From Common to Banal Tourism in Southern Africa

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to consider the current condition and the challenges facing tourism in Southern Africa in its attempt at becoming a sustainable activity. The hypothesis that underpins this article is that the long history of tourism in Southern Africa is actually working against its sustainability and that a radical shift is needed if one wants to implement sustainable tourism in the region. This article suggests that the tourism of the "commons" as implemented in the community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) policies did not manage to overcome the legacy of previous policies because it did not pave the way to a real diversification of tourists and tourist activities. Drawing its hypothesis from works on informal economy, subaltern studies and actor-network theory, this article considers diversification and the subsequent "banalization" as a way to make tourism sustainable in Southern Africa,

Introduction

The question of sustainability of tourism in terms of social, economic and ecological consequences is an important one. Indeed, the ITRC identified this issue as one of the major themes that should orientate and frame the studies of tourism in the region. As it is well known, sustainability is a rather blurry concept (Fischer and Hajer, 1999). In the Southern African context, what does sustainability mean exactly for tourism, and for tourism in relation to other activities? If one looks at the historical dimension of tourism in the region, it can be said that it has been very sustainable in the sense that tourism has been generating the equivalent of millions of dollars as early as the 1950s and still today brings large benefits. Nevertheless, if one looks at the socio-ecological side of sustainability, tourism in Southern Africa appears more problematic. It has been characterized by profound and lasting unequal dimensions, in particular in the concentration of entrepreneurs, the spatial segregation, and the focus on limited activities that still typifies tourism (Dieke, 2000).

The hypothesis that underpins this article is that the long history of tourism in Southern Africa is actually working against its sustainability and that a radical shift is needed if one wants to implement sustainable tourism in the region. Indeed, the last decades have seen the development of new forms of tourism, mainly through the community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) policies. This article suggests that the tourism of the "commons" (Ostrom et al., 1999, Dietz et al., 2003) did not manage to overcome the legacy of previous policies because it did not pave the way to a real diversification of tourists and tourist activities. Instead, it used the same resources and attracted the same tourists, but changed the institutional arrangements in an attempt to broaden the benefits of tourism. Rather, drawing its hypothesis from works on informal economy, subaltern studies and actor-network theory (Hart, 1987, Cooper, 1994, Latour, 2005), this article considers diversification and the subsequent "banalization" as a way to make tourism sustainable in Southern Africa.

Legacy

The history of tourism in Southern Africa in the 20th century has tended to privilege particular forms of activities. This is mainly due to the fact that the early development of nature conservation policies envisaged tourism as the main factor that could legitimate protection practices by bringing substantial economic benefits, first through a very elitist practice of safari hunting in hunting reserves, and later with a (relative and mainly white) popularization of tourism in national parks (MacKenzie, 1988, Neumann,

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1998). To give a few examples, in 1934 the Union of South-Africa received 20,000 tourists in its parks and reserves, generating £27,801, equivalent of approximately US\$2 millions in 2008. In 1952, the country had 90,000 visitors in its protected areas, bringing in the equivalent of US\$3.6 millions. In the same year, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) had 140,000 visitors and US\$190,000 of direct incomes from tourism, while Tanganyika (Tanzania) received US\$7,400 from tourism (Anonyme, 1953). The decolonization provided an impetus for linking tourism revenues and conservation, because decolonization was seen as a potential danger for conservation policies by most of the colonial administrators. In their view, the parks' revenues could be a sufficiently strong argument for the new governments to maintain the state of affairs in conservation policies. Indeed, the independent states largely followed the past policies, sometime even increasing their commitment toward national parks. Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia's first president, implemented one of the biggest network of protected areas in Africa. This was in spite of prior to becoming president he had said that Zambians should kill any animals the wanted to (Marks, 1984). From the decolonization onward, the importance of national parks and conservation policies for tourism development has not been questioned. This was undoubtedly influenced by the success of mass tourism in macroeconomic terms in countries such as Kenya and South Africa. Even Tanzania, which had limited tourism industry under the politics of *ujamaa*, eventually became a major destination for safari tourism, with an average expenditure of US\$988 per tourist in the mid-1990s, which is, more than the world average of US\$714 (Wade et al., 2001).

Recently, the progression of the commercialization of national parks (Child, 2004) and the establishment of the transnational park policies (Hughes, 2005, Ramutsindela, 2007, Wolmer, 2003) have also largely been based on the opportunities for tourism development in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region (Spencelcy, 2005). It is estimated that the nature-based tourism generated US\$3.6 billions in Southern and Central Africa, and contributed 9% of the GDP for the SADC in 2000 (Scholes and Biggs, 2004).

