



Sustainability management and tourism impacts on communities: Residents' attitudes in Maun and Tshabong, Botswana

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Abstract

Sustainability management and especially socio-cultural sustainability of tourism is premised on community awareness, participation and deriving socio-economic benefits from tourism. The purpose of the study was to examine local awareness, attitudes and relations towards tourism operations in Maun and Tshabong, Botswana. A qualitative study informed by in-depth interviews was undertaken in two tourist destinations in Botswana, viz. Maun and Tshabong which are at different stages and scales of tourism development. Based on the study the interviewed community members from both case sites were supportive of further tourism growth and development. Interestingly, in particular, there was support for the promotion of cultural tourism which was seen as ensuring meaningful community participation in tourism development and operations. Other findings suggested that interviewees were also aware of negative impacts associated with tourism such as pollution, demonstration effects and economic leakages. The issue of poaching was of particular local concern as it was perceived against the spirit of community-based tourism.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, tourism impacts, community-based tourism, cultural tourism, Botswana

Introduction

Involving local communities as important stakeholders in tourism development and planning has been of interest to tourism scholars and policy-makers for several decades (see Campbell and Vainio-Mattila, 2003; Grybovyh and Hafermann, 2010). Generally, tourism development projects have become increasingly sensitive to values and belief systems of the respective communities (Gurse et al., 2010; Murphy, 1985; Stone and Stone, 2011). It is acknowledged that tourism development that does not acknowledge and respect local people's cultural traditions, values and beliefs may fail in the long term (Dadvar-Khani, 2012; Doxey, 1976; Lepp, 2007). Earlier studies have indicated that if communities are not aware of tourism operations and their role, participation and benefit from tourism development, the local attitudes towards tourism may often evolve from positive views to negative ones (Choi and Murray, 2010; Martin and Uysal, 1990; Saarinen, 2010). Participation and benefits may have



value for the tourism industry itself as they can make local communities' 'buy-in-to' tourism (Lukhele and Mearns, 2013). This refers to recent discussions about reciprocity in corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Lähdesmäki and Suutari, 2012); as local communities benefit from tourism and understand the logic and value of tourism operations, they are also more likely to support the industry and its' interests in their everyday environment. In addition, in a positive situation local communities may be integrated in (bought-in-to) tourism operations via inclusive growth (see Ashley et al., 2007:16; Saarinen and Rogerson, 2014). According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) inclusive growth "is a new approach to economic growth that aims to improve living standards and share benefits of increased prosperity more evenly" across all segments of the population, both in monetary and non-monetary terms (OECD, 2015: 16). From that perspective the economic growth is not an end in itself but a tool for wider societal development. Similarly, the Government of Botswana recognises and aims to promote the role of tourism for wider development and economic diversification (Botswana Government, 2009). Recently, the government has geared various development policies towards deeper community participation and local benefit creation (see Botswana National Ecotourism Strategy, 2003; Community-Based Natural Resource Management Policy, 2007; Tourism Master Plan, 2000; Tourism Policy, 1990). These policy instruments articulate the form of tourism government prioritises as well as the actors and beneficiaries of the tourism industry (Saarinen, Moswete and Monare, 2014). Therefore, it is important to gain knowledge on how tourism has impacted on communities' livelihoods, hence set attitudes towards tourism development (see Gartner and Cukier, 2012; Murphy, 1988; Tao and Wall, 2009) and possibilities to participate in tourism and development.

The purpose of the study was to examine local awareness, attitudes and relations towards tourism operations in Maun and Tshabong, Botswana. The study was guided by the following research questions: Are there differences between attitudes of Maun and Tshabong villages regarding types of tourism that must be developed? What implications do these perceptions have in terms of policy and tourism development in Botswana, and; are communities participating in tourism? Sustainability and sustainability management are used as perspectives to analyse communities' attitudes towards tourism development with a qualitative study approach using in-depth interviews was undertaken in Maun and Tshabong. The sites were selected based on the diversity of the tourism products that they offer and influenced by their geographical context. The two areas are in different tourism development stages (see Butler, 1980) with Maun being at a more developed stage in tourism (Hambira et al., 2013; Mbaiwa, 2005) while Tshabong is a small scale destination with relatively limited numbers of tourists and tourism operators (see Moswete, Thapa and Child, 2012; Saarinen et al., 2012). However, both areas have similarities in products (i.e. nature-based tourism destinations) with shared policy pressures in diversification towards cultural elements. In addition both destinations have local communities next to tourism facilities and tourist activities and attractions.

