

Interplay of Nature and Heritage for the Communities Around the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg World Heritage Park

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Abstract : Many a tourist has a grand and insatiable dream about visiting the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park [UDNP], where nature has carved a theatre majestic features and humanity a tapestry of rock art. At this place the tourist hopes to experience and derive satisfaction what nature and heritage have to offer in South Africa. This paper explores the existing relationships between natural and cultural attributes within Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park, how these relationships are planned for and managed by the parks authorities, as well as how local communities perceive the meaning and importance of these attributes. The paper seeks to ensure that the intrinsic value of the parks, wild life, land and natural features of KwaZulu-Natal are sensitively protected as a source of spiritual and long-term sustenance for local communities and future generations.

The findings of the paper indicate that a majority of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg communities understand the importance of ecotourism as a human activity. They also show that not all the communities participate actively in promoting sustainable ecotourism development in the area. Finally, that existing ecotourism management practices are perceived as not adequately promoting sustainable ecotourism development principles for all stakeholders.

Keywords: geopark, geo-science park, outdoor recreation, tourism, perceptions, cultural and heritage park, community perspectives, tourism management and tourism prospects.

Introduction

The advent of the new democratic order in South Africa in 1994, brought about many and varied changes in the country. One of these high-profiled changes was the recognition of SA as a country endowed with natural beauty and pristine environments. In this regard, South Africa qualified for world heritage site status after rejoining the United Nations in 1994. Currently SA has eight World Heritage Sites two of which are located in KwaZulu-Natal. These World Heritage Sites are the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park [UDNP] [2000] and the Greater St Lucia

Wetland Park [1999]. The remaining six World Heritage Sites are: Robben Island [1999]; Fossil Hominid Sites of Sterkfontein also known as the “Cradle of Mankind” [1999]; Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape [2003]; the Cape Floral Region Protected Areas [2004]; Vredefort Dome [2005]; and Swartkrans, Kromdraai and Environs [2005].

These World Heritage Sites are currently drawing a lot of attention from both local and international tourists and scientists, and have subsequently become ‘not-to-be-missed’ tourist attractions. In South Africa, like elsewhere in the world, tourism is one of the fast growing industries which involves commodified consumption of all tangible and intangible assets that the society values. The World Heritage Sites, unlike other areas are protected by law. South Africa is the second country in the world to adopt into its national law (the World Heritage Convention Act 49 of 1999) the World Heritage Convention (WHC) policies which ensures the protection of the South African sites and their associated world heritage values. In order for these sites, more specifically the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Heritage Park, to retain their world heritage status, the protection and maintenance of their ecological integrity and ensuring their sustainable use, are of paramount importance (Wurz and van der Merwe 2005; MacLeod 2005).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are five-fold: (a) To describe the natural features of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Heritage Park as well as related tourism practices in the area. (b) To reveal the extent to which the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg communities understand the importance of ecotourism as a human activity in the study area. (c) To determine the degree to which the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg communities participate in activities that promote sustainable ecotourism development in the area. (d) To assess whether the perceived ecotourism management practices are in line with accepted sustainable ecotourism development principles. (e) To investigate the perceived value of the cultural heritage of the San people as an important ecotourism attribute of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg.

The broad intention of this paper is to establish the existing relationships between natural and cultural attributes within Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park [UDNP], how these relationships are planned for and managed by the parks

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authorities, as well as how local communities perceive the meaning and importance of these attributes. In support of this notion Derwent and Porter (2003) argued that the policies of Ezemvelo-Wildlife KwaZulu-Natal, which is an organisation responsible for managing all natural parks and conservancies, seek “to ensure that the intrinsic value of the parks, wild life, land and seascapes of KwaZulu-Natal are sensitively protected as a source of spiritual and long-term sustenance for future generations”. The policies are also seen as seeking to ensure the sustainable conservation of biodiversity in partnership with people of KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore these policies advocate that for sustainable tourism development to thrive in the area, all stakeholders should be viewed as equally important, hence the inclusion of local people and traditional leaders in the parks boards and councils (McKercher and Du Cros, 2002; Derwent and Porter, 2003).

