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The impacts of tourism on two communities adjacent to the Kruger National Park, South Africa

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This paper explores the socioeconomic impacts of tourism associated with Kruger National Park, South Africa's flagship national park, on the neighbouring villages of Cork and Belfast. Case study research, where the study area was characterised as a social-ecological system, was used to investigate the impacts of Park tourism on these communities. The findings offer a micro-scale, local community perspective of these impacts and indicate that the enclave nature of Park tourism keeps local communities separate from the Park and makes it hard for them to benefit from it. The paper concludes with reflections on this perceived separation, and suggests the need to make the Park boundaries more 'permeable' so as to improve relationships with adjacent communities, while also pragmatically managing community expectations.

Keywords: community; social ecological system; socioeconomic impacts; tourism; Kruger National Park

1. Introduction

Conservation and relations between national parks and nearby black communities have had a difficult history in South Africa, with commentators noting social inequity and restricted rights of black people regarding conservation areas (Khan, 2002). In South Africa's post-apartheid landscape, however, national park managers are increasingly focusing on building positive relationships with local communities. One obvious way is through sharing the

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benefits of tourism associated with national parks. The sharing of benefits with neighbouring communities resonates with the ‘park neighbour principle’ (Adams & Infield, 2003) which advocates benefit sharing as a key means of helping to achieve legitimacy.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an insight into the socioeconomic impacts of park tourism. It first reviews the relevant literature and then describes the case study approach used to identify and analyses the impacts of tourism on two communities neighbouring Kruger National Park. It describes the social ecological system – the Park, tourism associated with the Park, and the neighbouring communities of Cork and Belfast – and then analyses the impacts. The Park provides an ideal case study given its iconic status, well-developed tourism industry and the close proximity of historically disadvantaged local communities to the Park. The paper concludes with some suggestions for better management, from a community perspective, of the tourism associated with this National Park.

2. Literature review

In South Africa, many black South Africans feel little sense of ownership of national parks (Carruthers, 1995; Khan, 2002). This disconnection from conservation is argued as resulting from colonial and apartheid practices and policies which physically and psychologically separated local people from parks and restricted their use of natural resources (Carruthers, 1995; Khan, 2002). These historically divisive practices have left a legacy of ongoing conflict over land and natural resources (Fabricius, et al., 2001), such that suspicion and even hatred can characterise the relationship between local communities and the government agency responsible for managing much of South Africa’s conservation estate (Reid, 2001), SANParks. This legacy has had a detrimental effect on how local communities (defined here as the people living within or in close proximity to parks) perceive the national parks on their doorstep.

Changes to the sociopolitical landscape following democracy introduced a number of shifts in conservation policy. One shift has been the requirement for SANParks to make national parks relevant to all South Africans, especially those disadvantaged under apartheid. SANParks has responded to these legislative requirements with policies emphasising the importance of developing positive relationships with local communities and fostering ‘partnerships in a spirit of equity redress’ (SANParks, 2008). The principal means of developing these positive

relationships, and of gaining much-needed legitimacy, is through the sharing of benefits with neighbouring communities. These benefits may be economic (e.g. business tenders, art and craft market opportunities), livelihood based (for instance sustainable use of natural resources) or making parks more accessible for local communities (SANParks, 2008; Urban-Econ, 2008). One key manner in which these benefits may be generated is through involving neighbouring communities in tourism.

Tourism to national parks in South Africa makes a significant financial contribution to the country's economy. For example, 4 374 739 people visited a SANParks protected area in 2008/9, contributing R664.14 million in revenue (about US\$91 million) (SANParks, 2009). The economic gains associated with tourism have led to it being regarded as a development strategy with the potential to provide major benefits for local communities, including employment and revenue generation (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008). However, the effects of park tourism on local communities are complex. While there are numerous potential economic and social benefits, the possible negative impacts make it important to involve local people in analysing and understanding park tourism (Plummer & Fennell, 2009).

Since the literature on tourism's positive and negative physical, economic, sociocultural and political impacts is well developed (e.g. Archer et al., 2005; Wall & Mathieson, 2006), only a brief outline of potential impacts is given here, limited to those economic and sociocultural impacts most commonly associated with local communities adjacent to parks in developing countries. Discussion begins with the oft-cited positive economic impacts of tourism, which centre on the generation of local employment.

