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Cultural tourism and the role of crafts in Southern Africa: The case of craft markets in Windhoek, Namibia

Abstract

Southern African countries have a good cultural tourism development potential, and many countries in the region have identified the development of cultural tourism as one of the key growth areas in tourism. A specific element of cultural tourism is based on crafts that are sold for visitors in various sites and market places. Crafts and craft markets are relatively visible in the Southern African tourism landscape. While these sites have the potential to provide a significant amount of employment and economic benefits, they have been relatively little studied in the region. This paper aims to focus on craft tourism and craft markets as a specific form of and attraction site for cultural tourism. The empirical example utilizes a mixed method case study approach by looking at tourists' craft consumption at a selected market site in Windhoek, Namibia. According to the results the direct economic impacts were relatively modest in monetary terms. In general the interviewed tourists valued the local character of the crafts but only half of them indicated that they would prefer the locally-made aspect as the key selection criterion of a purchase. It is concluded that this emphasis can influence negatively on the local sustainability of craft-based cultural tourism.

Key words: cultural tourism; crafts; sustainable development; Southern Africa; Namibia

Introduction

Southern African countries have rich and diverse cultures with good cultural tourism development potential (Ivanovic, 2008; Boswell & Kane, 2011), and cultural tourism attractions are increasingly utilized in regional and local development strategies (see Rogerson, 2012, 2014; Manwa, Moswete & Saarinen, 2016). In this respect, cultural tourism is seen as a good and often inexpensive way to attract international and domestic tourism (see Rogerson & Visser, 2004; Snowball & Courtney, 2010; Rogerson, 2015), as many forms of cultural tourism do not require major infrastructure development. In addition, an involvement of cultural attractions in tourism is sometimes seen as a panacea or an automatic tool for creating local employment and community involvement in tourism. All this makes cultural tourism an appealing development and economic diversification option for municipalities, communities and other local or regional development agencies. South African Tourism, for example, which promotes the country for both international and domestic tourism markets, has identified the development of cultural tourism as one of the country's key growth areas (Ivanovic & Saayman, 2013). Namibia's planned tourism policy (and existing community-based tourism policy, see MET, 2005) also places a strong emphasis on community involvement and local culture(s) in tourism development (MET, 2008, see Republic of Namibia, 1994; Lapeyre, 2016; Kavita & Saarinen, 2016).

A specific form and dimension of cultural tourism is related to crafts and similar items sold as souvenirs for tourists and other visitors. Under optimal circumstances, crafts as tourism products can provide

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a wide range of opportunities for local people to participate in tourism and benefit from it: e.g., in activities related to collecting and processing the necessary materials, making crafts, distribution and sales. However, in order to fully benefit from craft-based cultural tourism, the role of local people and the value chain of tourism needs to be aligned with the basic ideas of sustainable tourism development (see Saarinen, 2016), i.e., that crafts are made, distributed and sold mainly by local people and that they represent local cultures, identities and traditions (Evans, 1994).

Currently, crafts and their selling sites are visible in the Southern African tourism landscape and there is an increasing number of market sites being developed and offered for craft selling in the region. These sites, together with other selling places (e.g., curio shops), provide a significant amount of employment and economic potential for people and local development. However, while the consumption of crafts has been studied relatively intensively (see Hu & Yu, 2007; Cave, Jolliffe & Baum, 2013a; Hume, 2014), the economic impacts of these sites have been less emphasized in research (see van Eeden, 2011). This paper focuses on craft tourism and craft markets as specific forms of and attraction sites for cultural tourism in Southern Africa. The paper utilizes a case study approach by examining crafts in tourist consumption at a market site located in Windhoek, Namibia. Methodologically, the paper aims to evaluate the economic impacts of craft markets by taking a simple mixed methods approach, combining systematic observations and interview-based information. First the paper provides an overview of the importance of cultural tourism development in Southern Africa and focuses on the idea and the role of crafts in tourism. After that the paper turns to the case study, followed by discussion and conclusions.