Characteristics of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg

The Ukhahlamba-Drakensburg geosciences-park bears double-barrel name combining Zulu and Afrikaans languages. The Zulu name *Ukhahlamba* refers to the mountains as “barrier of spears” suggesting a shield that blocks a barrage of spears. Figuratively, it suggest a barrier against attacks by warring invaders, very similar the historical role or function of the Great Wall of China.

The Afrikaans name *Drakensberg* means “Dragons Mountains” suggesting the range of mountains similar to a huge dragon traversing the landscape. The Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg [Refer to Figure 1] cover an area of about 243 000 ha and rise up to a height of 3, 482 metres above sea level. The mountain range has a number of peaks with various names and descriptions, some notable peaks include Mafadi at 3,450m, Makoaneng at 3,416m, Njesuthi at 3,408m, Champagne Castle at 3,377m, Giant's Castle at 3,315m, Cleft Peak 3280m, Mount Aux Sources at 3 282m, Windsor Castle 3068m, and Ben Macdhui at 3,001 m above sea level.

It has been argued that the geology of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg can be related to the remnants of the original African plateau. The mountains are capped by a layer of basalt up to 1,500 metres thick, with sandstone formation lower down, resulting in a combination of steep-sided blocks and pinnacles. More towards the north the mountains have rugged and broken quartzite formations, which pose a challenge to rock climbers and hikers. The sandstone formations give the

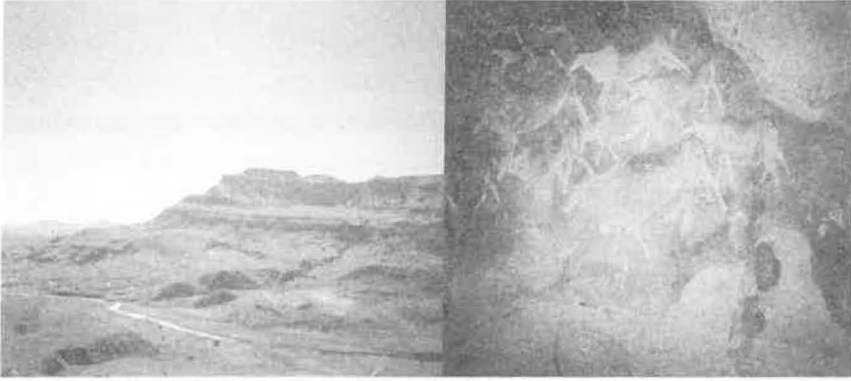
FIGURE 1: LOCATION OF UKHAHLAMBA-DRAKENSBERG PARK

[Source: Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (2005)]



Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg mountains their numerous caves, which have been associated with the San people also called Bushmen.

FIGURE 2 PART OF UKHAHLAMBA-DRAKENSBERG & THE ROCK ART



The physiographic attributes of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Natural Park or geo-science park, lend itself to what has come to be known as the stone-age rock-paintings. This geo-science park has a collection of 800 year-old rock art found in 600 sites with more than 35 000 individual images [Refer to Figure 2]. The popularity of this rock art has made Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg one of the popular tourist destinations for both domestic and international tourists. Archaeological remains such as rock art are “incredibly fragile” and may suffer irreparable damage if exposed to irresponsible visitation (Wurz and Van der Merwe, 2005).

The notion of describing these Neolithic rock paintings as important attributes of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geo-science park or geopark is a worthy one, since they introduce a human dimension in the description and meaning of the natural park. Accordingly, Tanabe (2007) sees or prefers to see the term ‘geopark’ as referring not only to the geology of a natural park, but mainly to the geo-science and nature-based attributes of a park, hence the term ‘geo-science park’ or a much wider meaning ‘natural park’. The term geopark seems to be open to several interpretations.

Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg as an Ecotourism Resource

Without doubt Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg has been described as an important ecotourism resource, which is underpinned by two philosophies, that is, biocentric (promotes ecological process to operate as freely as possible – protect

the integrity of the ecosystems) or anthropocentric (use and enjoy – maximisation of direct human use) in nature (Cooper *et al.* 2000). A general definition of ecotourism suggested by Ceballos-Lascurain (1996) states that it is by its nature environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations. In supporting a relationship between nature and culture, Hall and Lew (1998: 44): aver that ecotourism is “Purposeful travel to natural areas, to understand the culture and natural history of the environment; taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people”.