Employment is one of tourism's main development advantages and its role in promoting economic opportunities for communities adjacent to parks has long been appreciated (e.g. Goodwin, 2002; Simelane et al., 2006). In South Africa, tourism is recognised as a force for job creation and poverty alleviation (Binns & Nel, 2002) in the light of its labour intensive nature and role as a major employer of semi-skilled and unskilled workers, and women (Ashley & Roe, 2002). Job creation involves both direct (e.g. a role in park staff or tourism operations) and indirect employment (where income is derived by businesses or activities based on a park, e.g. local procurement or roadside stalls selling goods to passing tourists).

Nevertheless, tourism in developing countries is commonly associated with a number of negative economic impacts. These include opportunity costs (where resources are used for

tourism that could have been more profitably used elsewhere, e.g. agriculture or livestock production), dependency on tourism (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008) and the financial benefits of tourism often being overstated, leading to conflict over unmet expectations (Fabricius et al., 2001). Further negative economic impacts include foreign ownership of tourism enterprises and financial leakage because links with local economies are lacking.

Mbaiwa (2005) elaborates on foreign ownership in Botswana's Okavango Delta, linking it to fewer management opportunities for locals, loss of tourism revenue owing to repatriation, and a general failure of tourism to significantly contribute to poverty alleviation. The combination of foreign ownership and economic leakage is described by Mbaiwa (2005) as fostering 'enclave tourism'. Others say this separates tourists from local communities and effectively isolates them from their wider surroundings. Inequities in benefit distribution typically result from restricted opportunities for locals and tourists to interact (Goodwin, 2002).

Sociocultural impacts of tourism include changes in value systems, individual behaviour, moral conduct, traditional ceremonies, cultural practices and community organisations. On the positive side, tourism can contribute to cultural exchange and to revitalising old cultures, traditions, languages and arts (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008). Non-economic livelihood impacts such as capacity building, training, skills development and investment in health care (Ashley & Roe, 2002) are also significant potential contributions, especially given that a lack of community capacity in terms of business and management skills is commonly cited as a barrier for local communities in South Africa (e.g. Reid, 2001; Francis, 2002).

Negative sociocultural impacts include 'demonstration effects' (i.e. locals copying the behaviour of tourists), the marginalisation of locals to jobs of lesser importance, loss or misuse of cultural artefacts, perceptions of cultural exploitation and commoditisation of culture (Eagles & McCool, 2002; Archer et al., 2005). Tourism can also lead to tension, suspicion and hostility; segregation; culture shock; ethnocentrism; and perceptions and expressions of superiority or inferiority (Robinson, 1999).

3. Methods

This research used a case study method, defined by Yin (2009:18) as investigating a 'contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident'. Case studies are

useful in situations where the researcher has little control over events and requires an understanding of context. The context in this study was built through multiple sources of evidence, using two main research approaches: analysis of archival and current published and unpublished data relating to the Park, surrounding communities and Park tourism; and ethnographic fieldwork, where the researcher places events and understandings in their historical, political and social context (Tedlock, 2000) and attempts to capture better insights into local peoples' experiences and aspirations. To capture these insights, the first author spent four months interacting with members of the research communities on a daily basis, gaining information through the use of repeat semi-structured interviews and participant observation (Neuman, 2006).

The case study approach enabled this research to focus on the Kruger Park, its associated tourism and local communities (where interactions with tourism are possible) as a social ecological system. The concept of social ecological systems recognises that human and natural systems are explicitly interdependent – that events in one affect the other. Also, interactions occur between social and ecological systems across multiple scales (Liu et al., 2007). For example, apartheid policies of resettlement into Bantustans (apartheid tribal homelands) are recognised as having caused local environmental degradation (Pollard et al., 2008). Conceptualising the Park and its local communities as a social ecological system also provides for a rich description of the potential impacts of tourism, by identifying interactions between system components, such as between the Park and communities, which may in turn affect the possibilities for benefiting from tourism.

A number of researchers have identified shortcomings in tourism impact research, commenting that efforts to date have been unable to completely capture the complexity and uncertainty of interactions between stakeholders (e.g. government, non-government, tourism, community interests) with diverse political, environmental, economic, social and cultural interests in a tourism resource (McDonald, 2009) and that revised approaches are needed (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004). The social ecological system concept potentially provides a novel way of capturing complexity and ensuring consideration of the multiple, interacting scales influencing community-level impacts (Strickland-Munro et al., 2010). This systems perspective led to questions being asked of respondents, in the semi-structured interviews, about the current and predicted future interactions between the Park and the local communities, and the positive and negative impacts of Park tourism on these communities.

