Book review

Cultural Tourism in Southern Africa

How to bring national or regional culture nearer to tourists? This is the key question that became the focus of the book *Cultural Tourism in Southern Africa*. The content of the book revolved around several authors who were looking through different lenses at this very topic, to discuss about the problematics in a theoretical dimension, as well as on specific chosen case studies. It is fascinating how this vast variety of cultures and people who are representing southern African cultures, can be explored and examined in one book. The editors of the book did an incredible work trying to display the enormous variety that is in existence in Southern Africa; accompanied with some selections of case studies, stories and background information.

The first part of the book is looking more into the theoretical understanding of cultural tourism in Southern Africa. Cases from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana were discussed; where the authors looked for basic but crucial answers to this issue. Nearly all articles discussed the originality of culture, their products and their presentation to tourists. This can be especially observed with the recurring question that is intensely discussed of which cultural handcraft should be produced and sold to tourists. Is it good to overflow the market with products? Who should be given the entitlement to produce the products? How to assess the quality that the products should have? Who should sell and benefit from the sale of these products? No matter in which country or region, the answers to these questions are always the same. Cultural handcrafts should be produced and managed by each of their respective local cultural community. The government and local authorities should limit their engagement in the production and trade of these handcrafts. Alternatively, they should take up a mentoring position instead. Besides, big private investors should avoid from interfering with the local handcraft businesses. One example that was pointed out, discussed the quality of the handcrafted cultural goods. The suggestion by the community is that local citizens should craft their own cultural goods to control their quality and quantity.

Also, if the local cultural handcraft is one of the main concerns of local tourism organizations, the developing of regional cultural tourists' spots is another dilemma. Several authors looked into different regions to analyze their tourist models, plans and struggles. One point, which was always brought up, is that the local community needs to be actively involved in the tourism projects. The involvement can be in two different dimensions.

The first one is that the local community should be given the opportunity to take part in leading, planning and executing these projects. Big private tourism companies or the government should have a minimal role and should only take up the position as an adviser. The discussion was: how authentic lifestyle can be presented, if the local community is not involved in the tourism projects. Local cuisines, crafts and dances can be presented to visitors through homestay projects; where tourists can first-hand experience and immerse in the magic of the cultural experience. In this way, a sustainable cultural tourism can be build up. The second point is to involve the local community in the day-to-day routine work, which helps the regional development, as well raise the level of education and wealth of each member of the local community.

The second part of the book looked more into specific case studies of cultural tourism and their implementation of the theoretically discussed issues, from the first part of the book. All articles agreed that cultural tourism

is a market with increasing interests of attracting international tourists. However, the development and implementation is not always as simple as its theoretical counterpart. One specific example mentioned was about a region in Botswana that offers nature trips where tourists can experience the culture of local communities. The highlight of this experience is to spend the night at a camping ground. However, the tour guides faced a seemingly simple, but massive problem at the camp site. Ideally, the tour guides' role is to present tourists the incredible wildlife experiences and bring nature nearer to them. Meanwhile, local agriculture practices impede these tour guides from performing their jobs well. Instead, these tour guides had to adapt and became forced ranchers; who helped to keep the local cowherds away from the tourists. Feedback from the tour guides and tourists are that a cultural experience of this nature trip is nearly impossible, since the local agriculture tradition of free-range holding of cows are established and the local communities do not accept boarding up fences.

Another concern which was discussed in some of the other case studies was the financial support for cultural events. A carnival show in Zimbabwe is the perfect example of it. Despite being promised budgets from the government, these budgets were limited and cut throughout the entire planning process to the day of the event itself. The event committees faced financial difficulties to invite participants and pay performers to attend the cultural carnivals. Another instance is a tourist spot project in Namibia, where a private investor was banned from supporting the tourism project. This is because the financial gains from the project barely benefitted the local community and were rather limited. These investors do not give the local community the opportunity to gain profit out of these projects nor do they offer them leadership and management positions. Furthermore, the promised educational development of hired local staff were frequently delayed or ended up canceled. Moreover, if they earned salaries, which were usually higher than the local standard, the development for a brighter future as a skilled worker was still not provided. Both examples showcased that financial issues are present for running a project. The development and involvement

of the local community existed, but strategic plans for improving the situation were not imbedded yet.

An additionally discussed problem is that of cultural differences. Again, the case study of the cultural carnivals in Zimbabwe showcased this dilemma. On the one side, people want to see cultural performances and yearn to experience different and exotic cultures. On the other hand, they tend to have a strong aversion against the unknown and certain unacceptable cultural differences. In this specific case was the discussion whether invited South American (Brazilian) dancers are allowed to dance in their national carnival costumes in a Zimbabwe city. The concern is that the covering of "sensitive" body parts is a must in Zimbabwe culture and nudity cannot be accepted whereas, in the South American culture, nudity is differently defined. I believe that the question of whether or not to be exposed to foreign cultures and the question of accepting exoticism vs eroticism is still an unresolved issue; as well how much change that is made to the local cultures can possibly be accepted, to accommodate the needs of globalization.

One last problem, which was discussed throughout several case studies, was the issue of goods commodification. Different cases followed up the theoretical discussion of the first part of the book of how authentic cultural experiences should be. Two examples from Botswana and South Africa presented their understanding of commodification. Tourists want to experience the authentic lifestyles and be exposed to the local tribes' cultures of these regions. Hence, the "westernization" of tourism and tourist products is not favored by the local community and by the tourists themselves. In both cases, the point was made really clear, that culture can be only experienced and understood, if it is kept authentic.

Overall, it can be said that the book is a great reference to open people's eyes on current cultural tourism issues in Southern Africa. The book also discussed on specific cases of how problems were addressed and tried to be solved. Due to that, the book is an extremely important reference for further discussion and development of cultural tourism; especially for the Africans. On top of that, the book can definitely assist in future projects and initiatives, to ensure a higher

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rate of success, as it emphasizes on the concept of authenticity.

Throughout the book, cultural tourism issues were theoretically named and discussed, as well as connections were created to reality with samples of case studies. However, the important step of suggesting possible solutions and examples of good case practices that have been successful in resolving similar issues are missing. It would have been better, if the authors did not stop at the point of highlighting the issues; but instead explored additional implementations to resolve their discussed cultural tourism issues. In this way, the book can be taken as a better and more practical guidance for further development of these discussed projects, as well as for future projects, which are in the midst of the planning stages.

Christian Kahl
Christian Kahl is based at the Taylor's University, Subang Jaya, Malaysia.