Tourism development in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg is promoted by resource managers, wildlife officials, service providers and the local communities. Some of these stakeholders own a variety of hotels and resorts appearing on the slopes of the geopark. According to Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZNW, 2006: 12): “Standing on top of the world in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Park you are surrounded by craggy peaks, sandstone cliffs, cascading water falls, crystal streams, rocky paths, caves and sweeping grasslands....This is one of South Africa’s premier ecotourism destinations”.

The park offers tourists many facilities and activities [Refer to Table 1] as well as the best access to the San people’s rock art and thousands of the massive eland antelopes can be seen as they forage the grasslands. Many of the tourists visiting the geopark are attracted by the splendour of the beautiful environment as well as the many outdoor recreation facilities and activities available in the area. Table 1 shows a plethora of activities occurring in the 240 000ha of cliffs, valleys, caves and rivers

Tourists have indicated that they participate in the following activities: mountain climbing, hiking, authentic rock art viewing, museum rock art viewing, trout fishing, walking on trails, nature appreciation and mountain driving. Many of the tourist destinations have facilities such as caves, camps, accommodation, restaurants, and curio shops. It is worthy of mentioning that very few of destinations have facilities and trails for disabled persons, as well as local community

TABLE 1: RESOURCES, FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES IN THE UDNP

NAME OF RESOURCE ON MOUNTAIN	Caves	Rock art sites	Camping/Caravn	Accommodation.	Trail-Mount-Hut	Conference centre	Local craft market	Restaurant	Interpretive centre	Swimming [river/ pool]	Trails for Disabled	Birding	Mountain climbing	Fishing	Picnicking	Self-guided trails/walks	Overnight hikes/walks	Vehicle drives/tours
Royal Natal Park	-	-	□	□	-	-	□	□	□	□	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Injisuthi Camp	□	□	□	□	-	-	-	□	-	-	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Cathedral Peak	□	□	□	□	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Didima Camp	-	-	□	□	-	□	□	□	□	□	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Monk's Cowl	□	□	□	□	-	-	□	□	-	-	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	-
Giant's Castle	□	□	□	□	□	□	-	□	□	□	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Highmoor Camp	□	□	□	□	-	-	-	□	-	-	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	-
Kamberg Camp	-	-	□	□	-	-	-	□	□	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Lotheni Camp	-	-	□	□	-	-	-	□	□	-	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	-
Sani's Pass	□	□	□	□	□	-	-	□	-	-	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Cobham Camp	□	□	□	□	□	-	-	□	-	-	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	-
Garden Castle	□	□	□	□	□	-	-	□	□	-	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Bushman's nek	□	□	□	□	-	-	-	□	-	-	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Sehlabathebe Park	-	□	□	□	-	-	-	□	-	-	-	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

[Source: EKZNW, (2006)]

crafts and markets. The latter suggests the paucity of community involvement in small entrepreneurial activities in the area. On the whole, many of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg peaks offer challenging mountaineering. While the major summits have all been conquered, a number of minor pinnacles have yet to be ascended. Hiking is also a popular activity, the navigation on long hikes is often aided by GPS receivers, and current maps distributed by Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife.

Methodology

This paper reports on the findings of ongoing research that is conducted at various sections of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park [UDNP]. In establishing the empirical basis of this study, data were collected at three sections of the UDNP known as Northern, Central and Southern Drakensberg. The actual area of

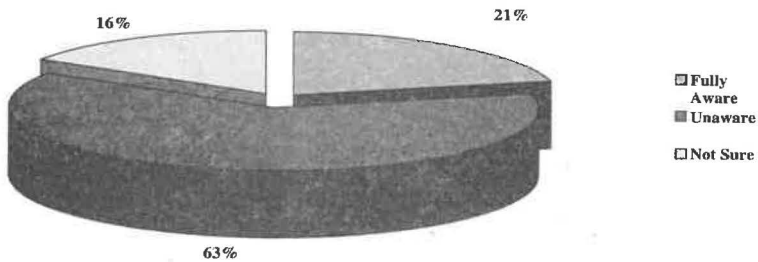
sampling were around Didima [Northern], Giant's Castle [Central] and Kamberg [Southern]. The categories of individuals interviewed included the tourism and wildlife officials, tour operators, tourists and local communities. A stratified random sample size of 400 respondents was targeted or aimed at. Finally, a sample of 322 respondents categorised into four groups was surveyed using a person-to-person interview schedule.

