

EXPLORING THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF TOURISM: AN INSIGHT INTO THE LESOTHO RESIDENTS VIEWS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate and examine the social consequences and impacts of tourism in Lesotho, in the Katse area, as perceived by residents. Katse is one of the tourist attractions in the country. It is located in the Leribe district. For the purpose of gathering data on the social impacts of tourism, an in-depth personal interviews were conducted with four different categories of Katse residents in Lesotho, namely: Category 1 (One) the traditional leaders, Category 2 (Two) residents employed in tourism related business, Category 3 (Three) residents not working and the last category 4 (Four) small business owners whose businesses are located in Katse area. An examination of the social impacts from the Katse residents has led the author to the conclusion that the negative social impacts of tourism in the Katse area are minimal and they are due to the big Katse Dam which resulted in tourism attraction in Lesotho. Where there are impacts, they appear to be largely positive, at least for the moment. It is therefore, recommended that broad-based education and awareness campaigns be a step toward increasing understanding of the tourism industry and greater understanding of the benefits of positive and negative social impacts of tourism. The results from this study may provide the basis for formulating responsible tourism guidelines that will shape appropriate policies and measures intended to prevent negative social impacts and reinforce positive.

Key words: Social impacts, tourism

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Introduction

The social impacts of tourism on a host community have been a subject of increasing concern to social scientists, policy planners, leaders and tourism destination managers all over the world. Yet the social impacts of tourism to a community are not widely understood, even where tourism is growing dramatically and should be of the greatest interest or concern. Most people think of tourism in terms of economic impacts, jobs and taxes. However, Andriotis (2005:67-90) argues that the range of impacts from tourism is broad and often influences areas beyond those commonly associated with tourism.

The tourism sector in Lesotho is considered to have great potential for attracting foreign exchange and creating employment in the country (Lesotho Government, 2009:39-41). The Lesotho tourism sector employs around 21 000 people and, as a very labour-intensive industry, has the potential to generate jobs, particularly in the Highlands region where poverty is rampant and grinding among the ordinary citizens. Although tourism contributes only 2.1 percent to Lesotho's GDP compared with a regional average of 7 percent (Lesotho Government, 2009:39-40), there is considerable potential for increasing its share in the economy. Lesotho stands to benefit, along with other developing countries, from ever-increasing levels of international travel and tourism. It is hoped that the contribution of the tourism sector to Lesotho might increase to more than 2.1 percent to the GDP if planning and management of tourism are done effectively and efficiently with the collaboration and partnership of the community and the private sector.

The increased tourism potential is created by the building of the Katse Dam by the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP), coupled with improved roads into the Highlands that were built and upgraded as part of the project. There has been an increase in the number of international tourists in Lesotho since the commencement of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) phase 1 construction at Katse in 1980 (Janse Van Rensburg, 2008:3). Tourist numbers in the period 1989-98 increased from 18 000 to 42 000 per year (Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation statistics, 2008:3).

Tourism revenue is generated by visits to the Katse Dam and the nature reserves in the Katse area. Nature reserves are part of the physical, biological and heritage aspects of LHWP under EAP's Natural Environment and Heritage Plan (Mochebelele, 2000:15-18). These nature reserves are meant for preserving the cultures, endangered wildlife and plants affected by the project activities while at the same time providing attractions for tourists. The leading tourism source markets for Lesotho from overseas are mainly from Europe: namely, Germany, United Kingdom and the Netherlands, while from the African continent South Africa and Zimbabwe are leading. Regardless of the region, South Africa is the top of the list with 94 percent and 93 percent in 2006 and 2007 respectively while Zimbabwe was the last from both years (Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation (LTDC) statistics, 2008:3).

Despite the growing tourism sector in Lesotho, there are a number of social impacts that need proper planning and management skills. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to investigate and examine the social consequences and impacts of tourism in Lesotho, as perceived by the residents. An understanding of these impacts may enable tourism leaders, researchers, policy planners, managers and the community to be able to mitigate the negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts on the host community for an overall healthier, economically and socially sounder tourism sector.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following two research questions:

- What are the positive social impacts of tourism in the Katse area as perceived by residents?
- What are negative social impacts of tourism in the Katse area as perceived by residents?