Culture as tourism attraction: Global and regional views

A decade ago the UNWTO (2005) estimated that cultural tourism accounted about one-third of global tourism, and currently it is seen as a relatively rapidly growing sector of the tourism industry (Smith & Richards, 2013). This makes it understandable why so many places see cultural tourism as an ideal vehicle for local and regional development (Saarinen & Rogerson, 2015). As a result, different forms of cultural tourism are increasingly visible in Southern African tourism promotion (Manwa, Moswete & Saarinen, 2016). Although the regional tourism product is often seen as being almost purely based on natural settings, wildlife viewing and wilderness experiences, it is estimated that almost 40% of tourists go to South Africa, for example, to experience cultural offerings (see Rogerson & Visser, 2004). Thus, culture has become a major "pull factor" for tourism in various parts of the region (Jansen van Veuren, 2001, 2004; Monaheng, 2016; see Manwa, 2007; Rogerson & Visser, 2006), including Namibia.

Conceptually, cultural tourism is often seen as the movement of people to cultural sites and attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention of gathering experiences and information and to satisfy their "cultural needs" (Richards, 1997, p. 25; Smith, 2003). In general, cultural needs or culture can refer to various kinds of issues; e.g., to traditions, heritage, art and literature, lifestyles, local livelihood and ways of living, value systems and beliefs, and so on. Thus, cultural tourism can involve an extremely wide range of attractions and activities, such as visiting museums, artistic activities, galleries, cultural heritage zones, shopping, religious locations, gastronomy, architecture, and handiworks and crafts (see UNWTO, 2005; Manwa, Moswete & Saarinen, 2016). Cultural tourism can also include tangible or intangible items and their various combinations (Keitumetse, 2005; see Richards, 2001; Smith & Richards, 2013).

While culture and the related sites and activities for cultural tourism are not static (Smith, 2009; Saarinen, Moswete & Monare, 2014), many authors connect cultural tourism with a search for originality and authenticity. McKercher and Du Cros (2002), for example, have stated that cultural tourists seek

a more "authentic" and "deeper" experience than many other types of tourists. Due to this anticipated connection with a search for authenticity (see MacCannell, 1976), cultural tourism is sometimes seen as a more "serious" and even more sustainable form of tourism (McCarthy, 1992). While sustainability may not really be an easier goal for cultural tourism than for any other sector of the tourism industry, there are many potentially beneficial aspects in cultural tourism, as it can act as a vehicle for mutual cultural exchange and understanding; stimulate conservation and heritage preservation; revitalize traditions and cultural identities; and generate employment and economic benefits for local people (Richards, 1997; Rogerson, 2006; Mbaiwa & Sakuze, 2009; Smith, 2009). However, cultural tourism can also create negative consequences for local communities and environments (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008; Saarinen, 2011). Thus, in order to avoid or minimize the negative impacts, the role of local culture, people and their well-being and living environment need to be specifically emphasized (Moswete, Thapa & Lacey, 2009; Saarinen, Moswete & Monare, 2014).

Crafts and craft markers in tourism

Crafts, craft markets and curio shops are common and visible elements in tourism destinations. Some tourist attractions, such as traditional handicraft villages or tourist shopping villages (see Bui & Jolliffe, 2013; Murphy, Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2013) can be almost solely based on the craft and souvenir trade. Crafts can also play a major economic role: Pye (1986, p. 27) has stated that "handicrafts are the second largest source of income, after agriculture, in the developing world". While this generalizing (and also outdated) statement is probably highly questionable in many regions and current economic contexts, it indicates the significant potential of crafts and related economic prospects, especially in the global South. In addition, crafts have connections to many key issues in tourism, such as heritage, authenticity, regional and social identities, innovations, and sustainability. Therefore, in contrast to souvenirs (see Swanson & Timothy, 2012; Cave, Jolliffe & Baum, 2013b; Gibson, 2014), it is surprising how relatively little research on crafts, craft-based tourism and craft markets has been done, especially beyond anthropological studies (see van Eeden, 2011; Hume, 2014).