The next section briefly deals with the sustainability thinking and management in tourism and community-based sustainability concepts to highlight the invaluable role of local communities in the sustainable development in tourism. The section also underlines the contribution of the study to this well-developed but still growing and transforming area of tourism research. The methodology section presents the qualitative approach, complemented by the literature review of academic articles, government publications and official reports. Results are presented followed by conclusions and the contribution of the study to policy and theory development.

Sustainability thinking in tourism

The idea of sustainability in tourism has evolved from the Brundtland Commission's seminal report "Our Common Future" in 1987, which stated that sustainability refers to development



aimed at meeting “the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). Fletcher (2005) further outlines the principles of sustainability to include taking a holistic approach to planning and strategy; protecting the environment (biodiversity) and human-made heritage features; preserving the essential ecological processes; facilitating and engaging public participation; ensuring that productivity can be sustained into the long term future and provide for a better level of fairness and opportunity between different countries. More recently, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) have defined sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” (UNEP, 2005: 12).

Although sustainability thinking was applied to tourism by the turn of 1990s (see Buckley, 2012; Clarke, 1997; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010), there is still a lack of an agreed and academically sound definition of sustainable tourism or specific criteria for sustainable tourism management (Sharpley, 2000). Related to this Higgins-Desbiolles (2010:117) has noted that many tourism scholars have dismissed the term *sustainable tourism* and instead opted for *sustainability* or *sustainable development* in tourism as a more appropriate and less tourism-centric term (see Butler, 1999; Hunter, 1995). This paper acknowledges the need to move away from ‘sustaining tourism’ thinking (Saarinen, 2006) and, thus, focus on the tourism industry as a potential tool for sustainable development in a local and regional scale. That re-orientation involves community development approach and emphasis but also a recognition that there needs to be economically viable and ecologically sound tourism management in place. Thus, economic growth, and for example absolute visitor number goals, should be balanced with socio-cultural development needs and ecological integrity.

Community-based approach to sustainability

As indicated, in addition to ecological and industry’s economic concerns, sustainable development in tourism is premised on community participation and creating socio-economic benefits for local communities. This involvement of local communities as participants, stakeholders and beneficiaries in tourism planning and development has been highly emphasised in the past literature (see Choi and Murray, 2010; Murphy, 1985; Saufi, O’Brien and Wilkins, 2014; Tosun, 2005). This emphasis on local people needs in tourism development can be referred to as “community-based tradition” of sustainable tourism (Saarinen, 2006), community-based tourism development (Murphy, 1985, 1988) or citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969). These approaches aim to empower communities to participate fully in tourism development and benefit from tourism (Scheyvens, 2002) as well as define and set limits to tourism development if needed. The focus of the community-based approach to sustainability is local people and their role in tourism.

At a policy-making level the United Nations voluntary implementation plan to sustainable development known as the Agenda 21, for example, is aimed at bringing sustainable development practices to the community level. The ‘future we want’ i.e. the outcome of Rio+20, clause 131 further states: “We encourage the promotion of investment in sustainable tourism, including eco-tourism and cultural tourism, which may include creating small and medium-sized enterprises and facilitating access to finance, including through micro-credit initiatives for the poor, indigenous peoples and local communities in areas with high eco-tourism potential. In this regard, we underline the importance of establishing, where necessary, appropriate guidelines and regulations in accordance with national priorities and legislation for promoting and supporting sustainable tourism.” (United Nations, 2012: 25).



