

ADDRESSING GLOBALISATION THROUGH LOCAL ECONOMIC TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: CASE STUDY IN PHALABORWA, SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a diverse country rich with cultural and natural attributes, but it is also marred by a controversial political past and a legacy of poverty, crime and unemployment. The emergence of the democratic South Africa from a past of economic sanctions and import substitution has occurred simultaneously with the dissolution of communism and the outburst of the cataclysmic effects of globalisation on the developing world.

Terrorism, globalisation and the weakening world economy has transformed the world into a place where people are seeking for their roots and has a reawakened sense of exploring 'The Other'. This has transformed the global tourism industry from mass tourism to more sustainable types of tourism like eco-tourism and cultural tourism. African arts and crafts are also very fashionable at present from the catwalks of Paris to the interior decoration shops in London. This trend creates tremendous potential for local economic tourism development in South Africa.

BaPhalaborwa is a community situated on the border of the Kruger National Park and boast a variety of tourist attractions ranging from birdwatching, to big game hunting, to visits to cultural rural villages and pre-historic mining. This community however lacked a one-stop centre where tourists can be informed about the tourism scene, watch tribal dancing, buy arts and crafts and visit a museum or interpretation centre. This inadequacy, along with the need to create jobs and income for the rural poor, has culminated in the creation of the Bollanoto Tourism Centre. The process was not easy and many lessons are to be learned from the experience of the establishment of the Centre.

GLOBALISED SOUTH AFRICA: HISTORIC OVERVIEW

South Africa is no stranger to globalisation; in fact it has its history based in the ancestor of globalisation, i.e. colonialisation. Unlike many other colonies, imperial interest and involvement in South Africa was instituted by a commercial company, it being the Dutch V.O.C. that established a refreshment post in Cape Town in 1652¹. The real imperial interest came to South Africa in 1867 when diamonds and gold was discovered². People from all over the world flocked to South Africa in the dream of becoming rich³. That included people like C.J. Rhodes who fumed the British interests in South Africa and eventually the entire South Africa became a British colony⁴. Gold and diamonds, followed by copper and iron, became the main export items of South Africa, mined by companies and mining houses with a dominating international flavour. After South Africa became a Union in 1910 the British influence was thus still exercised by their involvement in mining houses like Rio Tinto⁵. Like all newly independent countries South Africa became the victim of neo-colonialisation, based on the foreign ownership and dictates of many enterprises, regardless of the anti-apartheid movement⁶. It is also auto-colonialising itself due to the need for international brands and products⁷.

The South African apartheid government focussed on economic development via import substitution and tariffs as measure to ensure employment creation. During that time the growth pole policy, coupled with the Homeland policy (where certain black groups were given semi-autonomous rule in certain areas like Ganzankulu and Lebowa), identified certain growth poles next to these Homelands where massive infrastructure was developed to attract industries and businesses⁸. Tax rebates were given to the entrepreneurs and employment, coupled with empowerment, was ensured. Governmental aid organisations

like the Gazankulu Development Trust also played a pivotal role in bringing development and employment to the rural poor. With the political changes since 1990 these policies and Aid Organisations were dropped by government, abandoning factories and workshops, along with all its workers and entrepreneurs.

SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (LED) PROGRAM

The institution of a democratic government in 1994, coupled with affirmative action and the establishment of socialist labour legislation led to dramatic economic and employment changes in South Africa, with unemployment being rife. This moved the South African Government to institute the Local Economic Development (LED) program where policy and funding are linked to job creation efforts⁹. The Municipalities act as developer for these projects, which in the long run will be handed over to the entrepreneurs running the projects.

PHALABORWA, LIMPOPO PROVINCE

The Phalaborwa is situated in the Limpopo Province in South Africa¹⁰. The main economic powers in the area is FOSKOR (Phosphate Corporation of South Africa) that mined phosphate for agricultural fertilisers, PMC (Palabora Mining Company) the copper mine owned predominantly by Rio Tinto and FEDMIS (Federal Fertilisers)¹¹. In 2000 the BaPhalaborwa Municipality was created from the towns of Phalaborwa, Lulekani (from the former Homeland Gazankulu) and Namakgale (from the former Homeland Lebowa), 8 rural settlements (run by five Tribal Chiefs), several farms, small holdings and numerous game farms (these days mostly in the hands of Europeans and Americans, which in many cases fired the local staff and employed staff from their countries, thus adding to unemployment). The town Phalaborwa is the governmental headquarters and commercial capital of the municipal area.

The Phalaborwa area has based its entire existence on mining in the pre-historic, apartheid and current epochs¹². The minerals are all found in a dead volcanic pipe, which will be mined out in the year 2020. With a population of half a million, with the majority unemployed, a great need exist for economic development programmes¹³.