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach as opposed to a quantitative approach which would yield limited information, admittedly though, about a larger number of people. The

residents were selected using the non-probability purposive sampling methods and they were chosen because of their knowledge, experience and involvement in tourism related activities. As Sarantakos (2005) points out, qualitative data can be represented by perceptual and attitudinal dimensions, and real-life events not readily converted to numerical values. A qualitative non-schedule-structured in-depth personal interview was chosen as the research methodology for this study. According to Kumpulainen and Sairinen (2005) opinions about and expectations from tourism can be very different depending on which population or occupational groups are considered. On this basis it was felt that the sample chosen should take account of this perspective. Sampling for a qualitative survey requires a different mindset than for quantitative studies. It is important to recognize that residents do not represent a homogeneous group, which is a major weakness of Doxey's (1975) model.

The in-depth personal interview was held with a total number of 12 residents who were classified into four categories: Category one respondents included three traditional leaders in the Katse area, who had lived all their lives in the villages for more than 20 years. Category two respondents were three residents employed in tourism related business, specifically, in Bed and Breakfast (B&B) in the Katse area and they have more than 20 years staying in area. Category three respondents included three respondents who were residents of Katse and have been staying in the area for more than 20 years and not working, they just see the tourist passing next to their families. The last category included three business people, one owning a supermarket, the other one owning and running a bar and the last one owning a fruit shop. The three business people have been staying and running business in area for more than ten years. The selection of appropriate respondents was undertaken with the help of local traditional leaders to identify a diverse sample.

It was felt that this number would provide sufficient data given the qualitative nature of this study. The method within the sample, though, it can be seen that various temporal, spatial, organizational, social, and cultural dimensions were reflected by the respondent's diverse backgrounds. Such categories were felt to represent meaningful

classifications to facilitate useful themes, experiences from the data. In essence, the twelve respondents covered a wide range of backgrounds which was felt to be more important than an attempt to represent the population solely in terms of traditional characteristics (age, gender, social and class,) more typical of a quantitative inquiry.

The Results

Perceived positive social impacts of tourism

The three traditional leaders (category 1) agreed that tourism is crucial as it creates employment and as a result it enhances community social wellbeing. They further argued that some of their relatives and children have jobs in some B&B in the area of Katse and therefore they now have a better and improved livelihood. They also pointed out that the nature reserves at Katse area offer various tourist attractions and serve as rural income enhancement activities providing employment as well as tourist market opportunities for local communities' handicrafts and other products. One chief from Ha 'Mikia said "The nature reserve has improved the quality of life for Katse residents because many residents are employed in the the nature reserve and they are paid salaries by the end of the month".

The three residents employed in B&B's in the Katse area (Category 2) agreed with the Traditional leaders (category 1) and emphasized the belief that tourism improves the standard of living and create employment opportunities for residents. However, they argue that it is only a few number of Basotho residents who benefits from tourism. They indicated that tourism benefits only people who are working in tourism related business. One of them had this to say "Yes we get salaries because we are working in Umbrella B&B, what about those who are not working in B&B, they don't get anything" Similarly, Saveriades (2000) and Andriotis (2002) found that the residents of any host area may perceive tourism in a positive way because of its potential for increasing employment opportunities and the number of attractions and services that may improve the social wellbeing of the community. However, Chen (2001) stand that tourism creation of new employment opportunities is not conclusive, as those who are residents of Katse and

have been staying at Katse for more than 20 years and not working (category three) argue that tourism is not creating any employment to them instead the tourists are a burden to them as they overcrowd them and litter everywhere around their places. One respondent from category three said “I am tired of these people who will just come to Lesotho, with their lunch packs, eat them and leave rubbish in our Lesotho”. The business owners (category 4) pointed out that tourism benefits everyone regardless of whether he is in tourism related business or not. One of them said “I own a supermarket, I always see tourist coming to buy in my supermarket” This is a clear indication that the residents have different views in respect to tourism employment opportunities. Both Brunt and Courtney (2000) and Sheldon and Abenoja (2001) found that residents working in tourism have different attitudes from those hired elsewhere. Categories one, two and four have similar views different from category three views.