Thus, from local to national level policies on tourism resources should be planned and developed in such a way that it results in improved livelihoods for the people who live among the resource now and in the future (Moscardo, 2005; Scheyvens, 2011). Hence, to achieve one of its objectives of sustainability, tourism must engage local communities as decision makers where they are both planners and implementers of tourism projects (Stone & Stone, 2011; Tosun and Timothy, 2001). Murphy (1985) expounds on the issue further by pointing out that tourism relies on local people in many ways, as they have lived among the resources for generations and have developed indigenous knowledge systems to manage the resources sustainably. More importantly, they are also part and parcel of the product that tourists consume. Hence, many authors claim that it is important to involve local communities in decision making at all levels from planning, implementation and up to evaluation (Choi and Murray, 2010; Jamal and Getz, 1995; Pearce et al., 1996; Tao and Wall, 2009). Andereck et al. (2005) have further emphasised the importance of educating the communities about tourism, so that they are fully aware of both negative and positive impacts of tourism so that they can make informed choices on whether or not to support tourism development (see also Matarrita-Cascante, 2010; McGehee and Andereck, 2004).

Saarinen (2007) cautions against building unrealistic development expectations in rural communities that tourism would bring (see Lukhele and Mearns, 2013; Stone and Stone, 2011; Tao and Wall, 2009). In many cases, tourism may only have a capacity to complement other livelihood strategies in practice. Thus, there is a need for well informed decisions and also to take cognisance of the non-local (i.e. global) nature of tourism system that is influenced by many factors that are beyond the influence of local conditions or the tourism industry itself (e.g. global climate change, taxation, security changes). Participation in tourism involves various stakeholders even within communities, and these may have competing interests. In addition, involving all stakeholders can be a challenge, and there are potential winners and losers in the participation process in relation to land use, employment creation and business opportunities, for example. According to Tosun (2006) a common challenge in participation is that in most cases the views of the community are only sought after the development has taken place. In addition, as Hall and Page (1999:195) suggest, participation should be structured in such a way that marginalised community groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, are also represented so that they too can influence development discourses and benefit from tourism resources (see Richards and Hall, 2000). Thus, it is crucial to acknowledge that the right to participate does not equal the capacity to participate (Bramwell and Lane, 2000: 172).

