active stakeholder participation (Mgonja et al., 2015; Masilela et al., 2023). Other benefits comprise, inter alia, communal collaboration, talent exhibition, entrepreneurial skills, and the progressive shift of women from passive to active participation in cultural tourism. This form of tourism also enables indigenous communities to gain artisan skills as they use their hands to create unique, functional and decorative items employing traditional techniques. Mention could be made of tools, furnishings, clothes and toys. Some people working in the cultural sector also

gain important export coordination skills as the raw material they use has to be sourced nationally and sometimes internationally, but still retain an element of authenticity. Here mention could be made of simple skills like sales and marketing. Overall, the acquisition of such skills improves the standard of living and socio-economic status albeit on a micro level as they earn income by selling their crafts. Additionally, their practices put them in a strategic stead to build relationships with the outside world – thus adding more opportunities for growth and development. The issue of integrating cultural heritage into local tourism development strategy has led to the establishment of cultural villages that promote rural life through community-based tourism and conservation of heritage and culture (Ivanovic, 2016).

Masilela et al. (2023) argue that authenticity is one of the most dealt-with-themes within cultural tourism and add that it has mostly been dealt with from the tourist perspective while views of the significant others such as the tour operators or employees in cultural tourism are relatively relegated into oblivion. To this end, Ndlovu (2021) contends that the cultural villages are reproducing stereotypes of Western views of the indigenous people. However, some experts argue that cultural tourism is basically contingent upon the supply factors and that the authenticity of the destination usually gives rise to repeat visitation (Masilela et al., 2023). Therefore, it could safely be argued that authenticity leads to tourism growth in many parts of the world though it is a highly contentious issue with so many connotations such as commodification, identity, tourists-hosts interaction and sustainable tourism experience (Cohen et al., 2012).

Critical cultural heritage theory

Munoz-Vinas (2023) argues that in the last decades of the 20th century, the Enlightened version of Cultural Heritage (CH) came under severe scrutiny and criticism, thus a new non-axiological version of CH was developed. This development had some implications for the popular or non-Western cultural expressions that were not to be regarded as inferior anymore but also that immaterial cultural products such as performances, traditions, or languages, etc (intangible cultural heritage, or ICH) were regarded as important cultural expressions in and of themselves, deserving the same appreciation or recognition to that of tangible CH. This non-axiological, ICH - ICH-encompassing CH discourse has now become standard among researchers, cultural experts and even the general public (Munoz-Vinas, 2023). The above theory not only enlightened the authors of this study but also empowered them to have a bird's eye view of the cultural heritage landscape in Kwa Ndebele. It paved the way for the identification, consideration and review of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage assets in Kwa Ndebele, and most importantly, how the assets are utilised for the people's socio-economic well-being. The theory was therefore deemed suitable for this study. Additionally, it brought to the fore the definitions of both CH and ICH and the attendant problems inherent in their meanings and interpretations by various people. It further revealed the practices fostered by cultural heritage tourism, and how to identify the more conspicuous forms of both CH and ICH in Kwa Ndebele. The essential CH practices such as listing, research, musealization and conservation were also explained by the theory, and how they could be implemented in reality.

Commodification of culture

Van Beek et al. (2012) argue that it is for this reason that the commodification of culture is often under scrutiny and criticism by scholars and those who are meant to consume culture as a tourism experience. The above suggests that while Kwa-Ndebele has shown its potential to be a strong cultural destination for tourists, there are constraints that continue to hinder such potential. According to Rickly et al. (2018), there is still a need for proper facilitation and provision of authentic cultural experiences. Ivanovic (2011) further states that the

commodification of culture and heritage ought to be studied, carefully done, and monitored through guidelines that are in line with the cultural and heritage management system. Tourism development is essential for economic growth; however, such must not be the only purpose of pursuing tourism growth (Brown et al., 2020). Instead, a more sustainable tourism development ought to be initiated through meaningful consultation and participation of all actors within the tourism and cultural and heritage management space.

