

Original Research Article

Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model: a community-based intervention to address barriers hampering the heritage sector in Namibia

A.P. Muulila¹, N.R. Mbukusa² and R. K. Shalyefu³

1. Department of Heritage Management, National Heritage Council of Namibia, Namibia
2. Department of Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Namibia
3. Department of Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Namibia

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ABSTRACT

Heritage tourism is a form of tourism that attracts people to visit heritage sites to appreciate the natural and cultural heritage of any given place. Heritage tourism marketing and development in Namibia have been experiencing numerous impediments. This study, therefore, examines the barriers hindering the heritage sector and presents a conceptual model for heritage tourism development and marketing at the grassroots level. This qualitative study adopted an interpretive phenomenology design to generate data. The population of this study consisted of 58 heritage practitioners from the Oshikoto region of Namibia. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select a sample size of 20 participants. Data were collected through an in-depth interview, a focus group discussion and document analysis. The data collected were analyzed using thematic data analysis. The study revealed that the development, promotion and preservation of Namibia's heritage resources as tourism products pose many challenges, including inadequate funding, lack of basic infrastructure, weak documentation and poor marketing of heritage products. The study concluded and recommended that to address barriers hampering the heritage sector in Namibia, there is a need to intensify heritage funding as well as collaboration among a range of heritage stakeholders to strengthen partnerships and sharing of available resources including heritage spaces and facilities. The study also proposed the Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model as an alternative strategy to address the identified challenges. The proposed model includes a road map with detailed activities to develop heritage tourism in a way that engages the local and all heritage stakeholders by adopting a participatory approach to valorization and marketing of local heritage resources as tourism products.

1. Introduction

Heritage tourism is a form of tourism that attracts people to visit heritage sites and appreciate the natural heritage and experience or learn about the cultural heritage (Abahneh, 2015; Ezengu, 2020). It includes cultural tours, trips to festivals, visits to monuments and ruins, art viewing, and experiencing traditions and their vibrant expression in the target community. Hence, heritage resources have the potential to be a

driving force for heritage tourism and local development in both rural and urban areas if well-developed and marketed (Hausmann & Weuster, 2018). Heritage resources can be the backbone of heritage tourism if thoroughly developed and marketed. Heritage tourism is currently recognized as an economic sector with the potential for community empowerment and sustainable community development at the grassroots level (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2021). In this regard, the heritage sector

has proven to be an economic stimulus that creates jobs and direct economic benefits to the local communities, contributes to infrastructure development, and is a platform for profitable business opportunities (Doganer & Dupont, 2015). Other social benefits derived from heritage tourism include environmental protection, cultural exchange, revitalization of local culture and traditions, means of psychosocial support, and educational and spiritual values (Ezenagu, 2020).

Namibia is a country with rich heritage resources which can be the basis for heritage tourism development. However, their potential has not yet been fully realized and has hardly developed. Similarly, the heritage sector faces several challenges that hamper the development and marketing of heritage resources for heritage tourism. As a result, the country's heritage tourism industry is developing inefficiently. At the same time, current marketing strategies do not include approaches to encourage and attract visitors to the rich country's heritage resources and thus do not classify Namibia as a heritage tourism destination. Rather, the marketing strategies focus on ecotourism and wildlife (Ministry of Education, Art and Culture and Ministry of Environment and Tourism, 2021). Marketing heritage resources as heritage tourism products is a complex process. It encompasses the entire process of promoting the heritage tourism sector and selling heritage products, experiences and services. Consequently, there is a need for an effective heritage tourism development model that allows the involvement of the local community and key stakeholders (McCamley & Gilmore, 2018). Local communities can become peripheral hubs that stimulate new socio-economic activities through the valorization and commercialization of heritage resources and the diversification of community-based heritage tourism. Thus, this study aims to explore the perspectives of local heritage practitioners on the challenges associated with the development and marketing of heritage resources for tourism consumption. In addition, the study aimed to raise public heritage awareness and present a conceptual model for heritage tourism development and marketing at the grassroots level.