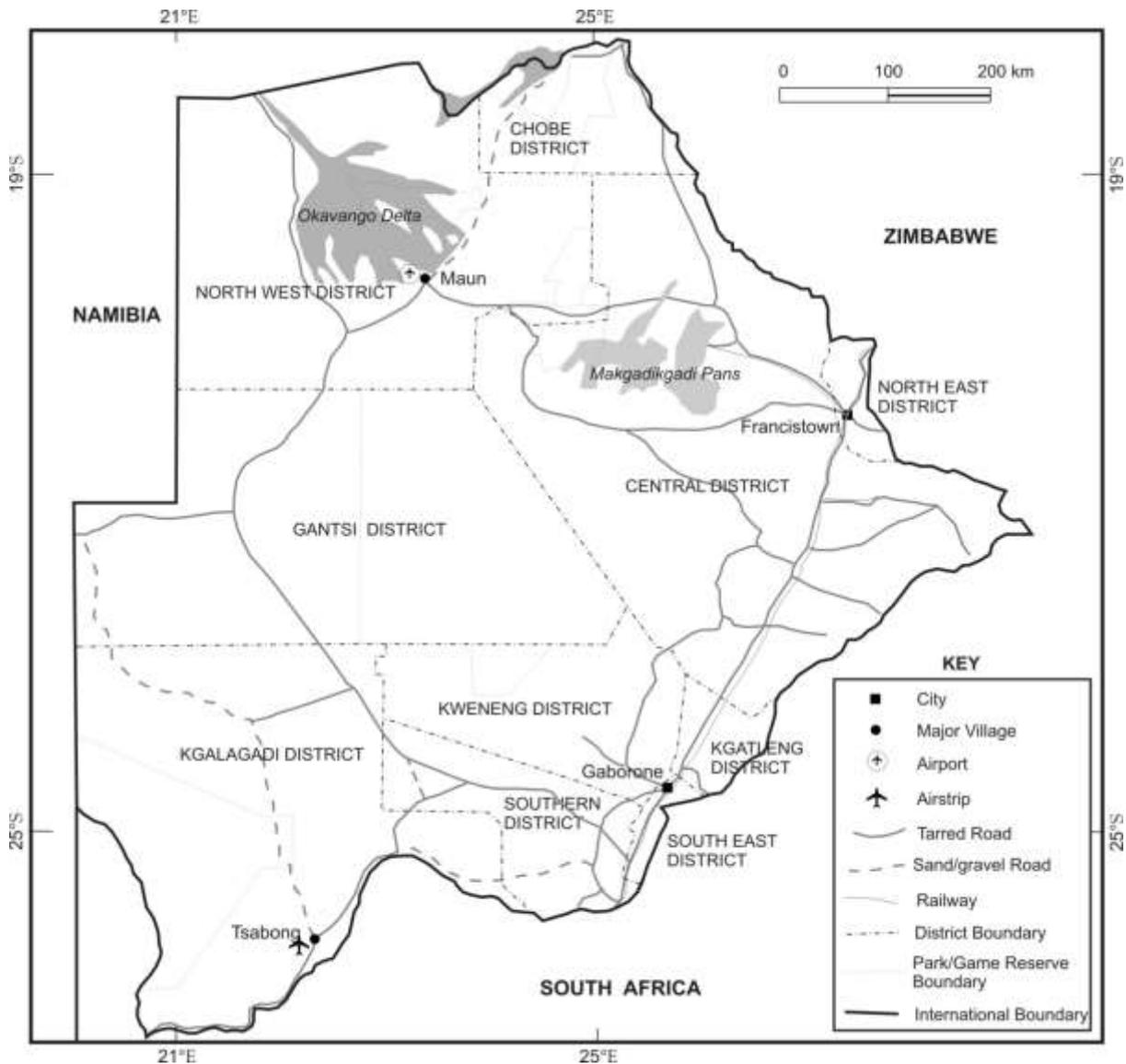
Many studies have emphasised tourism impacts but did not indicate whether or not communities want more or less tourism development - including the form or nature of tourism they would like to see developed in their locale. Furthermore, Tosun (2006) proposes a re-look at the forms of community participation desired by interest groups in tourist destinations as well as attitudes towards future tourism development (see Choi and Murray, 2010). This is an area of study that has received only cursory attention from researchers, including southern Africa.

Case Study Sites

The study areas of Tshabong and Maun in Botswana involve contrasting bioclimatic ecosystems and different scales of tourism operations. Tshabong and the surrounding area represent arid Kgalagadi environment with sparse population patterns. The village of Tshabong is located in the Kgalagadi District in South-West Botswana, close to the South African border (Figure 1). It is the administrative centre of the District. The main livelihood activities in Tshabong include cattle ranching, mining and crop farming. Currently the village serves as a transit site to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park close to the South African border, and tourism activities are still relatively low scale and mainly based on independent travellers

(see Moswete, Thapa and Lacey, 2009; Saarinen et al., 2012). However, it is an emerging regional destination and there are plans to develop and further utilise its own tourism potential (see Johnson, 1996). The tourist attractions, in addition to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park are camel rides, a relatively new tourism product which was introduced by the Botswana Tourism Organisation (BTO) as a community –based tourism attraction (Moleele and Mainah, 2003). Another tourist attraction is the sale of handicrafts of the San/Basarwa (Moswete, Thapa and Child, 2012).

Figure 1: The empirical study sites of Maun and Tsabong, Botswana



Source: Goitsemodimo Koorutwe (Chief cartographer, Environmental Science Department, University of Botswana)

In contrast to Tshabong, the town of Maun is a hot spot in the southern African tourism scene. It is the administrative and commercial centre for the North-Western District of Ngamiland, located next to the Okavango Delta, one of the world’s largest inland deltas (Kgori, Modo and Torr, 2006; Mbaiwa, Ngwenya and Kgathi, 2008). Indeed, Maun is known as the tourism capital of Botswana and the Maun international airport particularly serves charter flights to the



Okavango Delta. The tourism industry in the area is international and highly organized (see Mbaiwa, 2005) and the town offers various attractions to tourists such as camps and lodges, boat rides (mekoro) for example. The town is also the headquarters of numerous safari companies and air-charter operations. It is estimated that about 70% of the jobs in the Ngamiland District are dependent on tourism or tourism-related activities (WTTC, 2007).