This paper reports on part of a larger research project in which social ecological system approaches were used to explore the perceptions of a range of stakeholders associated with Park tourism in South Africa and Australia (e.g. Park and government agency staff, NGOs, tour operators). However, these wider views are not reported here; rather, discussion is limited to the views of 62 community members from two villages adjacent to Kruger Park. These community respondents were initially located using non-probability purposive sampling techniques. Other respondents were subsequently located using chain referral, where respondents are asked to suggest additional people (Babbie, 2007).

Respondents were selected to include those most knowledgeable about tourism associated with Kruger and about their community, for example village *indunas* (headmen), Community Development Forum representatives, high school principals, teachers and students, Park and tourism employees, local entrepreneurs and business owners, farmers, traditional healers and priests. Respondents with little or no involvement in tourism associated with Kruger were also included, for example home based care workers, and unemployed and aged persons. This range was chosen to access the breadth of possible impacts, both positive and negative.

Interviews in the villages were facilitated by a local interpreter. Village *indunas* helped select suitable interpreters. Interviews were voice recorded wherever possible and verbatim transcripts (based on translation from local dialects) completed. The interview transcripts were coded, using the NVivo software program, which helps to sort and organise transcripts of conversations into a reduced number of researcher designated coded clusters (Weitzman, 2000). Although the researcher designates the codes, these are generally regarded as emergent, where ideas apparent from the interviews provide the basis for codes. Initial emergent codes were derived from frequently mentioned concepts such as ‘jobs in Kruger’. Higher-level coding refined these initial codes to provide rich descriptions of phenomena such as ‘national pride (in Kruger)’. These higher-level codes, plus material from the review of documents and insights gained from participant observation, provide the basis for the following findings.

4. Findings

4.1 Description of the social ecological system

This system has three parts: Kruger National Park, tourism associated with the Park, and the local community, here explored through the towns of Cork and Belfast. Each part is described below, emphasising the relationships with the other parts, as is required by systems thinking (McDonald, 2009). The Park is located in the country's northeast (Figure 1) and covers an area of two million hectares, stretching 350 km north-south and 60 km east-west (SANParks, 2008). At the time of this research, the Park employed 1883 permanent and 233 temporary workers (Urban-Econ, 2008).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The second part of the social ecological system is tourism associated with Kruger National Park. The Park has been a tourism destination since the 1920s. It currently receives 1.3 million tourists per annum (SANParks, 2009). The main tourism activities are guided (either by Park staff or private operators) or self-guided game drives. Local communities have little involvement in tourism in the Park although economic empowerment projects initiated by the Park, for example curio sales and car washing, provide some opportunities (SANParks, 2008) and there are semi-skilled jobs available, for example as cleaners or gardeners.

The Kruger Park's popularity as a tourist destination positions it as a key means of stimulating further development in the local area. Tourism should be able to benefit surrounding communities, in line with both the SANParks and the Kruger Park vision statements which emphasise benefit sharing (SANParks, 2008). This potential to provide benefit is important, given research indicating that the Kruger Park lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the surrounding black communities (Mabunda, 2004).

This lack of legitimacy can be attributed to the eviction of black communities from within the Park boundaries, which occurred up until recently 1969 (Carruthers, 1995; SANParks, 2008). Another contributing factor is restrictions on black peoples' activities as visitors to Kruger. Until 1980 they were limited to tent accommodation at a single bush camp (Cock & Fig,

2002) and it was not until 1989 that the Park was declared open to all race groups. Having a boundary fence has also been identified as a contributor to legitimacy problems (Blignaut & Moolman, 2006). Fencing can reinforce perceptions of separation through being a physical as well as psychological barrier to local entry (Fortmann, 1995, in Ribot & Peluso, 2003).