2. Literature review

To explore the barriers faced with the development and marketing of heritage resources as heritage tourism in Namibia, definitions of the following key concepts are essential.

2.1. Heritage

Heritage is a broad concept and includes both natural and cultural features. It is the legacy from the past, what we live with today and what we pass on to our

future generations, including tangible as well as intangible resources with significance or values (International Council of Monuments and Sites, 1999). Heritage can be regarded as the present manifestation of the human past. For Bitusikova (2021), heritage is part of the past, selected in the present for contemporary purposes, be the economic, cultural, political or social usage. On this note, heritage is seen as an important market tool and a major tourist attraction, thus bridging the gap between culture and economic value in societies (Ezenagu, 2020). Heritage values refer to the qualities attributed to heritage resources (Mensah, 2022) and are associated with the preservation, management, and development of heritage resources (Diaz-Andreu, 2017). These values reside in the benefits derived from their direct and indirect use and include economic, social, aesthetic, scientific, symbolic, spiritual and historical values. Namibia has a rich natural and cultural heritage, which are of great importance for cultural preservation and revitalization, environmental protection and the economic life of the community.

2.2. Heritage tourism

Tourism activity based on the utilization of heritage resources is referred to as heritage tourism. Eladway et al. (2020) described heritage tourism as the experience of travelling to places and activities that represent the authenticity of people's stories, the past and present, which includes history, culture and natural resources. It is a phenomenon where the cultural, historical and ethnic components of a society or place are used as resources to attract tourists (Ezenagu, 2020). Heritage tourism includes not only visits to monuments and archaeological sites but also experiences of the traditions and vibrant expressions of the local communities visited (Ababneh, 2015)). According to Bitusikova (2021), the significance of historical tourism includes its political purpose of stimulating pride in national or local history, being a source of rising local revenue and being a catalyst for social change. Heritage tourism promotes local and regional development, contributes to community empowerment, opens up profitable business opportunities and is a source of capacity building for local people. Therefore, heritage tourism's perspective is committed to the development, promotion and preservation of heritage resources, community empowerment and economic development.

2.3. Community participation and heritage tourism

Heritage development can only be successful with full community participation. The notion of community participation in heritage tourism development may include the identification, nomination, preservation and safeguarding of heritage resources to generate benefits for local communities through heritage tourism. It is consistent with bottom-up approaches that include heritage resources sustainability, sustainable community livelihood, equity and empowerment. According to Salazar (2012), community refers not only to a locality but also to a network of relationships and shared interests. In the development and marketing of heritage tourism, the community can be a group of individual practitioners or custodians of heritage resources and practices. Hence, local communities must play an important role in the development of heritage tourism (Eladway et al., 2020). Local people should be encouraged to get involved in identifying untapped natural and cultural heritage resources in the region and determining their importance for the development of heritage tourism. Community participation in heritage tourism development enhances partnership and capacity building, decision-making, knowledge sharing, and collaboration with diverse stakeholders (Li & Hunter, 2014).

2.5. Heritage Tourism marketing

Marketing is an important aspect of heritage tourism development. Heritage tourism marketing includes the identification, selection and development of heritage products, the setting of prices for products as well as the setting of entrance fees to heritage sites. Marketing is also extended to the accessing of heritage services and places and the development and implementation of appropriate promotional strategies. Hence, heritage tourism marketing is a complex process and differs from traditional and mainstream tourism marketing practices (McCamley & Gilmore, 2018). Hasan and Jobaid (2014) described heritage tourism marketing as a process of convincing and communicating with actual and potential heritage tourists as they pay a visit to a heritage destination. This process is responsible for creating communicating, delivering and exchanging the element of heritage value for tourism development and is concerned with how heritage resources from different cultures are marketed as tourist attraction products. Donohoe (2012) expressed that heritage tourism marketing lies in strategies designed to communicate with target markets to generate profits. It can therefore be used to boost the number of domestic and foreign tourists visiting heritage tourism destinations. Furthermore, heritage marketing can also be used to raise public awareness of the significance of heritage resources and to reduce negative impact. For sustainable heritage tourism, there is a need to use