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach where views of the communities were sought by interviews regarding tourism in their area. This kind of approach is sometimes called 'natural experiment' which is an empirical study of people subjected to circumstances shaped by dynamics outside the researcher's control (see Dunning, 2012). In this case the natural experiment took place in the context of the interviewees' everyday life environments. Since this is a qualitative study there were no pre-determined numbers of respondents. Instead the study was guided by the responses received which dictated the number of respondents that we could go on interviewing (see Bernard, 2000). In qualitative data-collection, interviews are generally held with identified interviewees until the data generated from the interviews does not bring any more new information (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Hatch, 2002).

Household representatives in both Maun and Tshabong were interviewed. Although there was no sampling frame in a numerical sense, every second household was interviewed from different pre-identified 'wards' (sub-areas) of the study villages. The interviews targeted any adult member of the household (18+ years) available and willing to be interviewed. The interview guidelines had also been translated into Setswana, the dominant local language: if the interviewee was not conversant in English she/he was interviewed in Setswana. Since two of the researchers were conversant in Setswana, the interview information was simultaneously translated into English as we noted the comments from interviewees. This resulted in 40 interviews in Maun and 18 in Tshabong in different sub-parts of the places.

In Tshabong fifteen females and three males were interviewed whilst in Maun we interviewed 20 males and 20 females. The majority of interviewees in Tshabong were over 46 years old whilst in Maun the majority of interviewees were below 46 years old. Another interesting feature of the interviewees of this study was their educational levels.

Maun interviewees were more educated than Tshabong ones in that the majority of interviewees had attained both secondary and tertiary education (fifteen secondary; twelve tertiary, six primary; seven no formal schooling). Tshabong respondents differed from Maun respondents in that most of them had achieved at least primary level education (eight primary education; five no formal schooling; three secondary; two tertiary). The interview guidelines covered fourteen questions. These were already described as demography issues, background of interviewees, livelihood strategies including tourism. The other questions focused on the backgrounds of respondents in terms of the length of stay in the village and household characteristics.

Interviewees were also asked to state their main livelihood strategies and their perceptions regarding tourism in general. Respondents were asked to indicate their knowledge of tourism, type of tourist attractions in the village, whether they would prefer the numbers of tourists visiting the village to increase or decrease.

The perceived tourism impacts were also assessed. They were also required to suggest undesirable and desirable tourism activities in the area/village. Interviews lasted on average 45 minutes. The transcripts from interviews were coded according to the main themes from the interviews.

Results

Perceptions on tourist attractions and activities

Maun interviewees mentioned wildlife as a major tourist attraction to the area. Tourists visited Maun to engage in either wildlife viewing or hunting safaris. Another activity that the interviewees had observed tourists engaging in was boat rides, especially the 'mekoro' (traditional dugout canoes). They also mentioned that people are attracted by investment opportunities that Maun offers. It was noted, for example, that it is much easier to set up a craft shop or a bed and breakfast establishment in Maun as a major tourist destination than some other places outside the village.

Similarly, Tshabong interviewees mentioned wildlife to be a major attraction to tourists visiting their area. In addition they alluded to the existence of a new product, the camel rides tourist product (Figure 2.). Further, Tshabong had potential sand dunes products that were assumed to have a major pull especially for tourists from South Africa. One of the interviewees said that "people come from outside our village especially South Africa bringing their quad bikes and race on the sand dunes without paying for them".

Figure 2: Imported camels for new nature-based tourism operations in Tshabong, Botswana.



Source: Photo by J. Saarinen

Interviewees from both locations were asked to indicate whether they favoured an increase or decrease in tourism development, in their area. Maun and Tshabong respondents were in favour of increased tourism development in their everyday environment. In Tshabong, in particular, residents were not opposed to introduction of non-local products such as camel rides as a 'local tourist product'. However, there were dissenting voices in Maun where three interviewees expressed the view that they would be opposed to an increase in tourism



development, but would welcome tourism development remaining at the same level of development as at present.