The sample-size of respondents was as follows: 13 tourism and wildlife officials, 9 tour operators, 96 tourists and 204 local community members. The data was mainly collected during the summer season of the year. The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences [SPSS] computer programme. These data sought to reveal the understanding and management of existing relationships between natural and cultural attributes are perceived by the communities and other stakeholders.

Understanding the Importance of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg

The respondents in the geo-science park were asked to reveal their understanding of the importance of ecotourism as a human activity in the study area. On the whole (Refer to Figure 3), a majority [63%] of the respondents, mainly the local community members, indicated that they were not conversant with meaning of ecotourism. On the other hand, only 21 percent of the respondents showed good understanding of the concept, whereas 16 percent were not sure of the meaning.

FIGURE 3 UNDERSTANDING WHAT TOURISM MEANS



A significantly large percentage of the negative response [63%] may be accounted for in that the local community is not sufficiently educated, informed and involved in tourism activities and facilities in the geopark. This is notwithstanding that the geopark area is endowed with natural facilities. It should be noted that more than half of the total number of wildlife officials, tour operators and tourists interviewed, were conversant with the term of ecotourism. Indeed, the communities around the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark see it as a resource for their survival through tourism development. The Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife as the custodian of geopark, has concentrated its effort on promoting ecotourism development that is seen as a sustainable form of tourism. This promotion encompasses conservation of cultural and heritage assets mainly the rock art and the history and heritage of the Sans within the geopark.

In this paper the term 'local community', refers to what Lubbe (2003), regards as people living in relative proximity to the tourist destination, product or activity, and who should benefit from activities. It could be argued that if tourism is wisely planned, the communities can enjoy the advantages while experiencing ownership of and control over the development. In this regard, the perceptions of local community members would assist in identifying the expectations of communities residing next to the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg as a tourist destination. The paper supports the view of Gartner (1996) who contends that members of the community should form tourist organisations that will represent them in all matters pertaining to tourism in their areas. There was no evidence of such community involvement around geopark. It is therefore the view of this paper that the community's understanding of the importance ecotourism and sustainable tourism development, would mark the beginning of better tourism planning, management and delivery systems in the study area.

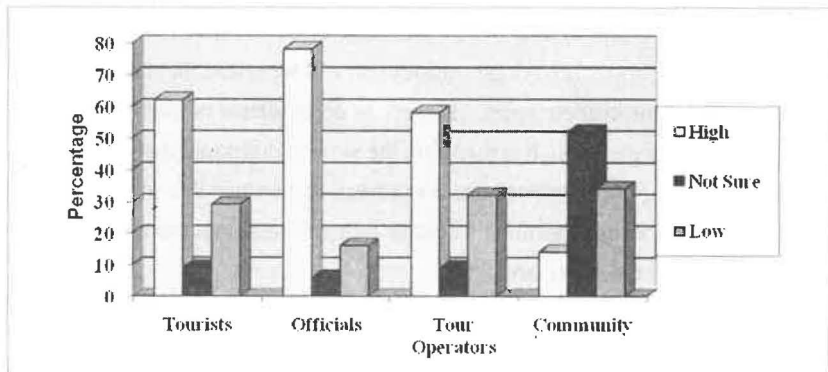
Stakeholder Participation in Ecotourism Development

The official policy of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg World Heritage Site seeks to promote sustainable ecotourism development. Sustainable ecotourism as a strategy for sustainable development and conservation of physical and socio-cultural environments demands that the local community should be involved in

planning, development and management of the geo-science park. (WTO 2004). Good management policies should contribute to the well being of local communities. It should be noted, however, that participation of the indigenous communities in the ecotourism development activities in the geo-science park has been very contentious. This is because the park has lost most of its indigenous communities, the San community in particular. The San people have been displaced and some are now found in faraway places, and their history has been reconstructed and commodified.