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) platforms. Hausmann and Weuster (2018) describe ICTs as an umbrella encompassing various digital communication tools, devices, and technologies as well as the various services and their applications. The ICTs platforms can be used for content creation to provide access to heritage information in the global market, thereby accelerating the development of heritage tourism. Additionally, the use of ICTs infrastructure helps communities to be more strategic and entrepreneurial in managing their heritage (Katiyar & Priyanka, 2015). It can be key to transforming the production, interpretation, marketing and consumption of heritage services, as well as interactively communicating with heritage tourists while managing their experiences (Hausmann & Weuster, 2018).

3. Methodology

A qualitative research approach with an interpretive phenomenological design was adopted to explore the perspectives of heritage practitioners on the barriers related to the development and marketing of heritage resources as products for tourism in the region. The target population of the study consisted of 58 heritage practitioners representing a wide range of professions related to the preservation and development of heritage in the Oshikoto region. The professions represented include curators, heritage site officers, culture officers, arts extension officers, conservancies officers, craftsmen and culture conveners. Using purposive sampling, 20 key informants were selected, 12 of whom were interviewed in depth and 8 took part in a focus group discussion. In addition, secondary data from records and reports for the heritage institutions in the region were collected using document analysis. The multiple data collection methods were used for triangulation purposes. The collected data were analyzed using a thematic data analysis approach, following the analytical procedure proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014). The researchers analyzed the data concurrently with the data collection. The researchers used the dataset as organized per theme to write the findings of this study. The data were analyzed concurrently with data gathering. Data were presented in narrative forms.

4. Results and discussion

Barriers hampering the development, preservation and marketing of heritage resources as heritage tourism products in the Oshikoto region, Namibia.

4.1. Poor funding for the heritage sector

The study revealed that Namibia has been facing the challenge of a short supply of public and private funding for the heritage sector. Consequently, it hinders the preservation, promotion and development of heritage resources as heritage tourism products. Besides, the heritage sector is placed in the Ministry of Education, Art and Culture, whereby education (teaching and learning) is considered a ministerial priority in comparison to culture and heritage development and promotion. This is reflected in the allocation of the ministerial budget and its distribution among different directorates and divisions within the ministry. For instance, the following participants (AEO1, C2 and AEO2) stated:

The Divisions of National Heritage and Culture Programmes in the Region were not allocated a budget for the previous financial two years (2017/2018 and 2018/2019) by Head Office. We have not been able to do much in the region due to the lack of the operational budget and many of our activities planned were cancelled. I don't know why arts and culture are not considered important in Namibia when they have great potential for economic development (Participant AEO1).

This museum is managed by the town council and when allocating funds to the departments and institutions within, the museum receives a small budget that is not even enough to carry out planned activities (Participant C2).

We are faced with the problem of lack of funding related to carrying out our activities and advertising our cultural products (Participant AEO2).

In literature, the same was noted by Sam (2019) reported that the heritage sector in Namibia has been facing funding challenges that hamper the development of the sector. Similarly, the results confirmed those of Huibin, Marzuki and Razak (2012) which shows that the challenge related to the preservation, promotion and management of heritage in developing countries is a prevalent lack of public funds. These results are supported by records obtained during the document analysis. The researchers found that a minimal operational budget was allocated to the Sub-division of National Heritage and Culture Programmes and Sub-division of Arts Education and Training in the Directorate of Education, Arts and Culture in the region. Due to the budget cut planned activities aimed at the promotion and preservation of heritage in the region were cancelled. It should also be noted that the above-mentioned sub-divisions are mandated by the Government to develop and promote

arts and heritage for economic growth.