In Kwa-Ndebele, for example, tourism development thrives upon natural and man-made objects, places, and people (Mugabe, 2022). To ensure that authenticity is kept in place, for the sustainability of culture and heritage, the interpretation of assets as elements of heritage should be done in a way in which they appear to be as they are in reality. Nkwanyana et al. (2016) argue that creating false stories and experiences out of heritage assets, just to entertain the audience, has the potential to present a challenge. Eventually, this may jeopardise the meaning and intrinsic value of the Ndebele heritage. It is worth mentioning that culture is far more important. It gives a sense of pride, unity, belonging, and purpose to a community such as Kwa-Ndebele. Thus, the commodification of culture into a tourism experience should be done by the Ndebele people and be directed in line with their indigenous knowledge and value system. According to Ivanovic (2011), while tourism development may attract outsiders into the locality, for investment purposes, it cannot be allowed that outsiders dictate or drive the commodification process in the absence of the Ndebele people. Instead, common logic advocates for the local community to be given a driving seat in the commodification process. This will help to put the residents in a position where they set the rules and limitations on tourism development in their area. In cultural villages where tourism thrives, case studies reveal that the host community becomes an important stakeholder. Rickly et al. (2018) note that there is a need to define the approach to be used for tourism development and the scope in which development must take place. On the contrary, where the role of the host community is undermined, outsiders, such as investors, tend to overlook the needs of the community and their resources. Instead, they prioritise the opportunity to maximise profit margins at the expense of heritage assets.

The sustainability of cultural heritage

The above argument is indicative of the problems inherent in commodification. Culture and heritage will be used and branded in a way that defies the value systems of a certain community because the main goal would be to package a tourism experience for pleasure seekers. In the tourism space, product promoters ought to understand that communities or cultures are not homogeneous (Nkwanyana et al., 2016). Instead, each society has its history, culture, heritage, and way of living that is not similar to the other in many respects. Thus, it cannot be that tourism development is approached in a way that follows the modern traditions of analysis, where societies are taken as totalities and tourists are taken as generalized, homogenous types (Van Beek et al., 2012). Many studies have shown that authenticity is achieved when successfully built on community control acceptance and cultural meanings. The community should be at the centre of everything happening within their locality, especially when their resources are a subject of exploitation. According to Boonzaaier et al. (2017), the survival of culture and heritage often depends on the community that will stand up as a key stakeholder, and make sure that their voice is heard and respected when it comes to the usage of their assets. While the above is all true, the commodification of heritage and ensuring authentic tourism experience to the satisfaction of the host community and tourists alike is not always achievable. In most cases, cultural villages in South Africa lack the necessary funding for sustainable tourism projects (Rickly et al., 2018).

In addition to these challenges, there is a concern that the level of support from the government is not enough to help advance rural tourism development in villages such as Kwa-Ndebele. While there are policies in place, the problem is the incoherent implementation of policies in the cultural heritage sector. It is argued that the government tends to favour investors who are bringing in investment into villages (Brown et al., 2020). As a result, development is likely to take a path which will in turn disadvantage the residents whose interests and opinions are often ignored. The government, and investors, need to play an active role (Rickly et al., 2018). Firstly, they need to understand that the existence of cultural tourism in cultural villages solely depends on the culture and heritage of the host community. According to Boonzaaier et al. (2017), host communities must be empowered because the protection and survival of cultural norms depend on the involvement of the local people. It is thus safe to argue that the provision and sustainability of an authentic cultural experience in Kwa-Ndebele Cultural Village rests on the shoulders of the Ndebele people acting in tandem with their local government and other cultural heritage product owners in Kwa-Ndebele.