Category one, two and four agreed that tourism provides improvements to transport infrastructure and creates recreational facilities and services. They further pointed out that the pre-dam livelihood conditions lacked roads and the isolated rural settlements were accessible only by rough dirt roads and footpaths, but with dams came tarred roads. one of the traditional leader had this to say about the new roads: “We are now able to go to Hlotse for shopping and come back the same day because roads are now improved”. He further, pointed out that they also have electricity even in their small roundavel. Hlotse is approximately 100 km from Katse. This view is supported by Thermil and Shaeffer (2004), who found that with the increase of the tourists in Saut d’Eau in Haiti, major road maintenance projects, transport infrastructure, water and electricity projects were executed. However, category three indicated that the infrustrutere improvements that are seen at Katse are not the result of tourism. They are the result of the bulding of the Katse Dam. One of them said “ Had it not due to the bulding of the Katse dam by the Lesotho Highlands Water Projects, we would not be having tarred roads, tourism has nothing to do with infrustrutere development that are seen in Katse area”

Category one observed that tourism enhances participation in cultural activities and provides opportunities to meet people from different places. Unexpectedly, category three respondents agreed that tourism creates opportunities to meet people from other countries and also to learn good things from them. Category two supported this point further by indicating that in their work places there are always cultural groups that perform cultural music for the tourists. These cultural groups are mainly made up of youths who expose their culture to other nations. Category two and four also supported category one views and indicated that tourism provides opportunities to make friends with white people from the developed countries. This friendship continues to the extent that some residents got some assistance from the tourist. This view is supported by Ratz (2003), who observed that tourism not only creates jobs and business opportunities but also facilitates cultural exchange between hosts and visitors and brings about an improved image of the host community and provides recreational facilities. However, category four argues that their children learn bad behaviour from the tourist; therefore they don't want to see them in the villages.

A study by Ap (1992) drawing on Social Exchange Theory (SET) sheds some light, and suggest that when an exchange of resources between residents and tourism is high and balanced, or high for the community, tourism impacts are viewed positively by residents, as it is the case with category One, Two and four. On the other hand, when an exchange of resources is low or an unbalance exchange that favours the tourists occurs, residents view the impacts negatively (Aibhoa and Gutierrez, 2005) Observed. Social Exchange Theory suggests that people evaluate an exchange based on the costs and benefits incurred as a result of that exchange. Andereck, Valentine Knopf and Vogt (2005) argues that an individual that perceives benefits from an exchange is likely to evaluate it positively while one that perceives costs is likely to evaluate it negatively. Thus, residents, perceiving themselves benefiting from tourism are likely to view it positively, while those not, negatively. Some studies have found support for it while others have not been conclusive.

Perceived negative social impacts of tourism

Despite the positive impacts observed by the respondents, the residents acknowledged some negative impacts occurring as a consequence of the development of tourism. The most negative comments observed by category two and category three were those regarding the inequitable distribution of economic and employment benefits between local and international tour guides, for example, category two, pointed out that they are unhappy about the tour guides and operators from nearby countries coming to Lesotho without the Lesotho tour operators permission. They take the Lesotho's tour operator's jobs in Lesotho. One respondent from the same category said "The tour guiding in Lesotho is supposed to be done by the local tour guides who know the area better and they should be given preference when it comes to conducting tours in Lesotho". They further argued that the Lesotho Government should assist them and enforce laws against tour operators coming from other countries to do tour guiding in Lesotho.

Another negative impact observed by category three respondents was the impolite and intrusive behaviour of some tourists. The respondents argue that the tourists often take photographs of the herdboys on their way to tourist attraction places without the herdboys' permission. This was a great concern for this category because they see the tourists passing within their villages and they were not happy because of this behavior. The respondents believe that the locals should be compensated if they are asked to pose for photographs. They have the right to know the purpose for which photos are taken. Respondents noted that locals find tourists who fail to seek permission to take photos very intrusive, and stated that tourists should be briefed on how to behave.

Other social problems attributed to tourism by all the category included, among others, prostitution, and high crime rate, increasing numbers of street children, begging and stone throwing by herdboys at tourists. However, they argue that their girls are getting married to the tourists without the permission of the parents. One from category one had this to say "I don't know where my girl is, I am told she eloped with a man who was a tourist here, I am not happy at all". The same category of residents pointed out

that since the development of the big Katse Dam; there are so many street children which resulted into begging and stone throwing at tourists. As a result, they attributed the stone throwing at tourists. These findings are similar to the findings of the study carried by Green (2005:37-56), who investigated the community perceptions of social change and tourism development on the island of Koh Samui, Thailand. The result of the study indicated that tourism has led to increased prostitution of the communities on the island of Koh Samui.