In the year 2000 a Local Economic Development Committee was established by the BaPhalaborwa Municipality and its co-ordination was done by the Town Planner, situated in the Department of the Town Engineer. On account of the focus on public participation, meetings were held with stakeholders in each of the towns and villages. In each community an LED Sub-Committee was established, under guidance of the Councillor and Ward Committee. Various projects were identified by the LED Committee, after consultation with their communities. The projects varied from carpentry, baking, arts and crafts and welding. The Municipality eventually applied for funding from the Local Economic Development Fund for a Tourism Centre in Phalaborwa.

BOLLANOTO TOURISM CENTRE

In regard to the empirical base of the study, it has the point of origin in the post-modern narrative. The information was gathered through time on account of the author completing degree and post degree thesis studies on tourism in Phalaborwa and after graduation working as private town planning consultant and later municipal town planner in Phalaborwa. Thus being part of the entire process and all the meetings relevant in this paper, until May 2002, after which information was updated via conversations, meetings and visits to Phalaborwa and all relevant role-players. The alternative references lies scattered in various and numerous reports, minutes of meetings and letters in the Records of the BaPhalaborwa Municipality of which the author of this paper has also been the predominantly the author.

In 2001 the BaPhalaborwa Municipality were granted R1 074 018 for the Tourism Centre by the South African National Department of Provincial and Local Government as part of the LED Fund of National Government. The BaPhalaborwa Municipality manage the funds, development and running of the Centre.

The Bollanoto Tourism Centre's ideal was to illustrate the life in BaPhalaborwa since the earliest times. It took more than a year, coloured by a much publicised open competition and heavy debate, since the beginning of the project before the Centre was named the Bollanoto Tourism Centre. Initially it was called the Ba-Phalaborwa Tourism, Heritage, Arts and Cultural Centre. The Centre includes a museum, tourism information office, arts and crafts shop, replica of a Voortrekker ox-wagon, coffee shop and most important 8 workshops where arts and crafts manufacturers from the local communities can produce their goods. The economic focus of the Centre is the empowerment of the poorest of the poor, disabled people and women.

After the funding was received a mass public participation meeting was held on 25 May 2001, which was widely advertised, to inform the public about the decision, to choose a site for the Centre and to elect a representative Steering Committee to manage the construction and management of the Centre. The municipal Town Planner was the Project Manager and Chairperson of the Committee. The rest of the Committee consisted of 3 municipal Councillors from the Community Services Committee, the tourism and ward Councillor and various other Municipal Officials. Furthermore, it consisted of representatives from the Chamber of Business, the Phalaborwa Accommodation Association, Kruger National Park, Tribal Authorities, Sanco (a trade union), Youth, Women and the Disabled. The Beneficiaries were also supposed to be representative, but could only get on board after they have been identified. At the first Committee meeting it was decided that various Sub-Committees also be elected and it was a Financial Sub-Committee (to monitor the budget, spending and allocation of funds and tenders), Building Sub-Committee (to oversee the process of design, building and decoration of the Centre), Marketing Sub-Committee (to inform the local community about the Centre and its progress and market the Centre to tourists and tour operators) and a Beneficiary Sub-Committee (to organise the recruitment and election of beneficiaries).

The site selected, after many debates (still ensuing) was the same site identified by several previous project proposals for a visitor and tourism centre. This site is ideally situated for the purpose as it is on the corner of the roads to the unique Lodge-style Kruger Gateway Airport, the renowned Hans Merensky Country Estate, the Phalaborwa Gate to the world-famous Kruger National Park and Phalaborwa Mining Company. The land has been partially donated to the BaPhalaborwa Municipality by Foskor¹⁴, the owner of the site on account of it being a Park ("Public Open Space" which falls back to the developer of the town, when being developed). Critics of the site wanted to place it within rural areas or Namakgale or Lulekani, due to the cultural diversity and taxi routes in the area, placing it in either town would create conflict in the other town and its ethnic group.

The design of the Centre was placed on tender and eventually the local Design and Project Services were awarded the tender by Council. The focus of their design was the celebration of indigenous building styles. The buildings will be up to South African National Building Regulations standards, but the decorations of the building will be in line with indigenous material, method and style. The idea of the design is that the Centre should emulate a traditional African "Kraal" and thus a circular design was chosen. The problem today with that design is that the community complains that the tourists are not sure what the Centre is, despite the signage, due to the Centre facing away from the street.

The Heritage Museum aims to exhibit the life and times of the Phalaborwa Area through the ages, including its geology, its fauna and flora and all its people combining to form a rich

diversity of cultures. A temporary archaeologist was appointed to handle the source and exhibition of artefacts and information in the museum, but due to a lack of commitment from the community, the exhibition focus mostly on posters with pictures, photos and descriptions¹⁵. Since July 2002 a 'Friends of the Museum' committee was established to extend the current meagre collection to include the entire spectrum of culture and its additions to history.