Tourism growth and economic opportunities

Thus, the Ndebele people need to be given full control when it comes to the usage and management of their heritage assets for tourism growth (Creamer Media Reporter, 2020). In this way, meaningful relationships can be built among stakeholders and mutual benefits can be realised by all parties involved. This will lead to the creation of a sustainable tourism sector in Kwa-Ndebele whereby tourism growth delivers economic opportunities and social change for the host community. It is also worth mentioning that looking only at the side of the host community, as far as authenticity is concerned, is not enough. According to Creamer Media Reporter (2020), in ensuring an authentic cultural experience, tourists themselves must be considered as important actors. According to Boonzaaier et al. (2017), tourism experiences are meant for the final consumer, who must be provided with an experience that is in line with their expectation. Thus, their needs and perceptions are to be considered too so that the demand side is also satisfied. It can then be concluded that authenticity is fundamental in a cultural tourism experience, and it is focused on two groups. These groups are the stakeholders who manage the assets and the tourists who consume the cultural assets.
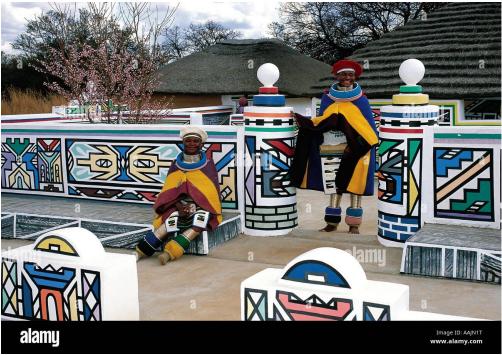
Findings and discussion
Kwa-Ndebele is a unique cultural tourism destination
Being the homeland of the Ndebele people, Kwa-Ndebele became part of the South African rainbow nation in 1994 (Berry, 2019), just after the first non-racial election, which marked the end of apartheid. Adding to the cultural diversity, the Ndebele people are known for their love for art, which manifests in their unique artistic works of colourfully painted and decorated huts and traditional attires (Akintobi, 2022). According to Mahlangu (2015) and Berry (2017), the glowing colours of houses, blankets, and beadwork representing the Ndebele culture have made the village itself an open-air living museum. As a result of such richness and uniqueness in heritage, there has been a growing desire from the general public, including people of other cultural groups, to visit Kwa-Ndebele (Ivanovic et al., 2015). For many, the main purpose of visiting this village in Kwa-Mhlanga, Mpumalanga, is to discover, experience, and learn about the culture and heritage of the Ndebele people. As the rates of visitation, caused by the influx of tourists, increase steadily, they signal the growth of the tourism sector in the area. Thus, the role of the community as hosts should not be overlooked, considering that it is for the residents to make sure that they are welcoming and hospitable to the guests. In addition, the contribution of all the other involved stakeholders should be considered and supported by relevant actors.

Doing so will make the tourism growth project a great success in Kwa-Ndebele, resulting in branding the village as one of the best rural tourism destinations in the country.

Figure 1: The KwaNdebele cultural village

Source: Keith-Jones (2005).

Heritage tourism and its potential for socio-economic development for Kwa-Ndebele

Commodification has emerged as an important concept. Gottdiener (2000) argues that it goes hand in hand with the usage of heritage resources, within certain communities with tourism growth potential, and the branding of such resources into consumable tourism products and services. It is thus important to take note that commodification, within a capitalist economic system, is a crucial process of transformation of raw material into something that has some form of value (Ryan et al., 2005). It is for this reason that in the tourism discipline, the process of commodification needs to be carefully monitored and put in balance with conservation and preservation. With that said, this introduces us to the concept of sustainability, which calls for a sustainable form of tourism development in destination areas such as Kwa-Ndebele. According to Nyambiya et al. (2022), the idea of sustainable tourism development has become part of tourism policy in South Africa. Sustainable tourism development is meant to support and drive tourism growth in a manner that enables the meaningful participation of the host community, which in turn is supposed to reap the benefits of the sector evenly (Katsoni et al., 2019). There are case studies, where sustainable tourism growth is successfully linked to economic growth, conservation of resources, environmental awareness, women empowerment, business opportunities, job creation, and skills development. Maasai village in Kenya, for example, is a suitable case study where tourism is pro-poor (Brown et al., 2020).

The Maasai village, just like Kwa-Ndebele village, is very rich in culture and heritage and that is being used for promoting tourism in the area. With the background of a staggering economy and social challenges (such as high levels of illiteracy and crime), many of the people living in Maasai are living under the poverty line and they are not in a formal labour market. However, because of the strong tourism growth potential, residents can tap into the tourism economy by starting up small-scale businesses. Nyambiya et al. (2022) note that residents can

identify opportunities in the art space wherein many are involved in cultural-related activities such as storytelling, poetry, theatre, singing, dancing, and interpreting objects. In the case of Kwa-Ndebele, the village is also presented with similar conditions and opportunities, which need to be exploited for tourism growth (Mahlangu, 2015). This can be successfully done through sustainable practices guided by tailor-made policies, which focus on rural tourism development in the context of the South African landscape.

Kwa-Ndebele and its primary resources for cultural tourism

Being part of the Nguni ethnic group, the Ndebele people are a distinct social group with a unique heritage that defines their existence in the South African landscape. The area, Kwa-Ndebele, is a rural settlement in Kwa-Mhlanga. It is a homeland to the Ndebele people and it existed independently since 1981 until it was integrated into the new South Africa after 1994. Despite the prevailing social and cultural integration in the globalising society, Kwa-Ndebele has remained predominantly the home of and inhabited by the Ndebele people. As a result, unlike other areas where there is a mixture of many cultures, Kwa-Ndebele is an area that breathes the pure Ndebele culture and heritage (Berry, 2019). This is generally manifesting itself through arts and architecture, history and heritage, literature works, music, value systems, lifestyles, and beliefs and traditions that are founded in the spirit of the Ndebele people. Akintobi (2022) contends that as a cultural village that is still rooted in the Ndebele ways of living, it has gained popularity as a tourism destination in the country. It was after 1994 that the democratic government recognised the potential for tourism growth in the area. With such rich culture and heritage, it is important to state that the tourism sector in Kwa-Ndebele is cultural-based (Delius, 2007). Thus, the commodification of cultural resources is very important in the branding and marketing of the village to become a tourism destination. The concept of the commodification of culture simply refers to the process of utilising aspects of the Ndebele heritage to brand it into a consumable tourism product.