The consequence of this legacy is now well known and can be summarized in three ways: Firstly, there is a strong concentration of private sector involvement, both at national and international level. This in turn has two consequences: it makes it very hard for newcomers to establish themselves in the tourism industry and it results in financial leakage into foreign owned companies and organizations. Scarlett Cornelissen shows that in post-apartheid South Africa where tourism has experienced an continuing increase, it has been the "global players" that have directed development in the tourism industry, at the expense of new black entrepreneurs (Cornelissen, 2005). In other countries in the region, the tourism industry is today still owned by either large groups or small tour-operators, mainly from South Africa and Europe. In the Okavango delta for example, the tourism facilities are 53.7% foreigner owned, and 23.3% are jointly owned between citizens and foreigners (Mbaiwa, 2005). Secondly, there is an enduring focus on a limited number of activities, namely wildlife for most of the continental SADC countries, and beach related activities for Mozambique. These activities tend to attract a specific type of tourist, mostly from Europe and the USA. Thirdly, tourism activities have been confined to specific geographical areas, in particular with connection with national parks (Dieke, 2000, Mbaiwa et al., 2008). The creation of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, at the forefront of the liberal and integrative discourse on "peace parks", led to the decision to resettle 10,000 people from the Mozambican part of this new conservation complex.

It appears then that tourism in the Southern African region has been strongly orientated and influenced by the conservation policies through which it has found a very rich niche and a comparative advantage in regards to other regions of the world.

The Tourism of the "Commons"

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The shift toward community-based tourism in the 1990s has been developed around the issue of participation and involvement of the local population into the already existing networks of tour-operators and tourist agencies working in the field of biodiversity conservation-related tourism. To be more precise:

the move toward eco-tourism was, from a public policy point of view, a result of the debate within the conservation circle, and not a move from the tourism sector itself. The two leading countries in the implementation of CBNRM in the 1980s-Zambia with the programmes ADMADE (Administrative Management Design for Game Management Areas) and LIRDP (Luangwa Integrated Resource Development Project), and Zimbabwe with CAMPFIRE (Communal Areas Management Programme For Indigenous Resources)—were primarily concerned by the state of their wildlife resources and the way to secure the administration in charge of it rather than increasing tourism (Gibson, 1999, Duffy, 2000). One of the major figures of CBNRM, Marshall Murphree, explicitly refers to the comparative advantage that wildlife yields to Southern Africa in a context of international trade and globalization (Murphree, 1995). Following their predecessors, the second-generation of CBNRM did not open up new areas or new kind of resources to tourism, but merely sought to improve both the administrative and economic processes of previous programmes (Mosimane, 2008). In the 1990s, both ADAMDE and CAMPFIRE's depended on safari hunting for 91% of their revenue (Rodary, 2001). The more recent Namibian programme on communal conservancies has diversified its economic base to some extent, but tourism is still its main income generator, representing more than 86% of the US\$2,7 million earned by the 50 registered conservancies in 2006 (NACSO, 2007).

The choice to rely on wildlife-based tourism in order to increase the social commitment to conservation made sense from an economic point of view, given the remarkable revenue that such tourism—and in particular safari hunting—could generate, and also because there were key stakeholders in the private sector. It is estimated that in the mid-1990s, the average expenditure of a safari hunting tourist in Tanzania was US\$35,000, while an average tourist would spend US\$1200 during his vacation (Wade et al., 2001). The "high cost low volume" policy is a common feature of the most developed nature-based tourism in Southern African states (Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe—with South Africa being an exception).

The tie between community-based conservation and tourism has been a strong impetus for innovative experiences and practices, with perhaps no other comparable situation in any other part of the world. But the commitment towards wildlife also resulted in a clear dependency of community-based tourism on the protected areas network and the institutions involved in conservation. In doing so, the main features of old forms of tourism remain largely unchanged. The same kind of international tourists were offered the same kind of activities. Even if the segregation was clearly not as strong as before, since the programmes were aimed at opening up new social spaces such as new hunting concessions in communal areas, these new touristic territories remained heavily dependent on protected areas as ecological reservoirs, especially for big game. One can assume that the concentration of private entrepreneurs in the tourism industry was not as strong as in the old economic system because the very goals of the programmes were precisely to incorporate new local people. But again, the focus on commoditization of wildlife in international networks of tourists meant that the communities had to rely upon specialized agencies and administrations (Murombedzi, 1996, Mbaiwa et al., 2008).