Like souvenirs, crafts have long played an important role in tourism (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). By definition, crafts (or handicrafts) are a type of work where useful and/or decorative devices are made by hand or with simple tools (Evans, 1994). This indicates that crafts are usually not mass produced, involving large economies of scale (Markwick, 2001). For the modern tourism industry, however, this may not fully apply as the scale and nature of tourist demand is often beyond the fully hand-made level in practice. While there may be "original" crafts sold for non-local people, i.e., tourists, the crafts in tourism are often described as "authentic replicas" (Evans, 1994), "tourist art" (Markwick, 2001) or "airport art" (Graburn, 1967), indicating a mass production type of manufacturing. Still, even if they are fully or partially mass produced, they may, as objects, reflect or imitate traditional materials, techniques and a sense of uniqueness.

Interestingly, Cave, Jolliffe, and Baum (2013b) see souvenirs as "glocal" products, i.e., products that are simultaneously global and local. This also applies to crafts which are increasingly commercialized, and commoditized goods representing various degrees of hybrids of local and tourism cultures sold in specific touristic marketplaces. These places can be seen as meeting grounds "between both tourists and local people, that is both authentic *and* staged" (Evans, 1994, p. 783). In Southern Africa, typical marketplaces for crafts are curio shops (including airports for the "airport art"), streets (either organized and controlled or individual and uncontrolled trade), cultural villages, various project sites (e.g., philanthropic and social tourism), and designated market places. The last ones are usually highly

organized and controlled sites where the role and interest of the government or other public sector organization is crucial, as these market sites are typically used for economic development and employment creation based on specific local or regional development programs (see Rogerson & Visser, 2004; Rogerson, 2006).

Producing, showing and selling crafts is a specific form of cultural tourism which often aims, although perhaps in a touristic way, to reflect local and indigenous cultures and their traditions (see Smith, 2009; Hume, 2014). Thus, there are many fruitful connections between craft-based tourism, local benefits, and sustainability. Craft-based tourism can involve local communities in tourism activities at different levels of the production chain. However, in addition to being a meeting ground for tourist and locals, there are usually many other actors involved in craft markets such as "middle men" (Evans, 1994). These intermediaries operate at different stages of craft production and trade. This involvement of intermediaries and their market knowledge is often needed, but it can also create leakages, unethical encounters, and the eventual modification of representations and identities of locality and, thus, consumers' understandings of what local heritage and tradition are (see Gibson, 2010; Swanson & Timothy, 2012; Hume, 2014; Paraskevaïdis & Andriotis, 2015; Saarinen & Niskala, 2009). In addition, due to the scale of the current tourism industry and tourist demand, "crafts are increasingly produced for external markets" (Markwick, 2001, p. 31; Cohen, 1995). This means that crafts sold as "local products" can actually be imported from faraway places and cultures, which can have a very negative impact on the local benefits of the craft trade and the sustainability of craft-based tourism in destination communities (Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Butler, 1999; Mbaiwa, 2011).

Case study site and methods

Empirically, this paper focuses on an open craft market area in central Windhoek, Namibia, where the craft trade is controlled by the city council. The market area is centrally located at the junction of Independence Avenue and Fidel Castro Street, next to the city's tourism information office. This central location, which is easily accessible and gives ample opportunities to interview tourists, served as a key reason to select it as a site for the case study. The craft market is also a relatively small area, consisting of less than 20 selling stands, which makes it easy to observe. During the fieldwork period (six days) there were 12 to 16 vendors working at the market on a daily basis.

The paper utilizes a case approach which is "typically based on a range of data sources" (Bui & Jolliffe, 2013, p. 165). In this case, the primary research materials are referring to systematic observations and semi-structured interviews conducted at the study site in June 2010. The research materials were collected a few years ago but based on recent site visits in 2014 and 2015 the case study area has remained quite the same in scale and the nature of business. Systematic observations were carried out over six full (trade) days (from approximately 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.). The observations focused on the visible characteristics of visitors (e.g., group size and composition) and their behavior (e.g., making a purchase as an observable event). As one of the aims of this paper is to estimate the economic value of the craft trade at the market, only the observed purchase pattern (i.e., whether a group/individual visitor made a purchase or not while visiting the market) is used in the analysis.