This study also sought to establish the degree to which the local communities participate in activities that promote ecotourism development. In this regard tourists, officials, tour operators and communities were asked to give their views regarding the level of participation in the activities of the natural park, which were described earlier in the paper. The responses are depicted in Figure 4 and show that about 62 percent of the tourists respondents reflected a high level of participation in sustainable ecotourism development activities, whereas 29 percent has a low participation level.

FIGURE 4 LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION OF STAKEHOLDERS IN SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES



At this point it is important to point out that opinions regarding the level of participation are limited to that part (section) of the geopark which the tourists are visiting or in terms of the particular day on which they are visiting the destination. Tourists, therefore, do not compare their level of participation on the basis of the

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benefits to the local hosting communities and do not seem to have a general overview of the level of participation within the entire Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg World Heritage Site or geopark.

Not surprisingly, 78 percent of the officials felt that their participation in ecotourism development activities were high and positive, since it was their mandate to promote sustainable tourism development in the area. The tour operators on the other hand, perceived their participation in ecotourism development activities to be high [59%] as against 32 percent who perceived them as low. The majority of tour operators [59%] were interpreting their business involvement in geopark as equivalent to tourism development, whereas this was not necessarily so. A significant number [32%] of the tour operators were not convinced of any sustainable development being achieved. Finally and importantly, the local communities at three sections of the geopark, were non-committal (52%) by indicating that they were 'not sure' about their level of participation in sustainable development activities in the geopark. A further 32 percent indicated a low participation rate. The main reason for these negative responses were that many of the local communities were not well educated about and adequately exposed to participation in tourism planning, management and development of ecotourism activities in the geo-science park.

In an effort to reveal the relationship between educational qualifications and the level of participation in ecotourism development, the cross-tabulation analysis was performed. With the chi-square analysis of: $\chi^2=8.706$; $df=3$ and $Asymp\ Sig.=0.033$, the critical value of the chi-square was 7.82 under the level of confidence 0.05. The calculated level of significance was 0.033 and was less than 0.05. The calculated chi-square value $\chi^2=8.706$ was higher than the tabled chi-square value of 7.82. The findings indicated that there was a moderate, yet significant relationship between educational qualification and the level of participation. Furthermore, that the relationship between these two variables was not a matter of chance. This relationship was revealed by [11%] of the official respondents with technical diplomas who felt that the geopark was not well participated in as compared to [11%] of the tour operators respondents with similar qualifications who felt that the geopark was well participated in. The relationship may be attributed to the fact that the respondents with technical diplomas may have a better under-

standing of the concept of participation in tourism activities.

Therefore, in concluding this section, the overriding question which is: 'what causes the lack of participation of the local communities in this destination?' needed to be addressed. Accordingly, Lubbe (2003) argues that host communities avoid participating in destinations, where the infrastructure and services are not owned by them and there are opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. Furthermore, destinations have a great deal of flexibility and innovative opportunities for creating tourist flow and augment existing attractions. Arguably if the facilities in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark accommodate host community participation, it is logical to conclude that innovative strategies have not yet been adequately put in place in this destination. There is therefore, a dire need for an innovative development of the tourist destination of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark.

To achieve this innovative development of the rock art features within the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark, sustainability ought to:

- * Contribute significantly to the conservation of the history and cultural heritage;
- * Include local and indigenous community in the planning, development and operation of tourism activities.
- * Contribute meaningfully to the well being of the local communities
- * Interpret correctly the significance and meaning of the natural and cultural heritage of the destination for visitors' educational and experiential benefit and
- * Be meaningful to self guided tourists as well as to organized tours.

Sustainable tourism development requires that all stakeholders are equally important (McKercher and Du Cros, 2002).

Perceived Ecotourism Management Practices

The Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark community's perception of existing ecotourism management principle in relation to tourism practices can be viewed utilising two approaches. First, there are views of the previously disadvantaged communities, which largely comprise residents with no formal education, no profession and who are employed as labourers in the agricultural and timber planta-

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tion sectors. Their perception of ecotourism management principle seems to be that there is a degree of disparity in ecotourism practice in the study area, because it is a playground of those people who can afford holidaying at hotels, guest houses, game parks, horse-rides, fishing, canoeing and mountain-hiking.