Some of the explanation for not wanting further tourism developments might be the undesirable tourism impacts such as demonstration effects, pollution and inadequate benefits to locals (see more below).

Tourism impacts: Costs and benefits

According to Maun interviewees, some lodge owners were polluting the environment by dumping toxins from vehicles into the Thamalakane River running through the town area. They also mentioned the economic leakage as a serious problem in Maun whereby tourism does not benefit the local community – instead, the foreign owners of tourism facilities expropriated the benefits to their foreign countries. In addition, Maun interviewees also alleged that tourists were responsible for littering and there were also indications that tourism businesses have exploited local employees in terms of creating poor working conditions and paying low salaries. As some of the interviewees' noted:

“Most foreigners own the tourism businesses in Maun. They make a lot of money and give the local employees peanuts” (Interviewee 1)

“Local people are just used as tools to drive the industry through employing low skilled labour” (Interviewee 2)

Other costs of tourism were related to so-called demonstration effect: many of the interviewed Maun residents' view was that the local culture is dying because locals want to emulate tourists' cultures. They also alluded to tourism being responsible for drug trafficking, sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and poaching of wildlife. Interestingly, the Tshabong interviewees also raised the issue that tourism has resulted in poaching in their region. In addition, they mentioned water pollution, the spread of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and economic leakages. Tshabong interviewees also mentioned that tourism did not benefit the local community but rather the central government.

While there were multiple negative issues raised, the benefits from tourism were also perceived by the interviewed community members. Under positive tourism impacts, Tshabong respondents perceive tourism to promote environmental awareness resulting in conservation. There were also positive economic impacts highlighted such as village development, foreign exchange earnings, and development of human capital, employment creation and linkages with local businesses. For Maun interviewees the main positive impacts were development of human capital, development of local facilities, improved livelihoods, cultural exchanges, environmental conservation and linkages with local industries.

Suitable types of tourism activities and development

In relation to what kind of tourism would be preferable, i.e. community-based forms of sustainable tourism, the interviews demonstrated both path-dependency and path-creation. Indeed, there were views supporting the existing modes of tourism but also attempts to find alternative development paths. In addition to the current hegemonic types of tourism, such as wildlife viewing, photographic safaris and nature-based tourism (e.g. Okavango Delta viewing), in general, Maun interviewees would also prefer the development of cultural tourism and handicraft production. Although profitable for many Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), they were opposed to trophy hunting (which was actually banned by the Government of Botswana in 2014). They were opposed to trophy hunting because they saw it as a



dangerous activity for guides. In addition they feared that it would result in wildlife extinction. These sentiments were expressed in the following terms, for example:

“Hunting our wildlife (trophy hunting) will affect our tourism industry since it is dependent on wildlife and wilderness” (Interviewee 1)

“We do not support tourism that involves killing wildlife. It may result in extinction of animals. May contribute to declining animal species” (Interviewee 2)

“Trophy hunting endangers the lives of the tour guides by going to restricted areas. It is too risky and puts lives of tour guides in danger” (Interviewee 3)

In addition, they were against the establishment of casinos as they alleged that casinos were responsible for social problems, such as alcoholism and prostitution. They were also opposed to ‘sex tourism’ i.e. people who would promote such activities, and other forms of tourism activity not benefiting local communities. This also explains why the Maun interviewees were opposed to government’s preferred tourism strategy of ‘High Value – Low Volume’ (HVLV) tourism (i.e. tourism development strategy referring to the aim of attracting limited numbers of overseas tourists with high expenditure patterns), as they considered that the strategy did not benefit local entrepreneurs and communities but foreign-based businesses and non-local investors.

Discussion

Based on the interview results it seems that in spite of the different scales and stages of tourism development in the case study regions, the local communities seem to be quite similarly aware of the positive and negative impacts of tourism. However, in Tshabong the interviewed community members were much less aware of tourism development and activity options, especially in terms of alternative paths for the current modes of tourism development. The overall findings indicate that interviewees from both destinations were very supportive of further tourism development. This local ‘pro-tourism’ attitude has been noted also in other community studies in the southern Africa (see Lukhele and Mearns, 2013; Manwa, 2012; Saarinen, 2010).