4.2. Lack of basic infrastructure

The study found that the Oshikoto region faces the challenge of a lack of supporting facilities and infrastructure. These are infrastructures where heritage practitioners can host heritage promotion activities such as arts festivals, talent shows, and cultural festivals and exhibit the artefacts present in the region. The following quotes from respondents support this claim:

There is no single studio or performance centre in the region. I have no place to teach music to learners and I don't have musical instruments to use. The government needs to bail us out (Participant AC5).

We are facing the challenge of lack of funding. Funding to carry out our activities, funds to promote culture and arts in the region, funds to support the community in initiating activities to promote arts and culture, and funds to develop and build infrastructure such as workshops, culture and craft centres where craft people can go and exhibit their products (Participant AEO2).

Participant CGL1 pointed out: *"There are no centres such as culture villages where we can lively exhibit the people's culture in the region".*

These results mirror those reported by Yang et al. (2018) found that one of the barriers for heritage practitioners such as artisans is the lack of availability of basic infrastructures such as power supply and commercial markets. The results also support the study by Viljoen and Henama (2017) who claim that the heritage sector in most rural areas of Africa is characterized by underdevelopment or a total lack of basic infrastructure. Heritage tourism infrastructure is an integral part of heritage tourism development. According to Ebbe (2009), infrastructure can serve as the single important key to tourism growth and successful performance and can provide an entry point for effective interventions in heritage conservation and development. Henceforth, to successfully preserve, promote and develop heritage resources requires basic facilities and public infrastructure. Public infrastructures are one of the pillars for social and economic growth in the heritage tourism industry as they have the potential to attract multiple tourists. Therefore, it is of great importance to develop heritage facilities and infrastructures in the region. Infrastructures to be developed for the heritage tourism sector can include roads, craft shops,

museums, cultural villages, heritage sites, theatres, art galleries, conservancies and landscapes. Some of these infrastructures become heritage assets themselves.

4.3. Lack of interest and participation by the locals in heritage matters

The study revealed that heritage practitioners and institutions in the Oshikoto region are challenged by the lack of interest from local people in heritage activities aimed at preserving, promoting and developing heritage resources for economic purposes. The respondents mentioned the following:

As a curator, I keep a record of visitors coming to our museum and only a few Namibians visit the museum. Many community members have no interest or willingness to participate in heritage activities related to activities in the region (Participant CO1).

I observed poor participation by local inhabitants, schools and institutions in activities such as Namibia Heritage Week, culture festivals and heritage-related social gatherings that are meant for heritage development and promotion (Participant HSO2).

Young people have no interest in cultural heritage-related matters and consider most cultural heritage activities time-consuming and old-fashioned (Participant AC4).

In addition, the document analyzed such as visitor records for museums, cultural villages, conservancies, and heritage sites show that compared to foreign tourists, few locals visit heritage sites and institutions. The results showed that local people are not interested in engaging with heritage matters. Lack of interest can be attributed to many factors such as poor marketing, lack of heritage education, Christianity, Westernization and acculturation. The results are consistent with the previous study by AbdelNaby (2017) which showed that there is a lack of interest in the active participation of the local people in heritage promotion and preservation. In addition, the results support Yang, et al. (2018) who observed that there is a growing trend among the younger generation that they are reluctant to enrol in heritage-related studies or choose heritage-related careers, instead, preferring to work in other sectors. The thriving promotion and development of heritage depend on the interests of the local communities as they are the custodians of heritage resources in their locality. Importantly, the local community's involvement in the conversion of heritage resources into tourism products and their marketing efforts give greater importance to these heritage resources.