Cultural heritage has the potential to draw in the influx of pleasure seekers and those with and desire to explore, discover, experience, and learn about the heritage of the Ndebele people. The commodification of heritage and allowing public access to the local culture of the Ndebele people further presents an opportunity for the community to promote their tourism sector and reap the benefits resulting from it (Gottdiener, 2000). Over the years, the promotion of tourism in Kwa-Ndebele has shown potential to bring tangible economic benefits, even though this is happening at a minimal scale (Ivanovic and Butler, 2015). These benefits include job creation at tourism establishments and the start-up of small businesses. Despite the mentioned benefits of the tourism sector in Kwa-Ndebele, there are noticeable non-economic benefits (Khandwala, 2020). These include ongoing projects focused on cultural preservation, rehabilitation of historic buildings, environmental awareness, clean-up campaigns, and skills development. However, it is also worth mentioning that tourism development in Kwa-Ndebele has its challenges. As a result of that, tourism growth has been minimal and lagging behind, especially when compared to other rural tourism destinations in Southern Africa.

Key actors in cultural tourism and the existing relationships

It is important to state that cultural tourism is one of the tourism niches that draws in a variety of stakeholders. They come in the form of people and organisations, existing as individuals and groups, having certain interests in tourism, culture, and other related fields. The study found out that the government's role is, but not limited to, the formulation of policies, providing funding for tourism ventures, providing infrastructure and expediting marketing (Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency, 2005). The traditional leaders advise the government on policy areas and legislation that have an impact on the Ndebele people. They work for development

in partnership with the government, civil society and communities, promote the cultural and traditional values of the Ndebele people, help to deepen democracy and expand the access of people to cultural tourism benefits (Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency, 2020). There are also young heritage practitioners, healers, herbalists and diviners who are involved in the conservation, sustainability and protection of heritage and sacred sites, forests, rivers, caves, stone ruins and land. The spiritual groups act as sacred site keepers, organise sacred site retreats for healing, awakening, and communication and handle the agenda of spiritual heritage tourism and ecotourism. The tour guides co-ordinate the tours and guide the tourists. Arts, culture and heritage communities deal with arts, culture and heritage organisations and creative industry practitioners (Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency, 2020). Of course, these key actors are not homogenous but they tend to vary in their objectives, ideas, expectations, and goals. According to Van Beek et al. (2012), the heterogeneity in their involvement in culture and tourism has always been an issue that has created strange, dynamic relationships among the actors themselves. These strange, dynamic relationships have become a subject of debate and research by scholars over the past decades. Some scholars reveal that the awkwardness amongst the key stakeholders has become a stumbling block towards unity and collaboration (Rickly et al., 2018). As already mentioned, cultural tourism invites actors from a variety of areas. From these areas of different disciplines, the stakeholders impart their different interests and ideologies into the field of the cultural tourism sector (Nkwanyana et al., 2016). Bringing these fields together is not an easy task because of the opposing ideologies, often causing actors to view each other with suspicion and distrust. In practical terms, the actors who are more focused on the cultural and heritage management sector tend to devote their attention to safeguarding the intrinsic value and artistic quality of culture (Ivanovic et al., 2015).

On the contrary, tourism developers and promoters have an interest in the usage of culture mainly for commodifying it into a product for the enjoyment of tourists. This has caused an unstable relationship between the two actors. They are hostile towards each other, and one often views the other as an enemy toward achieving their individual, rather opposing goals. The government is also an important stakeholder in culture and tourism (Ivanovic et al., 2015). For example, the Department of Tourism is there as the custodian of the tourism industry in South Africa. It also bears the responsibility to represent the government as an actor in tourism. Hlabathe (2019) states that the role of government is often noticeable, considering that it does the planning and formulation of policies for tourism development. The government is also regarded as an important source of funding for tourism projects. Indeed, the government of any country that seeks to promote cultural tourism has the responsibility to provide some form of financial boost to tourism development, and create an enabling environment for investors to invest in tourism (Ivanovic et al., 2015). This suggests that the government is a crucial stakeholder in cultural tourism development, and its role cannot be ignored by other actors involved. However, while this is true, it must also be noted that the role of government never goes unchallenged by other actors in the process of tourism development and usage of heritage resources (Perry, 2017).