Semi-structured interviews for tourists were conducted for groups (one person per group) or individual visitors when they had just departed from the market area. Every third group or individual visitor was sampled. This provided a total of 101 semi-structured interviews that focused on the nature and scale of tourists' consumption; what and how much they consumed and tourists' perceptions and preferences on the aspects and importance of the localness of crafts. Perceptions and preferences were enquired

about using open-ended question and a five-point Likert-type scale, asking whether they agreed or disagreed with the given statements. These statements were selected and modified from Hu and Yu's (2007) study on tourist segmentation and craft selection criteria. However, this study did not aim to segment the visitors or study their travel or shopping motivations; instead it was designed to map their preferences and perceptions on crafts in the Namibian context.

In order to generalize the results of the interviews on the level of craft consumption, a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2003) was used. In this case it was based on the combination of systematic observations and semi-structured interviews: The observations were utilized as a point of reference to multiply the interview-based information on the level of purchase per visiting group/individual visitor. However, there was a major difference between the interview material and observation data in the intensity of tourists' purchases. Based on the interviews, 55% of the visiting tourists purchased crafts from the open market. In contrast, only 33% of the visitors did so based on the observations. The observation point provided a clear view of the overall market area, i.e., it was easy to observe individual tourists and their behavior in this compact market area. Those interviewees who said they purchased crafts usually also showed those items to the interviewers (as the tourists were asked about the characteristics of crafts). Therefore, this difference between data sets is probably due to a relatively high level of refusals to perform the interviews – well over one-third of the visitor groups/individual visitors did not have time and/or did not want to be interviewed at busy street junctions where they were contacted. Thus, compared to the sample it can be assumed that those groups/individual visitors declining the interview request were purchasing (on average) less from the market, causing the difference between the interviews and observations and, thus, negatively influencing the reliability of the interview materials in this respect. Therefore, the observations were used as reference data for economic generalization.

Results

Visitor characteristics and craft purchase patterns

Based on the interviews, most of the visitors were from overseas. The largest group among the respondents was tourists from Germany (40%), followed by visitors from the United States (11%), United Kingdom (9%), and South Africa (8%). There was almost an equal number of men (51%) and women (49%) among the respondents. Age groups were rather equally distributed: 16–30 (28%), 31–45 (29%), 46–60(23%) and over 60 years (19%).

Those respondents who made purchases (55%) at the market consumed carved wooden and/or stone crafts depicting animal figures (25%), jewelry (e.g., necklaces) (20%), a combination of animal figures and jewelry (32%), wooden plates and kitchen tools (9%), and other pieces (14%). These items were also seen as a reflection of the original Namibian, i.e., local, crafts by the respondents.

Craft perceptions and purchase preferences: The role of locality and economic impact

The respondents were asked to rank their perceptions and preferences on the aspects and importance of the localness of crafts. This was processed based on the Likert scale, which is modified here (Table 1) as a scale from 1 to 3 by combining points 1 and 2, and 4 and 5 for the sake of clarity in presenting the results.

Basically, the local and hand-made characters were preferred by the respondents and 89% of them indicated that tourism actually promotes locally-made crafts. However, only 50% of the respondents

stressed the locally-made character as one of their purchase criteria. In contrast, the ease of packing a piece of craft (71%) in a suitcase, for example, and price level (57%) were more important for the respondents. In addition, the appearance of the piece of craft was slightly more important than its origin to the interviewed visitors.

Table 1.