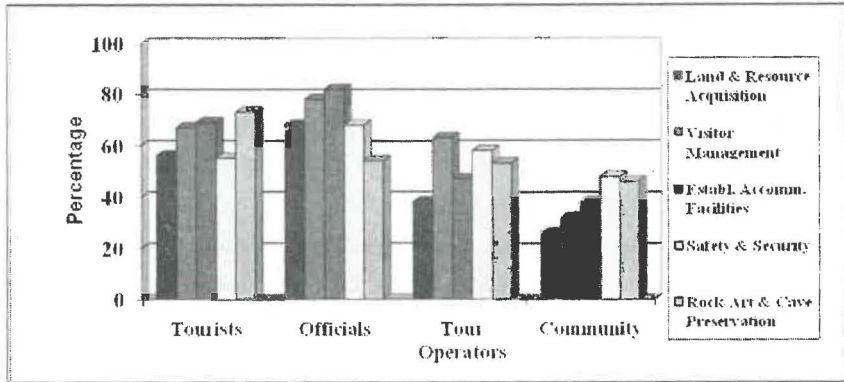
Secondly, there are views of the previously advantaged communities, which tend to be well educated, resourced and privileged, possibly from the previous *apartheid* dispensation in South Africa. This group tends to be the commercial and entrepreneurial leaders of the tourism industry and hold tourism-officer positions and tour-operator businesses. Their perception of ecotourism management principle seems to be underscored by the existence of abundant business opportunities and therefore the need to 'protect' the natural resources in the geopark. To a large degree, the tourists as visitors may be regarded as comprising a privileged group, which has financial resources to visit and enjoy the outdoor recreation resources available at the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark.

Notwithstanding the tourist attractions, have to respond to the changing market trends, competition and sustainable management approaches. It is for these reasons therefore, that the respondents (tourists, officials, tour operators and community members) were requested to furnish their perceived ecotourism management practices and development needs which they consider appropriate for the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark. In this regard, Figure 4 depicts the responses obtained from the various stakeholders.

In order to investigate whether or not development and management practices of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife authorities were understood and appreciated by the stakeholders, the respondents were asked to indicate their views. As shown in Figure 5 stakeholder perception were to be based on practices such as, land and resource acquisition, visitor management, establishment of accommodation facilities, development of game areas, safety and security of tourists, and rock-art and cave preservation. The responses of the subjects, comprising the tourists, officials, tour operators and communities are reflected in Figure 5.

The analysis of development and management principles within the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark were perceived by tourists, officials, tour operators and community members to differ noticeably among these stakeholders. As indicated in Figure 5, the majority of tourists [56%] and officials [68%] felt that

FIGURE 5 PERCEIVED BENEFICIAL STATE OF ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES



[n = 322. Some of the subjects gave more than one response for each statement]

land and resource acquisition well established, whereas the tour operators [38%] and communities [26%] thought this was less beneficial at the time of investigation. Possible reasons are that the tourists appreciate what they see since they are visitors and officials are supporting government policy in their responses. The tour operators and community members think there is room for improvement because the state owns most the land and natural resources.

With regard to the practice of visitor management, the majority of tourists [67%], officials [78%] and tour operators [63%] generally regarded this practice as well managed and bearing good outcomes. Conversely, the local communities [32%] were not happy with the practice as it exists, mainly because the visitors were not channelled to their areas of operation, where they would be able to make money by serving the tourists. These perceptions did not vary markedly in the three areas of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg.

The proposed plan of establishing accommodation facilities as a management principle in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark, were positively viewed by tourists [58%] and officials [76%]. On the other hand, the tour operators [44%] and communities [42%] thought this practice was less beneficial to the stakeholders. The possible reason for this view is that most of the existing accommodation facilities are owned by big business and not by local tour operators or community

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Notwithstanding that lapses in safety and security, which have been regarded as a threat to tourism development in many parts of South Africa, the respondents around the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark were sounded out on the state of ecotourism management practices in the area. In this regard, the majority of tourists [55%], officials [68%] and tour operators [58%] felt that safety and security practices were reasonably well managed. On the contrary, 46 percent of the local communities were not happy with the practice as it exists, mainly because communities are the ones that experience the lapses in safety and security. It has been argued that lapses in safety and security are increasing because of high levels of unemployment in KwaZulu-Natal.