The shift to community-based tourism presents some dilemmas relating to this ambivalent attempt both to use the best of national park and safari tourism, and to overcome some of their problems. Community-based tourism experienced a real extension in the numbers of stakeholders, but this has been mainly restricted to a process of professional co-optation of local people, either as "communal" entrepreneurs, staff, or members of village committees. This multi-stakeholders approach certainly provided new opportunities to local communities, but by focusing on the same activities based on the same resources and targeting the same restricted groups of visitors, the communalization of tourism proved to be unable to deal with the legacy of previous policies.

This approach is related to two different sets of factors. Firstly, as already noted, community-based tourism has been framed by conservation goals with the consequence of narrowing the attention to the communal dimension of wildlife rather than to look for a broader range of tourists. Secondly, wildlife-orientated tourism uses very large areas, which in turn necessitates a balancing of the different activities

that take place within the areas. The objective is then to integrate diverse and sometime conflicting stakeholders in a single management body or institutional arrangement. But while such integration may be relevant from a conservationist point of view, for sustainable tourism it proves to be largely irrelevant as it does not address the potential diversification of tourism activities and the necessity to link—rather than to integrate—these activities with other uses of the land,

Increasing Instability

At this point I would like to offer some more hypothetical ideas around the future of tourism. This setting and different options can be important for the sustainability of tourism, particularly in the context of increasing instability in the region. Taking account of instability could be important because tourism in the Southern African region is not only marked by uneven institutional and economic frameworks, but also presents some characteristics that might weaken its future development in the situation of high level of risk. In the current configuration of international tourist flows, Southern Africa is a marginal destination. Moreover, this destination is highly dependent on long-haul travels, with tourists coming mainly from Europe and North America. One can then assume that social or ecological changes can have very profound outcomes for the tourism industry at the regional level, because its specialization can be easily affected by the reworking of world tourist circulations.

Two main forms of instability can be highlighted. Firstly, political instability has been a common feature of different states in the region for the last decades, mainly due to regional conflicts (for example Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, and Namibia) and/or internal crisis (e.g. Zimbabwe). The specialization of tourism on wildlife, while giving a comparative advantage at the intercontinental level, increases competition between countries within the region. With the exception of sport hunters looking for very specific game, most of the tourists can easily shift from one country to another in the Southern African region. Broader events such as global terrorism can also affect the tourist industry. It may be difficult to forecast such political phenomenon, but the sustainability of tourism has to be evaluated within this framework of potential risk and instability.

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Secondly, the climatic instability, and more particularly global warming, can also have huge consequences for the tourism in the SADC countries (Berrittella et al., 2006, Hamilton et al., 2005). One of the reasons for this is the politics of reducing carbon consumption, which could bring a decrease in long-haul travel. With the current forms of outbound tourism strongly correlated to national incomes, the majority of tourists are likely to remain from Europe and North America. The tourists from these regions can choose to shift to closer destinations in case of an increasing concern about global warming. While this shift has already being acknowledged by tourist-dependent islands (see Gössling et al., 2008), for an example of such concern in the Caribbean Islands), it still has to be taken into account in Southern Africa. But destination is not the only thing that climate change can affect. New climatic conditions can also cause tourists to modify their recreational activities, for both material reasons (such as change in biodiversity), and socio-psychological reason (such as a concern about the impact of their activities for the visited areas, or their personal engagement in mitigation measures). Finally, global warming can have effects on the ecological and biogeographical conditions of the "wildlands" and wildlife sought by the tourists (Preston-Whyte and Watson, 2005).

It is obviously difficult to predict the future trends of tourism, given the high level of uncertainty and the possible interaction between different factors (Gössling and Hall, 2006). The lack of precise figures for the impacts of global warming at local or regional levels also creates room for unpredictability. Furthermore, the effects of such changes can be negative as well as positive. For example, a global model on the impact of climate change for international tourism shows that Zambia and Zimbabwe would greatly benefit from a 1°C increase in average temperatures in the next 20 years (Hamilton et al., 2005).