Respondents' preferences and perceptions of crafts and the importance of localness in the craft market area, Windhoek, Namibia (N=101)

Preferences and perceptions	Responses (%)		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Tourism promotes locally-made crafts	89	8	6
Appeal of craft is linked to local culture	86	9	5
Craft should be hand-made	84	12	4
Appeal of craft is that it is original	80	14	6
Appeal of craft is that it is easy to pack and take home	71	13	16
Low price for the piece of craft is very important to me	57	28	15
I only buy locally-made crafts	50	20	30
Appearance of piece of craft is more important than its origin	37	29	34

The average cost of purchases per interviewed visitor was 362 Namibian dollars (NAD) and the daily average number of visitors was approximately 75. By combining the interview (NAD 362/group) and the observation (33% of groups purchased) materials, the daily turnover of the craft market was NAD 8,929 ($74.75 \times 0.33 \times 362$). This estimate represents the direct economic impact of craft tourism during a relatively slow tourist season based on trade in a small market area.

Discussion and conclusions

The attractiveness of Southern Africa to tourists is increasingly based on its product diversity. Recently, the role of cultural tourism has been highlighted in the region's tourism development, and producing, showing, and selling crafts (and arts) currently represents an increasingly visible and important element in cultural tourism. As tourist products, crafts represent both local and touristic cultures. In many respects they are transnational objects. On one hand, this may problematize the questions of authenticity, representation, and cultural ownership (see MacCannell, 1973, 1976; Cohen, 1993). On the other hand, very few if any ethnic and/or indigenous groups have a cultural tradition of (systematically) making and selling crafts for non-local people. Thus, those crafts that are sold to tourists are usually manifestations of tourism and "tourism culture" and how local people and cultures aim to respond to the emerging tourism and tourist activities in their living environment and everyday life.

While this touristic nature of crafts is theoretically and conceptually understandable, it may have negative effects on the sustainability of the craft trade in tourism. This is problematic, especially if a "local" response to tourism culture is based on and coordinated by intermediaries or other external actors and powers, and if non-locally produced works are sold as "local" artifacts. In contrast, if developed along the lines of sustainable development, craft-based tourism – even as a transnational and hybrid process – has good potential for serving local and regional development, current poverty alleviation aims, and the needs of previously marginalized people and communities (see Saarinen, Rogerson & Manwa, 2011; Scheyvens, 2011; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2014). The creation of sustainable and meaningful local benefits and employment in cultural tourism does not necessarily require objective authenticity (see Wang, 1999), but it does require socio-politically agreed criteria (e.g., a license or certificate) for

how the role and benefits of local people and localness are defined in craft tourism based on Namibian cultures and heritages.

According to the case example, visiting tourists value the local character of crafts. They also believe tourism can contribute positively to local craft production. However, only 50% of the interviewed tourists said that they regard local manufacture as the main purchase criterion. Instead, ease of packing and price were more important than localness. This provides flexibility in local craft design but also opportunities for intermediaries and businesses in general for importing crafts from various locations where they are produced for external markets based on lower production costs, for example. Although the factual "objective" localness of the sold crafts was not examined in this case study, as it would be highly challenging in practice, the items (e.g., carved wood and stone crafts or masks and fabrics) on sale in the open market were largely the same as those in most other market areas in Namibia and South Africa, for example, and they probably originated from various regions such as Zimbabwe and central and western African countries.

Based on the estimated results, the direct economic impacts of tourist expenditure were relatively moderate. This modest overall turnover during a slow season was also based on a quite small market area with a rather limited number of vendors. Still, this small market site provided a daily income for 12–16 people and – at least partly – their families. In addition, in informal discussions the vendors at the site indicated that during busier seasons there is more trade and more stands, i.e., more visitors and people involved in craft selling.

In conclusion: There is a clear need for further studies on crafts in tourism, especially on how the trade is organized, what are the ownership, value chain, and power structures behind the vendor operations, and how these issues affect the overall turnover and the share of benefits received by local people. Obviously, the definition of localness local community needs to be further discussed and problematized in (cultural) tourism development nexus research. By studying these issues it would be possible to understand and approach the level of social and economic sustainability of craft-based tourism in more comprehensive ways. In addition, critical research into the development and governance of craft markets would help different governmental departments and other public institutions to respond more effectively to local and regional development needs and strategies via the promotion of cultural tourism in Southern Africa.

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