Interestingly, this positive attitude, in general, does not mean that the local people would not be aware of the challenges that tourism development may bring. The main challenges that emerge from the study were demonstration effect; poaching; challenges in benefit creation and sharing; and repatriation of tourism revenues. Demonstration effect, is reflected for example, where local people, especially young generations, have abandoned some of their traditions and adopted the western life-style elements (see also Mbaiwa, 2011). While there are perceived ‘touristic’ problems in the everyday environment of the local people, community members may see the existing and/or potential benefits of tourism as having higher value than perceived or possible costs, and as tourism is highly promoted by the governments, local people may not always perceive alternative livelihood paths.

Increased poaching could have devastating impacts on the overall sustainability of the tourism industry in Botswana that is predominantly wildlife based and thus needs local support for its very existence. The poaching issue is especially problematic in the context of the Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) model utilised in Botswana (and elsewhere in the southern African region). It often involves a tourism component, and the model is dependent on local support as it aims to involve local communities in natural resource management and related activities, such as tourism, by stating that local people must have direct control over the uses and benefits of resources. By securing the control and benefits,



local communities are assumed to value and manage natural resources in a responsible and sustainable way (see Blaikie, 2006; Ostrom, 1990). Thus, the idea of CBNM in tourism development contexts is based on the idea of reciprocity between local communities and the industry; via participation and benefit sharing communities maintain wildlife resources in which the industry is highly dependent on.

The identified poaching, however, is perhaps a manifestation of the lacking reciprocity between tourism and some segments of local community. Indeed, there may be inadequacies in the CBNRM model and related structures of participation and benefit sharing (see Mbaiwa, Stronza and Kreuter, 2011), which issues were not the focus of this paper. However, it seems that the direct and indirect and monetary and non-monetary benefits from nature-based tourism are not necessarily seen as being shared in a fair manner or as being comparable to benefits for the community (or its certain sub-groups) derived from traditional uses of natural resources (see Hemson, et al., 2009).

Conclusions

Benefit creation and sharing in tourism have been noted as thorny issues in Botswana (see Mbaiwa, 2005). Previous studies have indicated people's dissatisfaction with the economic impacts of tourism (Magole and Magole, 2009) and tourism development is said to benefit foreign-owned companies and/or the Botswana government tourism. The issue of expropriation of funds by foreign owned companies is a long standing challenge. Mbaiwa (2008: 216), for example, has stated that "the ownership and control of the tourism industry by safari companies based in developed countries results in the repatriation of profits, wages of managerial staff and import leakages from developing countries where these companies operate." In the context of Botswana, this kind of development refers to the issue of 'High Value – Low Volume' (HVLV) tourism strategy, which was negatively perceived by the interviewees of this study. Indeed, the HVLV strategy makes local participation in tourism development difficult or even impossible. The interviewees blamed the strategy for the non-involvement of Botswana, i.e. the employment, business operations and value-chains were seen to be foreign driven. This kind of situation is against the idea of inclusive growth and the current development policies in Botswana.

In order to 'localise' tourism activities the interviewed community members in both study sites were supportive towards the development of cultural tourism in their areas, as they regarded this as an activity where communities, rather than foreigners, would benefit from tourism development. However, the interviewed residents in Tshabong were also tolerable to other kinds of tourism products (e.g. camel rides), which may indicate lower tourism awareness compared to people in Maun having more experience on the nature of tourism and tourism impacts.

In spite of this difference the locally preferred future development pathway in both study sites is cultural tourism. It is also one of the Botswana Government's priority areas for future tourism development. Obviously, the study findings of this qualitative approach should be interpreted with caution since they reflect the views of those community members who were interviewed and willing to participate in the study. Although the utilised natural experiment approach is usually seen as having a good capacity for research findings to be generalised into real-life settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), more quantifiable studies with larger populations and a longitudinal approach would be beneficial in future. Still, tourism developers and policy-makers should seriously take into consideration the local preferences and also locally perceived negative impacts of tourism before embarking on any tourism development programme since people's perceptions will influence future support for tourism development.



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