The third part of the social ecological system is the local community. Kruger is bordered by densely populated ex-Bantustan areas. Approximately two million people live in these former Bantustans, which are historically underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure and characterised by widespread poverty and unemployment (DWAF, 2008), with just under half of all households receiving no annual income (Municipal Demarcation Board, 2006). The villages of Cork and Belfast typify these homeland areas, although their shared location on the main access route to Kruger and the busy Paul Kruger Gate (Figure 1) exposes them to passing tourists. It was this location that resulted in their inclusion in this study as the third 'local community' part of the social ecological system.

Cork is larger of the two villages and has a higher population, estimated as approximately 9509 in 2001 (DWAF, 2003). The smaller Belfast village has a (2007) population of 5979 people (AHPU, 2008). They have similar infrastructure, cultural traditions and background, livelihood opportunities and racial structure. The majority (85%) of inhabitants identify as Xitsonga (Shangaan ethnic group), followed by those speaking SiSwati (Municipal Demarcation Board, 2006).

The following description of the villages' socioeconomic conditions was derived from information on the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality, given that village-specific information was unavailable. Unemployment in Bushbuckridge is in excess of 90%, with 84% of the population classified as 'indigent', earning less than R1300 per household per month (US\$177) (DWAF, 2008). Consequently, Bushbuckridge has a historic, ongoing reliance on wage remittances (Pollard et al., 2008; Sartorius et al., 2009) where family members employed elsewhere send money back home to support families, and familial dependency rates (where a number of family members depend on a single source of income) are high (Municipal Demarcation Board, 2006), although exact figures are elusive.

Food security is also a critical issue and there is heavy reliance upon natural resources (Du Toit, 2002). There are also generally low levels of education (Pollard et al., 2008), with almost half of the inhabitants having no formal schooling and only 6% having received some

higher education (Municipal Demarcation Board, 2006). This lack of (Western) skills and education (DWAF, 2008), limited availability of money and an associated entrenched poverty can be linked back to the effects of apartheid (Blignaut & Moolman, 2006; Sartorius et al., 2009).

4.2 Interactions within the social ecological system: The impacts of Park tourism

The following results describe the perceptions of the respondents from Cork and Belfast regarding the socioeconomic impacts of tourism associated with the Park on them and their communities. Interview excerpts are used to illustrate the four key themes that emerged from the ethnographic research, including the interviews and participant observation. This focus means that perceptions of the Kruger Park not specifically pertaining to Park tourism, for example benefits gained through participation in Park environmental education programmes, concerns about the use of natural resources and damage-causing animals, and the Park's role in social development, are not reported on here.

The four key themes were *direct employment in park tourism*, *indirect employment* (e.g. through curio stalls and sales), *pride in the Park*, and *perceptions of being separate* from the Park and its tourism opportunities. With regard to the first theme, the benefits to local communities from tourism associated with the Park were largely economic and obtained through employment (see Box 1). A total of nine community respondents (15%) were directly employed in Park tourism, in community outreach positions, for example providing environmental education, tour guiding and frontline operations (e.g. gate security, housekeeping, tourist check-in). Community members clearly linked tourist patronage of Kruger with employment opportunities.

Box 1: Community members' comments on their perceived benefits from employment in park tourism

a) Employment in the Kruger Park

If there is no job the people cannot survive you know. The Kruger National Park it helps the people there.

They generate jobs for people, most of them are working here you can see, even me, because of Kruger National Park. Without Kruger National Park where should I be now?

Those some are those who have some businesses in the Park, those who are working in the Park; they regard the Park as their home. Their village. Their industry.

b) Roadside curio stalls – benefits and limitations

I feel good because the tourist, when the tourist visiting the park, they sometimes buy for my stock and I benefit from that.

If [tourists] stop here, they stop at the little markets which are here to buy... but otherwise we don't communicate with them outside.

People who are standing along the road, selling wood and carvings, something like that, so when [tourists] pass through, then they buy it. So they also benefit. So that is our benefit.

It is no surprise to me when two or three days go by with no tourist stopping here.

c) Livelihood opportunities created by employment

You see one person who was working at the Kruger, here at home has a wife, mother, father, children to the school... they benefit that home. The one person feeds six person to eight person at that home, you see the Kruger National Park feeds that home.

I have gone to school because the Park have employed my father, understand.

I think very much great about the Kruger Park because, like myself, I should have not been grown up to this age but because my father was there and the salary they get from there [Kruger], that make me alive now.