4.4. Poor documentation of heritage significance and potential

Poor documentation and limited research on heritage resources hinder the preservation, promotion and development of heritage tourism in the region. Local people and relevant stakeholders should assist with the identification of such resources and assess their cultural values and significance. The National Strategy on Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development and Employment Creation Opportunities at Community Level (2021) reported that no systematic research is being conducted on the importance of heritage tourism in Namibia. Similarly, the following respondents supported the claim:

Cultural heritage practices, indigenous knowledge and events such as rituals, new harvest ceremonies, children's naming ceremonies and more are disappearing and gradually dying due to a lack of documentation (Participant CGL5).

Due to the lack of documentation of cultural heritage such as cultural arts and crafts skills, which are intangible cultural heritage, the elders are ageing and forgetting traditional artistic skills and techniques resulting in no skills left to be transferred to the young generations (Participant AC6).

Indigenous knowledge systems related to traditional healing and agricultural techniques are disappearing because they are weakly documented, thus, there is nothing left to retain and build on (Participant CO1).

These results support the study of AbdelNaby (2017) who explained that poor documentation of heritage resources is one of the major challenges of the heritage sector. The results continue to agree with Gwenzi et al. (2015) who warn that indigenous knowledge systems are at risk of disappearing due to the lack of systematic documentation and coordinated research of fragile intangible cultural heritage. Similarly, Underberg-Goode (2014) called on institutions responsible for heritage to research and document all the heritage resources threatened by extinction.

4.5 Poor marketing of heritage resources as heritage tourism products

The study revealed that current marketing strategies for heritage resources in the Oshikoto region are not effective. If expanded, the community will benefit from heritage resources available in the region through heritage tourism.

Poor marketing of heritage products and sites was identified as one of the challenges facing the heritage tourism sector in Namibia. The poor marketing is attributed to poor funding and a lack of interest from both the public and private sectors. In addition, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (2021) in the National Strategy on Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development and Employment Creation Opportunities at Community Level reported that mainstream tourism does not market Namibia as a heritage destination. Heritage resources such as handicrafts, museums and cultural villages have the potential to attract heritage tourists to the region and therefore need to be marketed. Marketing is a tool to make products known to customers. The Oshikoto region faces the challenge of poor marketing and a lack of markets for heritage products. This was what respondents had to say on the subject:

Our museum needs to start using digital platforms and media to market and showcase the objects that we are exhibiting to attract more tourists. Our exhibition is very special because it can only be found in our museum but the problem is that the museum is not well known and we are not well trained when it comes to marketing and promotion (Participant C2).

There is no marketing system for heritage products in the region, therefore all heritage stakeholders need to come together to design a marketing approach that includes the integration of ICT because it is not an individual responsibility. Nowadays everything is digitized and we need to do the same (Participant CO1).

There are no places where artists and craftsmen can go and sell their products, therefore, we established small craft and curio shops at their museum but cannot cater for all of them in the region (Participant C1).

The results show that the current marketing strategy for heritage resources as a tourism product is ineffective. Therefore, it needs to be intensified, to allow the community to benefit from the heritage resources available in the region through heritage tourism. The poor marketing is attributed to poor funding and a lack of interest from both the public and private sectors. In addition, it noted that Namibia is not marketed as a heritage tourist. These results are consistent with those of Rotich (2012) who noted that the global lack of a marketplace for heritage products, makes the effective marketing and promotion of these products challenging due to the lack of widespread marketing skills. Heritage marketing is a collaborative effort to make heritage consumers aware of the heritage resources available and to help increase its popularity and appeal. Therefore, various media such as television, digital photo radios, newspapers,

Facebook, WhatsApp, billboards at airports, and video and short films at the national airline should be used to market the national heritage resources and attract heritage tourists.

5. Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model

The Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model is a strategic approach developed based on the analysis of related literature and the findings of this study on the challenges faced by the heritage sector in Namibia. This model aimed to develop, commercialize and valorize local heritage resources as tourism products and make heritage tourism an integral part of the country's development agenda. A model is a bottom-up approach that ensures community participation in the identification, preservation and development of heritage resources at the grassroots level. It encourages collaboration among the heritage actors' identification, development, promotion and preservation of both cultural and natural heritage resources in the region. Namibia has a wealth of natural and cultural heritage resources with the potential to attract tourists from around the world. These heritage resources embodied several significant values that can be valorized by local communities for functional use. Therefore, this model promotes the identification and valorization of untapped heritage resources in the local areas. In addition, the model aimed to empower local heritage tourism practitioners, ensure ownership and promote the sustainable use of heritage resources for community development and community livelihood

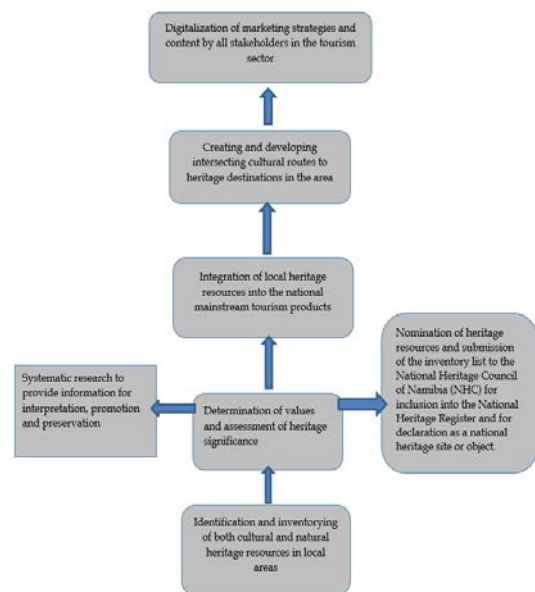


Figure 1: Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model
Sources: The Authors

improvement. The model is presented in seven

processes as detailed in Figure 1.

5.1. Identification and inventorying of both cultural and natural heritage resources in local areas

This process advocates the recognition, inventory and mapping of heritage resources existing in the region with the potential to support heritage tourism. The identification and inventory of heritage resources should be an ongoing approach leading to the generation of information necessary for the preservation, development and conservation of both tangible and intangible resources. Importantly, the information collected can be presented to the general public to promote further awareness and appreciation of heritage resources. In addition, the model calls on local communities, traditional authorities, local councils, regional councils, groups and all stakeholders to get involved in identifying and profiling heritage resources, including lesser-known and well-known resources in the areas, developing management plans and forming a local management committee. Community involvement is vital as some are the custodians of heritage resources, especially cultural heritage as they are the ones who create and practice to keep it alive. The successful identification and inventory of heritage resources serve as an invaluable tool for the preservation, conservation and safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage resources in the region. The Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model is further strengthening the development and management of heritage resources by governmental institutions and local communities through participation in decision-making. This involvement of the local community leads to community empowerment. Also, this model encouraged stakeholders to use innovative technology such as geographical information systems (GIS) for better mapping and the creation of a heritage resources database.

5.2. Systematic research to provide information for interpretation, promotion and preservation

Documentation and gathering background information are critical in heritage resources promotion, preservation and marketing as tourism products. The Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model encouraged systematic research and documentation for the identified resources to provide information for interpretation, marketing and preservation purposes. According to Fitri (2017), the documentation of heritage resources enhances the acquisition of knowledge to advance a better understanding of heritage value, history and utility and revive community interest in its preservation through the dissemination of gathered information. Therefore, local heritage practitioners and all key players in the area such as local

communities, historians, private property owners, anthropologists, tourism development officers, environmentalists, business analysts, cultural officers, researchers, arts and heritage sites officers, conservation officers, archaeologists, traditional authorities and regional councils should work in a participatory manner to collect and provide information. Participation in the research activities will build trust among each other and cultivate a sense of ownership of the heritage resources. Information can be gathered through observation of heritage assets, interviews, surveys and study of archival materials such as photographs, records, maps, and unpolished written materials. Heritage practitioners and stakeholders would use the information gathered to write a narrative description that includes the heritage facilities, the cultural values, the historical and cultural connotations, the physical location and distance between them, and the activities and services available. Heritage practitioners and stakeholders should also use the information to identify and establish intersecting routes to tourist destinations in the areas.