In the face of such unpredictability, one option for the tourism industry is to strengthen the uniqueness of what Southern Africa has to offer. It is, for example, recognised that a change in travel costs

can have a limited impact on the choice of destination if the incentives to travel are highly specific (the "big five" for example), thus limiting the negative effects of reduction in air travels that the global warming could cause. But while such option can benefit some stakeholders and companies, it rests on the assumption that no change will radically transform the tourism industry, or that only the stronger and most attractive places will overcome such transformation. It might be a realistic view of the future for some stakeholders but it will not reverse—but rather reinforce—the current uneven situation in tourism described above.

Banal Tourism?

Another option would be to move towards diversification. The idea of diversification is, indeed, at the core of most of the new policies that have been developed in Southern Africa in the last 20 years. But as shown above, the community-based tourism did not manage to bring real diversity of stakeholders, activities and touristic resources. In a similar vein, the more recent "pro-poor tourism" initiatives have been largely focusing on existing forms of tourism and the way that such forms could benefit the poor rather than on diversifying tourism per se (Harrison, 2008). These different policies and initiatives are constitutive of the (now hegemonic) discourse on participation (Hickey and Mohan, 2004), itself part of a broader view on liberal democracy, in which the poor, or for that matter the peasant, the "local" and so on, has to be institutionally helped in order to integrate the larger context of the liberal system. If the effort is legitimate in its intention to make the poor participate, the concept is intrinsically ambivalent as it assumes that empowerment and subsumption can be done in the same move (Rodary, in press). Participation is then a notion that is inherent to uneven situations, whatever the goals of its promoters.

I would now like to consider a direction that is not an extension of institutionalized practices and/or policies. Having the informal sector, the subaltern studies and the actor-network theory as blueprint (Hart, 1987, Cooper, 1994, Latour, 2005), the aim is to give attention to, and to keep a lookout for, hidden or underestimated practices in tourism and related activities. Diversification then means slightly more than the integration of common resource use that has been presented above. It sets out a three dimensional process: diversity in the tourism activities; diversity in the origin of the tourists; and the practice and policy of connectivity.

The diversification of tourism implies the opening of recreational activities not related to wildlife or to the natural features of Africa. This obviously encompasses a large range and forms of tourism which are too numerous to mention here, but can involve visiting friends and relatives, religious pilgrimages, going out of the cities, going out of the rural areas, moving for sport-related reasons, shopping away from home, and so on. We are not exactly in the area of cultural tourism, which is generally presented as an alternative to nature-oriented tourism. Cultural tourism can suggest, in Africa as elsewhere, a strong pejorative meaning of "traditional" culture, that is, largely situated in the existing official tourism networks. This is not to say that such culture tourism cannot re-invent tradition, leading to reappropriation of activities and identities that are part of the tourist experience. Maybe more than any other economic sector, tourism is the place of acculturation, reinterpretation and appropriation. But this process is a hard and long one, in which one has to get through institutionalization and formalization in order to exist. The UNESCO's World Heritage Sites and the more recent Intangible Cultural Heritage List are extreme examples of such institutionalization and the uneven map that this mechanism draws. Heritage and cultural tourism are then the tip of an iceberg which has still to be acknowledged by scientists.

The second dimension of diversification concerns the tourists themselves. Diversification of tourism activities also implies a diversification of tourists. The tourists that want to experience the wildlife, being international visitors or local elites, are clearly not concerned by a large range of practices. It is therefore in the social and geographical origins of tourists that the diversity could be broaden. Diversification of tourists is primarily concerned by the growth of regional tourists (Ghimire, 2001), the diaspora tourism, and the domestic tourists (Ghimire, 1997). In Southern Africa, such tourists have systematically been ignored by policy makers (Scheyvens, 2007). Yet, despite a notable lack of research

on these topics, some data can give a rough assessment of the importance of domestic and regional tourism. It is estimated that domestic tourism constitutes approximately 80% of world tourist flow (Scheyvens, 2007). Domestic tourists distribute more widely their spending than international tourists, and are less likely to produce leakage flows as they rest on local resources and services (Scheyvens, 2007). Moreover, according to official statistics, regional tourism within the continental SAC countries accounted between 11 and 94% of inbound visitors (Figure 1).

Here we face methodological difficulties in tracing those tourists and their activities, which do not necessarily involve crossing borders and are therefore not recorded by customs. They may also not be using or staying in hotels. A recent extensive study of tourism in Mozambique shows that while "informal" tourism could be important, the actual possibility at estimating its size was largely missing. The prominence of formal tourism (and in the case of Mozambique mainly South-African owned and internationally driven) can be as factual as a methodological bias in research studies (Silva, 2007). A large amount of research is then needed in this area, which will have to combine quantitative and ethnographic analyses.