Respondents pragmatically recognised their dependence on Kruger and its tourism opportunities, particularly in terms of providing employment, as the third comment in Box 2 shows. A related interest was the livelihood opportunities created by tourism, where employment by one family member directly or indirectly benefited the whole family and for some families enabled them to send their children to school (Box 1). Respondents mentioned familial dependence (where income from an employed person supports any number of extended family members) and educational benefits as significant flow-on effects from local employment.

Box 2: Community members' comments on perceived dependence on Kruger and Park tourism

Kruger must keep going on and help us as I am making a living because of the Kruger Park and because of the tourists passing here.

There is nothing that I can say about not to like them, because I depend on them.

It's good about Kruger Park because I'm getting money from the tourists who go there. Should it not be the Kruger Park, I'm sure I would not be here.

It was also evident from interviews that respondents felt the Park had a responsibility to provide jobs (Box 3). They also commented that the Park needed to create more jobs. They felt that the benefits of Park employment were restricted to those employed and were not available to other community members. Dissatisfaction with hiring practices was a further concern, largely related to nepotism (Box 3).

Box 3: Concerns expressed by community members about Kruger Park employment

a) The Park's 'responsibility' to provide jobs

To help the poverty, by giving them jobs, all of us... those who are poor. Provide jobs.

If you go to Pretoria, they ask you where are you from, you say Mpumalanga. They say, go back to Mpumalanga they have got jobs for people from Mpumalanga. So they must create jobs so that people – more specially we neighbouring the Kruger Park – can get employed there.

[Kruger] must establish more employment opportunities.

b) Limited spread of economic benefits from employment

It is good for those employed there, not for us all.

I think the one who are getting job from Kruger National Park, they are the one getting benefits. Because if you are not working at Park, what benefit you can get, I don't think so. You only get benefits when you work.

c) Concerns about nepotism in hiring practices

The Kruger National Park is full of nepotism; these people are hiring their friends and families.

You find that most of the people are just giving to their relatives, this word, 'connections'.

Even if I qualify for that job and I pass the interviews I must not get employed because someone be my relative there.

d) Concerns about employment practices

[Local] people working in the Park, they are not working as professionals; we don't have a lot of them. Only labourers and some semi-professional people are working there.

Things that's got high value like high tenders, high positions, you'll find it is only people who are coming from far away, those are not affected you know, by the DCAs, the dangerous causing animals, that are getting those opportunities.

People who working there, most specially for higher ranks, are people from far away.

Indirect employment was mentioned in the form of selling goods at roadside stalls, with 11 respondents (18%) involved in this tourist related activity (Box 1). The stalls sold a range of locally produced and imported curio items as well as some fresh produce and firewood. Observations of and information obtained from both sellers and curio producers indicated the volume of sales to be highly variable and prices received were generally low compared to the prices of souvenirs inside the Park. Although curio sales bring money into the communities, the amount is limited because tourists only buy a small number of items and they often do not stop at the curio stalls. So these sales, although a benefit, were not regarded as an economic panacea.

Both direct and indirect employment were linked to a sense of ownership of the Park; as exemplified by a community member's comment: 'I like [Kruger] because it's our place. It's all one place because most of the people from here are working there.' Respondents expressed a national pride in Kruger, most likely founded on the international recognition and appreciation of Kruger's wildlife, and also noted the benefits of meeting new people – talking to them and being able to tell friends in their community they had met people from overseas (Box 4).

Box 4: Other perceived benefits for the communities arising from park tourism

a) Meeting new people

Yes, we benefit. We are welcoming them [tourists] very well and we are happy when they are here. Even if I'm talking and they don't understand me, but they hear me.

We meet people from half around the world, because of the Kruger Park. For an example, like yourself... I did not expect but because of the Kruger National Park, I met you. Now I am proud because I am going to tell them at school 'I have been here with people from Australia'.

b) National pride in the Kruger Park

I'm proud because I'm just close to the Kruger National Park which means it's also mine.

There's this pride about Kruger as a national icon, and a lot of the people share that.

So if you are a tourist and you haven't been to Kruger National Park you just tell yourself that 'I haven't been travelled yet'.

A negative for the Park in terms of community support was the theme of perceived 'separation' or distance between communities and the Park, its tourists and associated benefits. Impacts on communities from damage-causing animals probably contributed to these feelings of separation. These are animals such as monkeys, lions and elephants that move beyond Park boundaries and cause disruption and damage to local food crops, domestic livestock or human lives. These were of greatest concern to those living closest to the Park's boundary.