In conclusion, the Ukhahlamba Drakensberg geopark has management strategies for both the park and the visitors to the facility. The site management strategies are meant to protect the socio cultural and the physical environment especially the rock art found in the caves in 600 sites. Protecting the rock art is different from protecting other types of environments because rock art is highly sensitive and delicate. Ecotourism management practices emphasise the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (WTO 2004).

Even though this world heritage site has embraced ecotourism as a strategy for job creation and poverty alleviation, it has unique problems to contend with. Ukhahlamba Drakensberg has to deal with the conservation of the delicate rock art that is currently suffering from overexposure to tourists and the natural corrosion which is leading to gradual fading away of some of the paintings as well as the inclusion of local communities in decision-making processes.

San Culture as an Ecotourism Attribute

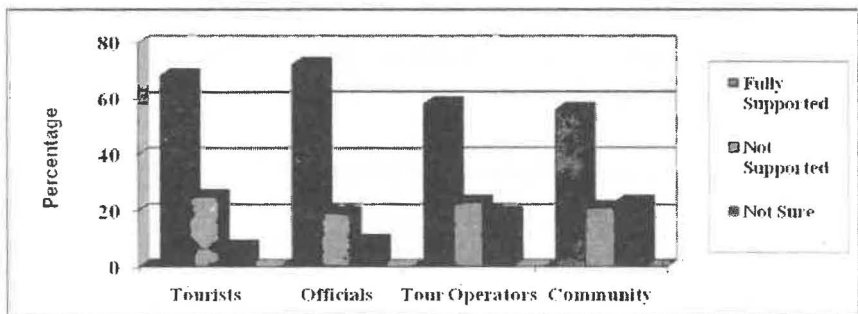
The San people who were the original communities that inhabited the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark. These people were responsible for the rock art that has become the main attraction and an ecotourism resource of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg World Heritage Site. These rock paintings made over a period of at least 4 000 years are found in the caves and rock shelters throughout UDNP. It is

unfortunate that the San people, have since been displaced and their history has been reconstructed and commodified. Their existence is depicted by a collection of 800 year-old rock art which are largely undisturbed on the cave walls. With about 600 sites with more than 35 000 individual images, this rock art is the largest collection and the most densely painted area on the African continent (Derwent and Porter 2003). The paintings and the history of the San people have led to the popularity of this geopark and have made it one of the significant ecotourism destinations for tourists. Some members of the local communities have advocated for the promotion San rock-art heritage.

Stakeholders in the geopark were asked to reveal their views about the value of San cultural heritage as an ecotourism attribute. On the whole the responses indicated in Figure 6 show that the majority of all stakeholders: tourists [68%], officials [72%], tour operators [58%] and the communities [56%], fully supported the utilisation of San culture as a tourist attraction. The main reason for this support was that all stakeholders seem to benefit from the San culture as well as that it was incorporated in the development planning of the geo-science park.

Interestingly, only the local communities were somewhat less supportive [21%] and unsure [23%] of the capability of the San culture to stimulate tourist interests into the geopark. Possible reason for this notion may be that since some of the community members were related to the San, they therefore did not see the novelty in the San cultural heritage.

FIGURE 6: PERCEIVED SAN CULTURE AS AN ECOTOURISM ATTRIBUTE AND TOURIST ATTRACTION



[n = 322. Some of the subjects gave more than one response for each sub-variable]

Related to the responses shown in Figure 6, the stakeholders indicate that the support and acceptance of San culture as a tourist attraction was encouraged by some expectations. Some of these include: high level of unemployment, exposure to tourism projects, labour intensive activities, male dominated sector, women empowerment, and other unspecified reasons. Many stakeholders selected the statement “high level of unemployment” because they expected San culture to increase tourists visiting the geopark, thus creating more jobs. The response was also supported because some respondents had been unemployed for a very long time in the area.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding that the declaration of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park as a World Heritage Site has assured more popularity and economic viability of the geo-science park, it has come to be recognised that its strongest attribute is that the park is both a natural attraction and cultural heritage. The sensitive relationship between natural and cultural attributes within the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark, has to be planned, developed and managed in a sustainable manner so that the resource could continue to benefit the communities of KwaZulu-Natal for a very long time to come.

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