There are case studies that have shown that it is often the case for some key actors who see and describe the government as a bad actor in the tourism and heritage sector. For example, Hlabathe (2019) states that there is a concern that the government, as the custodian of the tourism industry and heritage sector in a country, has the tendency to cause tension between other stakeholders. In some poverty-stricken areas and developing countries with strong tourism potential, the sub-Saharan region is not an exception as the governments tend to favour investors over host communities (Okharedia, 2020). This unfavourable situation is always caused by the fact that poor areas striving to develop their tourism sector are in serious need of foreign investment, and investors come with developmental capital. As a result, investors will

have more power and voice in determining how local resources should be used, what is to be done, and which direction the process of tourism development should take (Okharedia, 2020). Due to their financial power to successfully run small-scale and large-scale tourism projects, small economies tend to succumb to the demand and conditions set by investors from rich, industrialised countries (Rickly et al., 2018). In these countries, especially in Africa and some parts of Asia, having foreign investors running tourism projects has led to a situation where multinational corporations become the only dominant players in tourism.

In the long run, they will be the ones reaping off the benefits of the tourism industry, which they further export to their home countries of origin. According to Keith-Jones (2005), the host destination and community itself, where tourism is being developed and produces the net benefits thereof becomes the loser by not realising most of the economic and non-economic benefits of tourism in their area. This creates the kind of tourism that is not in line with the principles of sustainable development and inclusive form of tourism. Instead, it creates a tourism industry of a few individuals, wherein multi-national corporations take advantage and exploit the local resources of a host community through a false narrative that tourism is for the betterment of all (Brown et al., 2020). Research proves that there are cases where local community residents themselves get divided and become hostile to each other over the issues surrounding tourism development and usage of heritage in their areas. This takes form when one segment of the community advocates for the preservation of its intrinsic values, while another segment is eager to welcome tourists in their area because of the benefits tourism may bring. According to Keith-Jones (2005), a development project that tends to cause a division among stakeholders and community residents signifies poor planning, coordination, and execution of the project. This is also bound to happen with tourism projects, especially when the government favours some key players over others.

It will create a situation where some people reject tourism development, especially when the net benefits are not spread across to all those involved in the projects (Brown et al., 2020). Of course, those who stand to benefit will welcome and support such a project, considering that it will work for them while excluding others who are also participants in the process. This is always the case in places where tourism policies are inadequate or not implemented in a manner that would allow tourism to bring about development for the host community. According to the UNWTO guidelines, sustainable tourism development places the community at the centre of tourism projects (Gottdiener, 2000). The residents tend to have a strong voice to decide on how to manage and control the usage of heritage resources for tourism development. Their indigenous knowledge and information get prioritised to give direction for tourism development and heritage resource management. In this case, tourism development and use of heritage assets are done in a coordinated manner through tailor-made policies that are focused on the need for proper consultation and involvement of all the key players (Gottdiener, 2000). It is through such practices that tourism can be sustainably developed and promoted. It gives rise to the key actors developing well-balanced relationships centred on mutual respect and benefits.

Some case studies prove that this has not yet been successfully achieved in many of the emerging and existing cultural tourism destinations in the small, less industrialised economies. Instead, key actors often oppose each other and have legal battles over the use of heritage assets (Gottdiener, 2000). Of course, this is because of their opposing values, desires, ideologies, expectations, interests, and goals. The other important key player in the tourism sector and heritage sector includes the NGOs. In their nature of operation, NGOs are usually non-profit organisations that often exist through the help of donors and funders. They are nonetheless essential actors because they represent a certain constituency by ensuring that their needs, demands, interests, expectations, and rights are not overlooked or violated by other

stakeholders in the process (Gottdiener, 2000). NGOs, along with other stakeholders, contribute towards policy formulation during the planning stages. They play a very important role in ensuring that government, for example, does not misuse its power and resources but remains accountable to the masses whom it is meant to serve. NGOs often work closely with local communities, helping to ensure that the voice of the people is heard (Gottdiener, 2000). NGOs are regarded as implementers as well, as they also have ties with other supporting entities across the spectrum. NGOs tend to differ in terms of their standards and scope of operation even though they operate at an international level.