These perceptions of 'separation' between the communities and Park tourism (and the associated benefits) were apparent from interviews. Some community members saw the Park as being for tourists, not for them. Among the comments made were the following:

The main purpose of Kruger as a whole is to conserve the nature for the tourist to come and experience that conservation.

You coming from overseas come to Kruger Park. Me staying here in Mpumalanga don't know the Kruger Park.

I am not the tourist. I am just sitting here. I know nothing about Kruger Park.

5. Discussion

Community members have a highly localised view of the impacts of Kruger Park tourism, and they focus on benefits and costs to their daily lives, as the four themes illustrated above show. This focus on immediate impacts is not surprising given the ongoing effects of apartheid which characterise the region and foster 'narrow survival strategies' (Percival & Homer-Dixon, 1998) which direct attention to daily survival and the more tangible, immediate impacts of Park tourism. Further, the restricted range of benefits mentioned by respondents can be attributed to the enclave nature of tourism in the Park.

5.1 Direct employment in Park tourism

A wide appreciation of the economic benefits derived from employment in Park tourism was evident, with many respondents linking employment in the Park to survival and a better life. Previous research around the Park has highlighted the importance of direct economic benefit for locals in terms of livelihoods and support for the Park. This may reflect the great need for employment among many living in South Africa's former Bantustan areas (Francis, 2002).

Economic benefits gained from direct employment in the Park enabled locals to support their extended families, a high degree of familial dependence being common in the area (Municipal Demarcation Board, 2006). The apparent relationship between receipt of benefits and positive attitudes to park tourism (Eagles & McCool, 2002) is underpinned by social exchange theory, which posits that the receipt of individual benefits influences positive perceptions (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). In addition, wage-sharing can enhance local resilience by decreasing livelihood vulnerability and food insecurity (Liu et al., 2007).

Despite widespread recognition of the benefits of tourism employment, respondents were keenly aware of the limited availability of positions. Other researchers have commented that the presence of national parks encourages high and often unmet expectations of local economic benefit through job opportunities (King, 2007). Around the Kruger Park, the need for jobs vastly exceeds the opportunities available in tourism (Rademan, 2004; Makamu,

2005; Anthony, 2006). The resulting inequality in income distribution can foster differential access to environmental resources (Adger et al. 2002) and opportunities to benefit from Park tourism. Unmet expectations can affect trust relations and may lead to conflict and alienation as locals feel they are missing out on the perceived employment benefits offered by national parks (Dahlberg & Burlando, 2009).

Perceptions of nepotism in hiring practices persist among local communities, despite hiring practices that benefit locals, for example, the employment of locals is favoured for special events held within the Park and for contract works. In this study, nepotistic practices were attributed to the benefits of employment being limited to extended families and others with close connections to those already employed. King (2007) similarly identified dissatisfaction with hiring practices as a common complaint in his study of community perceptions of the Mahushe Shongwe Game Reserve in South Africa.

5.2 Informal employment: Curio stalls

Where local community members are generally unable to access tourists inside park boundaries (Goodwin, 2002), curio stalls on the entrance roads to parks provide an economic opportunity (Rademan, 2004; Spenceley & Goodwin, 2007). Although tourist patronage of roadside curio stalls is uncertain and small-scale, with limited opportunities for financial benefit (Scheyvens, 1999), some researchers have suggested that the income derived from curios is one of the few secure income sources for locals, and comprises a major part of their cash income (Bruyere et al., 2009). It can 'often mean physical survival in the extremely impoverished communities which surround the [Kruger] park' (Cock & Fig, 2002:146). These observations probably reflect the localised benefits of small-scale tourism operations, like curio stalls, where most of the income stays in the community (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008).

Curio sales also potentially enhance local cultural and educational values through producing and selling traditional handicrafts (Scherl & Edwards, 2007). Reinforcement of intangible values such as these can contribute to community psychological empowerment (Scheyvens, 1999) and the strengthening of local traditions and practices. Additionally, the existence of craft industries can be an example of best practice in the sharing of nature based tourism benefits (Scholes & Biggs, 2004).