5.3. Determination of values and assessment of heritage significance

Heritage values help to understand the context and sociocultural aspects of heritage resources while significance helps to give a clear and concise understanding of why such heritage resources are important (Chandani et al. 2018). Mensah (2021) defined heritage values as the qualities attributed to tangible and intangible heritage resources and differ from society to society and at levels within society. They may include the historical, social, spiritual, educational, economic and aesthetic values of the past, present or future generations embodied in heritage resources. Community participation plays an important role in defining heritage values and the functionality of heritage resources in the local community. Heritage resources are associated with the number of qualities, meanings, and values that society has attributed to them. Within this process, the model inspires local communities and all stakeholders to work together in determining values and evaluating the importance of local heritage. This is because heritage plays different roles for individuals, families, communities, regions, nations and the world. It is, therefore, crucial that all concerned members participate. Therefore, the Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model invites local communities and all stakeholders to participate in the accurate identification of heritage resources and clear

articulation of heritage values.

5.4. Nomination of and submission of the inventory list to the National Heritage Council of Namibia (NHC) for inclusion into the Namibia Heritage Register and declaration as a national heritage site/ object.

The Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model encourages heritage actors to submit the heritage inventory list to the National Heritage Council of Namibia for inclusion in the Namibian Heritage Register. The Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model further calls for heritage actors to collaborate in the nomination of such heritage resources to be considered and declared a national heritage site or object. The inclusion of heritage resources into the national heritage register allows the provision of legal guidance through a heritage site management plan.

5.5. Integration of local heritage resources into the national mainstream tourism products

Namibia's tourism sector is primarily focused on ecotourism and wildlife, with less emphasis on heritage tourism. The current national tourism marketing strategies inadequately represent heritage resources as tourism products. To foster sustainable development in heritage tourism, this proposed Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model recommends the integration of heritage resources into mainstream national tourism products. This integration aims to enrich visitors' experiences, provide economic opportunities for local communities, and facilitate the responsible management of these delicate resources.

5.6. Creating and developing intersecting cultural routes to heritage destinations in the area

The Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model aims to promote tourism destinations by creating new cultural routes and expanding tourism offerings, including wildlife and ecotourism. According to Pattanoro and Pistocchi (2016), a cultural route should combine three elements: the geographical area where attractions and places of interest are located, the theme that links the different components of the route, and the products and services provided to visitors in the destinations along the route. These cultural routes should showcase the cultural and natural products of the region and connect lesser-known heritage sites to well-known tourist attractions, making it the most attractive tourist destination. Tourism stakeholders, including local communities, should collaborate to define the main goal of the cultural route and select an appealing theme. They should also create narrative descriptions that encompass heritage amenities, cultural values,

historical and cultural significance, physical location and distances between sites, available activities and services, and consider the accessibility of the destinations. Accessibility here refers to easy access to information, services, and transportation to heritage destinations along the route. It is also important to develop a map of the intersecting tourism routes, along with a common log and website providing detailed descriptions of the different tourism destinations in the area. This comprehensive approach will help increase the quantity of heritage tourism attractions and attract and retain visitors in the area.

5.7. Digitalization of marketing strategies and content by all stakeholders in the tourism sector

To attract tourists and visitors, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive marketing approach that accentuates all the heritage resources in the region. It is advisable to market heritage products as a cohesive cluster rather than individual entities. Collaboration among local creative artists, ICT experts, and heritage actors is essential for the development of digital marketing content and materials that cater to both local and foreign tourists, providing them with detailed information about the available heritage products and landscapes in the region. In addition, it is recommended that tourism stakeholders enhance existing heritage strategies and establish regional heritage tourism forums to underscore the significance of heritage assets as viable tourism products.

The Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model promotes the utilization of digital platforms to showcase all heritage products, activities, and services, to attract both local visitors and international tourists. Furthermore, it is imperative for heritage practitioners to collectively conduct target market research to identify potential risks associated with the established cultural route and devise necessary actions to mitigate business failure and enhance the sustainability of operations. These endeavours will engender a sense of ownership, promote social cohesion, and encourage networking, collaboration, cooperation, and community participation among stakeholders, all of which are pivotal for the advancement of the cultural heritage industry.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This study explores the perspectives of heritage practitioners to uncover the challenges associated with the development and marketing of heritage

resources for heritage tourism in the Oshikoto region. After in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion with the heritage practitioners as well as analyzing various documents such as reports, plans, policies and laws, this study concluded that the heritage sector in the Oshikoto region has been facing numerous challenges ranging from developing, promoting and preservation of heritage sources as tourism products. Amongst, the sector experiences inadequate funding from both central and local governments. Other challenges from the study's findings are a lack of basic infrastructure, a lack of local interest in heritage activities, and poor documentation and research. Similarly, the lack of integrated marketing strategies and a marketplace for heritage products was also pointed out as a challenge for the sector.

Given the economic and social significance of heritage resources, further development of this sector is essential. This study proposes active participation, coordination, and collaboration among heritage stakeholders are crucial to strengthening partnerships and sharing available resources, including heritage spaces and facilities. On the same note, the study recommends the establishment of a Regional Heritage Joint-Management Committee with full representation of grassroots community members and a diverse range of stakeholders. The Committee should address issues related to heritage tourism development, marketing, funding, infrastructure development, and the promotion of heritage offerings. Furthermore, the study suggests seeking funds from traditional entrepreneurs, public-private partnerships, supporting affiliates, and other sources. It also recommends the efficient utilization of available resources and an increase in state funding.

To address the marketing challenge, this study proposes the development of cultural routes that connect well-known and lesser-known heritage resources to attract more tourists. It also suggests promoting destinations, establishing a strong network among heritage practitioners, and ensuring access to heritage sites. Additionally, the study recommends leveraging social media, packaging heritage offerings as a unified tourist product, and enhancing existing heritage tourism products and services.

The study proposes an increase in heritage education and awareness to enrich local understanding and appreciation of heritage resources, thereby unlocking their potential benefits and fostering greater interest and participation. It's believed that locals' interest in heritage-related matters can be cultivated through a deeper understanding of the heritage and its significance. Henceforth, the study advocates for institutions responsible for heritage promotion and higher learning institutions offering programs in

heritage-related areas to prioritize community capacity building through training and encouraging enrollment in tertiary programs focused on heritage conservation and tourism development. Moreover, it is essential to integrate heritage into the basic education curriculum to foster a deeper understanding of heritage among school-going children and youths. Furthermore, the study encourages community heritage awareness through a range of initiatives including community outreaches, forums, media campaigns, and school visits. This strategic approach aims to equip Namibians, particularly the young ones and youths, with the necessary knowledge to appreciate protect and preserve heritage for sustainable development.

In addition, it is imperative to prioritize the advancement of heritage documentation and research agendas to generate data for training heritage stakeholders in awareness raising, heritage conservation, and capacity building. Active involvement of community members in the documentation of heritage is essential, given their role as custodians.

Finally, this study has made a significant contribution to the development of a Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model based on its findings. This model aims to strengthen and promote the heritage sector, ensuring its primary role in tourism activities in Namibia and its central position in the country's development agenda. Additionally, the model advocates for the active involvement of the local community in identifying, preserving, developing, and commercializing heritage resources at the local level. To ensure the successful implementation of this Heritage Tourism Development and Marketing Model, a study must be conducted on the relevance of digital platforms in promoting and preserving heritage in Namibia, as digital technologies (ICTs) need to be effectively utilized.

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