In the main, the biggest problems are traffic congestion, litter and overcrowding in the town. This concurs with Burns and Mules (1986) who report that overcrowding and congestion are often significant issues. However, this study also shows that category four and three respondents do not believe that tourism disturbs local activities or creates more vandalism. It may well be that in Dawlish residents are able to adapt to the inconveniences caused by tourism as was found by Rothman (1978) in Delaware.

The study findings also suggest a range of other perspectives, including perceptions of migration, attitudes towards tourists, crime, language, the church, cultural change, tourist host interaction, and more generally in terms of the effects on the respondents' way of life. Respondents are, however, split on the effects tourism has on family life, both in general terms and in respect to the time the family has together during the tourism season. Therefore, the effect of tourism on the resident family would appear to relate more to personal circumstances and to the presence of children than any particular relationship connected to resident typology

In some other respects, the findings of this study coincided strongly with those of Mathieson and Wall (1982) in concluding that tourism contributes to a perception of an increase in crime. Here category one and three believe this to be the case. The perception is that of an increase in petty theft, stimulated by the higher population over the tourism season in comparison to the level of policing which remains fairly constant. Whether this industry could be considered a potential determinant of crime as is suggested by Pizam, Milman, and King (1994), however, is debatable. However, the

same two categories do not perceive tourism to negatively affect the quality of the environment any more during the tourism season than at other times of the year. To quote one respondent from category two, “there’s always the possibility of being broken into”. In answer to a question posed by Mathieson and Wall (1982), tourism does not appear to have a major effect on the perceived safety and security of residents in this case study. Category two and four perceive no effect at all.

Conclusions and recommendations

Many of the results of this study reinforce previous findings on residents’ perception of the social impacts of tourism. The overall perceptions of Katse residents were positive and can be perceived as a vote of confidence for the importance tourism has for the local society. In this way, the main assumption of SET that people’s reactions depend on the degree of the perceived benefits seems to have truth in a great extent. Although, category three and four of the residents are not working in tourism related jobs, they have a feeling that they would like to see many tourists visiting their area. This could be probably because they have hope that tourism will improve and create employment in their areas.

Although the Katse residents believe that the benefits of tourism will outweigh the negative impacts, this response does not mean that negative impacts will not occur. It is important that the community residents recognize these consequences so that they will be able to monitor and attempt to control negative social impacts and to plan accordingly if negative impacts are escalating.

Despite these overall positive perceptions, residents of Katse identified some negative social impacts of tourism. Too many strange people at Katse, an increase in the cost of living in their respective areas highlighted the causes of their negative perceptions. For effective management of the social impacts of tourism, all the stakeholders in the management of tourism need look upon these negative consequences and minimize them.

It is therefore recommended that all the stakeholders in the management of tourism should consider increasing the awareness of residents by conducting systematically workshops with regard to the whole picture of impacts of tourism, both positive and negative. Thus, conscious and socially educated residents will realize that the initial reasons that made their destination desirable are the nature and tourist attractions. These resources will be protected when residents are aware of both the negative and positive impacts of tourism.

Education, awareness and capacity building are crucial to achieving sustainable tourism. The incentive to conduct such training programmes or workshops resides in the need to maintain community support for tourism and to minimize the negative impacts of social contact associated with tourism on the residents. Furthermore, the establishment of the training programmes and workshops will empower the residents to take ownership of tourism initiatives in their areas for their own benefit. Therefore, Understanding residents positive and negative perceptions is essential to achieving the goal of support for tourism development (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000).

For Lesotho tourism to thrive, local involvement and awareness of tourism is essential. If the community is involved in tourism developments, the community might participate and be aware of the development of the tourism industry. Rob (2005:295-309) argues that community awareness and participation can facilitate the sense of ownership and control the community feels over tourism, and can encourage engagement by a wider range of community stakeholder groups. This may bring about improved community infrastructure and services and may result in sustainable tourism.

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