5.3 Pride in the Kruger Park

A new and important finding from this work, complementing the usual emphasis on employment in other social impact studies, is the pride in the Kruger Park that was expressed by local communities. This finding was made possible through conceptualising the study focus as a social ecological system and then using an ethnographic approach. Pride in the Park is part of a mixed set of emotions about it and seems to be associated with living next to an internationally recognised icon. Such an appreciation can motivate ecosystem stewardship (Kofinas & Chapin, 2009) and provide a fundamental building block for loyalty to the Park.

5.4 Separation from Park tourism

Another new and important finding, again attributable to the conceptual and methodological approach taken, was that despite clear recognition of economic and sociocultural benefits, and a local pride, many locals felt ‘separated’ from the Park and the benefits associated with its tourism. The historical precedent this perception lies in tourism in South Africa being a traditionally white domain (Kepe, 2009). Garland (2008) argues that feelings of alienation are inherent in African conservation, based on dichotomies produced through a history of racial inequality between foreigners and locals and characterised by attention to the needs and desires of foreigners. Local opinions of the Park existing for the benefit of tourists (Rademan, 2004) suggest perceptions of separation.

More broadly, the perceived separation between local communities and the benefits from Park tourism reflects an implicit understanding that locals have the right to benefit from Park tourism, because of geographical proximity. This ‘right’ and the expectation of local benefit have permeated conservation policy for several decades, and were made explicit at the 2003 World Parks Congress² where the principle of local benefit as part of ‘good’ conservation practice was detailed. Essentially, the management and practice of protected areas now promotes recognition of wider context and the placing of protected areas into the broader sociocultural, political and economic landscape (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004; Kothari, 2008). The delivery of benefits to local communities is a central element of a new management paradigm, with protected areas now being managed to ‘help meet the needs of local people, who are increasingly seen as essential beneficiaries of protected area policy,

² Durban South Africa, 8-17 September

economically and culturally' (Phillips, 2003:19). The principle of local benefit is clearly entrenched in policy within the Kruger Park (SANParks, 2008).

6. Conclusion

This research presents a largely positive depiction of the impacts of Park tourism on Cork and Belfast villages, despite indications that the spread of financial benefit was highly limited. Economic benefits achieved through direct and indirect employment in tourism associated with Kruger National Park were clearly a positive impact. Local dependency on tourism for income helps explain these views. Ongoing attention to the economic benefits possible for local communities through Park tourism appears to be a critical component of the relationship between the Park and local communities. Conceptualising the study focus as a social ecological system combined with an ethnographic research approach afforded a unique and interesting insight: that local communities were proud of the Park and its tourism but at the same time felt separated from it.

This perceived separation, probably related to the enclave nature of Park tourism and the subsequent limitations to local benefits, requires policy response. Policy and management efforts to increase the permeability of the boundary between local communities and the tourism opportunities provided by Park may help. However, it will be crucial to temper the often unrealistic expectations of benefits.

Suggestions for making the boundary more permeable hinge on moving community members across the boundary and enabling benefits to flow across it. Possible movements could include environmental education activities in the Park for school children, free bus trips to the Park and free access for locals. Ways to improve the flow of tourism benefits to local communities include promoting stops by tour operator at community-run roadside stalls, and improving the transparency of hiring practices and tackling nepotism. Other measures include greater sourcing of local produce and the development of cultural tourism itineraries in which Park guests visit local communities as part of organised tours run by the Park and local communities.

In conclusion, we offer a few comments on the methods of this study. Ethnography, a widely used approach in determining the social impacts of developments (such as tourism) on

communities, proved useful and effective in accessing local peoples' experiences and aspirations. Seeing the study area as a social ecological system, encompassing the communities, the Park and its tourism, was similarly useful. It ensured that the researchers looked for impacts at the interfaces between system components, for example, the apparently conflicting existence of pride and separation were apparent at the Park-community interface.

If the Park or the communities had been examined in isolation from each other, such insights would have been less likely. Further, the combined ethnographic and social ecological systems approach ensured attention to the multiple scales contributing to impacts, for example the lack of employment in the study communities is largely due to the apartheid legacy rather than to any local phenomenon. It is an example of events at much broader scales driving impacts at local (community) scales. This combined approach provided a clear description and analysis of the tourism impacts experienced by these communities and is recommended for similar applications, especially where society and nature interface in complex and intriguing ways.

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