The third dimension of diversification relates to the process of connectivity. Here I want to stress the necessary links that must be identified in the diversity of tourists and tourism activities. Connection has an institutional dynamic in the sense that it looks at cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders in different fields, within the tourist sector itself, and between the tourism sector and other spheres of activity. It has also a spatial scope since it follows the networks that transcend segregation in a given territory (be it local, national or regional). In this respect, the transnational conservation areas prefigure what a policy of connection might be. But these areas differ from the proposition above because they keep the strong focus on wildlife and are heavily supported by large government bodies and private companies. They also bring a great deal of uncertainty about the way that local communities will fit into such big policies (Dressler and Büscher, 2008). Connection, unlike participation, is not an unidirectional procedure: it emphasizes the link that exists or can be created, but with no postulated orientation. And connection, unlike integration, does not aim at creating organizations encompassing all practices in a local area, but seeks to identify the rhizomes that depart from institutionalized bodies.

The reader will have understood that the attempt at appreciating the networks of activities that surround and constitutes tourism in its diversity is a hypothesis involving the size, the scope and the meaning of the practices of leisure and travel. In this respect, it has something to do with the affirmation that tourism is more than official avenues leading to natural or cultural precincts, but can actually produce social groups (Latour 2005). If tourism is to be the leading industry of the coming decades and one of the most common ways for people to meet, the question of its social dimension must be seen to be crucial.

Conclusion

Tourism in Southern Africa seems to be, to a large extent, framed by an elitist and segregative legacy. The shift toward more community-orientated tourism in the 1990s did not manage to shake up the industry because it used the existing and most institutionalized networks and resources. As a result, the communal dimension of this tourism has constantly come up against the narrow demand of the public to whom it has remained addressed. In this context, neither the tourists nor the activities became "common". This article proposes an emphasis on "banal" tourism, characterized by its diversity of tourists, their activities and their connections with other places and other actors. It is assumed that these forms of banal tourism already exist but are not recorded by official bodies nor acknowledged by academics.

As already mentioned in the introduction, the diversification of tourism is both a research agenda and a potential policy programme. But the aim of this article is not to define the future orientation and practices of government planners and policy-makers, lustead, its purpose is to devise new areas of research which have been largely neglected so far. To this end, the research on the diversification of tourism is also political: by identifying forms of tourism that have not been officially recognized, the scientific practice calls for a shift in the representation and understanding of the tourism sector itself, and therefore can have practical effects.

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Fgure 1: International tourists in the SADC countries (continental) 2005.

From	Angola*	Botswana	DRC*	Lesotho	Malawi*	Mozambique	Nemibia	South Africa	Swaziland	Tanzania	Zambia*	Zimbabwe	Total SADC	Total World	Tourists from SADC (%)
Angola			4,147	23	41	2,227	1,429	13,294	91	158	1,095	1,837	24,342	210,000	11.59
Botswana**	350		60	5,474	3,109	615	57,542	626,207	4,911	1,587	72,492	576.328	1,348,675	1,727,000	78.09
Lesotho		1,973				211		280,399	1,481		309	2,088	286,461	304,000	94.23
Malawi						95,019					43,855	60.807	199,681	438,000	45.59
Mozambique					100,580			306.177	23,856			88.450	519,063	954,000	54.41
Namibia	281,365							230,949			35,782	22,765	570,861	972,000	58.73
South Africa	27,801	802,715	15,462	1 657,119	106,674	596,462	219.303		909.966	11,595	127.255	773.991	5,248,343	7,518,000	69.81
Swaziland						15,597		99.176					114,773	1,182,000	9.71
Tanzania	550	773	9,479	177	19.999	1,530	780	28,922	481		29,120	8.884	100,695	613,000	16.43
Zembia								110,272		65.881		148,436	324,589	669,000	48.52
Zimbabwe	18,133	135,860	9,422	2.075	55,965	183.792	11,103	626,677	4,245	8,459	194.311		1,250,042	1,559,000	80.18

^{*} Overnight visitors only. ** Data 2004, Inbound tourists in DRC excluded due to lack of data.

Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Tourism Factbook, http://www.e-unwto.org/content/v486k6/?v=scarch.

Everybody enjoys leisure and discovery. It is therefore the duty of research to acknowledge the diversity of these everyday life practices and the way in which they can be fostered in order to pave the way to more equitable social encounters.

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