Challenges for tourism in Kwa-Ndebele

Whilst Kwa-Ndebele has demonstrated to be a unique tourism destination, offering an authentic cultural experience to tourists, some obstacles have hindered the full potential of the area to be an outstanding tourism brand. Recently, for example, the problem of the ongoing national power cuts by the power utility, Eskom, has put many small business owners operating in the tourism industry under stress (Majola, 2023). The situation seems to be worsening than it was a few years back. According to Dummy (2019), the tourism sector is very much dependent on technology, and it embraces the Fourth Industrial Revolution (FIR). However, in the case of Kwa-Ndebele, the tourism sector is run predominantly by small and medium-sized businesses (Smith, 2022). Many small businesses are operating within the informal sector. As a result of the power cuts, there is a growing number of these businesses running on the survivalist level (Dummy, 2019). This is because business owners are under financial difficulty and they do not have generators to be used as back-up in the case of load shedding. For many businesses, load shedding has brought so many challenges (Smith, 2022). These include causing damage to appliances, shutdown of accounting and security systems, exposing businesses to criminality, limitation of operating hours, losing potential suppliers of raw material, and job losses. As of early 2020, the outbreak of Covid-19 also affected the tourism sector in Kwa-Ndebele. Musavengane et al., (2022) argue that of all the industries in South Africa, the tourism sector is one of the industries which have been adversely affected by the pandemic.

For nearly two years, since March 2020, the government implemented a lockdown by invoking the National Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002. As a result, South Africans witnessed their right to movement limited, as they had to be indoors to combat the spread of the pandemic (Page, 2021). For the first time in history, the economy was at a standstill wherein only essential services were given exemption. To put it in the right context, tourism is all about the movement of people from their usual environments where they live to other destinations where tourism products and services are offered. With that perspective, it must be pointed out that there can be no enjoyment of tourism activities without the movement of people and the usage of tourism facilities and amenities. Thus, this means that under lockdown during the Covid-19 era, all tourism activities were paused. During lockdown levels four and five, for example, no tourism business was operational and all tourism centres were shut (Musavengane et al., 2022). Page (2021) argues that while the implementation of the lockdown was a temporary measure to limit the spread of the pandemic in South Africa, many people lost their jobs and businesses could not keep up. This resulted in the collapse of many businesses within the tourism sector. The effect of the pandemic is being felt at this moment in Kwa-Ndebele. The economy has not fully recovered from the impact of the pandemic, as many businesses are regaining strength while others were forced to shut down indefinitely.

Conclusion

Cultural heritage plays a crucial role in a local tourism development strategy by attracting visitors, preserving cultural identity, and driving economic growth within a region. Cultural

heritage refers to the tangible and intangible aspects of a community's traditions, customs, art, architecture, festivals, and history. It manifests itself through lived realities, places, and objects that give true meaning, the purpose of existence, and a sense of belonging to the Ndebele culture. Unique cultural attractions, such as historic sites, museums, traditional crafts, and performing arts, draw travellers looking to explore the distinct identity of a place, enriching their travel experiences. The sustainability of cultures can be used for positioning the destination for its food, cultural heritage landscape, artwork and history. Promoting and preserving cultural heritage helps maintain a community's identity and sense of belonging. By showcasing their traditions and history to visitors, locals are encouraged to take pride in their heritage, fostering a stronger sense of community and cultural continuity. However, tourism development has lagged because of conflicts of interest confronting different stakeholders within the local area. Visitors spend money on accommodations, food, transportation, and souvenirs, generating revenue for local businesses and creating employment opportunities in the tourism sector and related industries. There is an element of fear among the local communities that cultural integration may destroy the authenticity of local cultures and natural landscapes. Balancing the needs of visitors and the preservation of cultural authenticity is essential for the long-term success of cultural tourism as a driver of local development. Even though tourism may lead to social problems, integrating cultural heritage into local tourism development is complicated. Successful implementation of cultural heritage as a tourism strategy requires careful planning, community involvement, and sustainable practices to avoid negative impacts such as over-tourism or cultural commodification. When managed sustainably, it encourages the preservation of historical sites and traditions, ensuring that future generations can also benefit from and appreciate their cultural heritage. The paper concludes that a concerted effort must be made to minimise the negative consequences of cultural integration while unlocking local economic development opportunities for the growth of tourism and social good. Therefore, interactions between locals and visitors can lead to mutual respect, tolerance, and the exchange of ideas, promoting global peace and harmony.

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