The initial planning included the establishment of two cultural villages. One to be a Tsonga Village and the other a Pedi Village. It was intended to be living villages, with "actors" performing the different duties that makes up a cultural village. The reasoning for inclusion is that the community insisted due to successful cultural villages in other parts of South Africa. Eventually the idea of these villages were shelved when less money was received than applied for and after the Town Planner gave a lecture on the negative stereotypes created by these false representation of people in the likeness of a 'human zoo', freezing them in a time reminiscent of colonial ideas of Africa, discounting their current ways of life and achievements¹⁶. The historic picture of the Africans will be sufficiently represented in the museum over time. Recently a group of potential beneficiaries suggested that an 'Artist Village' be built at the Centre, where the people can stay at the place where they create their arts and crafts, along with some tourist accommodation. This idea was rejected by the Committee¹⁷.

An Open-air museum were to depict an ancient copper furnace and prospectors hut, an European prospector's tent and a replica of the Hans van Rensburg Voortrekker ox-wagon¹⁸ that moved through the area during the Great Trek. The replica of the ox-wagon was housed in front of the local government offices by the Conservative Party majority during the apartheid era. The reigning African National Congress politicians, and community, viewed as a 'symbol of apartheid' and wanted to demolish the building with the ox-wagon¹⁹. Eventually they gave into the idea that it could be a tourist attraction and recently the ox-wagon has been moved to its new exhibition site at the Centre. The rest of the open-air museum still needs to be added when additional funding is granted.

The Centre slopes as such that the central area provides a natural amphi-theatre where traditional dancing, tribal dancing, singing, competitions and other shows will be enacted for the benefit of tourists. The amphi-theatre has not been used to its full potential, but due to the new officials being appointed various activities are planned for the September 2003 Tourism Month²⁰.

The Coffee Shop has since the initial planning of the project been identified as to be placed out on tender for entrepreneurs to provide food and beverages to the tourists. The idea of the Coffee Shop was also to focus on traditional food and innovate ways of translating indigenous products and food into modern delicacies. The rent paid by the owner of the Coffee Shop was to be used for the initial running cost of the Centre. The Coffee Shop has been placed on tender, awarded and is running more as a kiosk at present than as a proper Coffee Shop.

A tourist office are also a key attraction to the Centre, that should provide information to the tourists regarding the attractions, accommodation, restaurants, activities and amenities of the Phalaborwa area. The information office was supposed to be run by the community, but the Council has also put that up for tender and the tender was won by a local tourism lodge and safari owner. With that step the Council went beyond the land use specifications of the site and conditions of the grant from National Government. A new tourist association has been established and the BaPhalaborwa Municipality appointed a new LED officer and official to be permanently based at the Centre to deal with the everyday running of the Centre²¹.

Arts and craft workshops were the key focus of the Centre from a local economic development point of view. The rest of the facilities of the Centre are to attract the tourists, but the workshops were to get the tourists spending. The workshops aim to host a place where artists and crafters from all over the Phalaborwa area can manufacture, exhibit and demonstrate their wares. Eight workshops are provided for pottery, traditional materials and art articles, traditional clothing, weaving of mats and baskets, African beadwork, African woodcraft, African sculptures and African copper craft. It is an ideal that when the workshops are well established, that the tourists can join in and make and decorate their own baskets, grass mats, pottery and jewellery. The arts and crafts includes the traditional functional and decorative crafts made for traditional and contemporary lifestyle purposes, as well as fashioned articles that can be utilised and exhibited in a modern household. Outside the workshops, some other artists and crafters sit under the shade of the trees, weaving mats and making woodcrafts, just like they do at their homes. All arts and crafts are sold from a central shop. The need for artists and crafters for the Centre were published in newspapers, posted at clinics, schools, bus and taxi shelters and at the local government and tribal offices. The Ward Councillors offered to act as liaison in their Wards and organise meeting points for the Beneficiary Roadshow. During Saturdays for four months (August – November 2001) the Project Manager, Beneficiary Sub-Committee, along with some willing Committee members, visited these 11 meeting points, even in the remotest villages, that is all part of the BaPhalaborwa Municipal area. All proposed artists and crafters came to the Roadshow meeting points with their work²². They completed a form and had to produce their identification documents, in order to ensure that they are South African citizens by order of the LED contract. A photo was taken of them with the work and placed on record. More than 250 people were recorded. In the potential Beneficiaries the process created a dream of an income, as currently they have none. At first the people were called 'Beneficiaries', but in order to stop a tradition of perpetuating the dependency factor so ingrained in Africa, they were re-termed as 'Entrepreneurs' a term that will rather create a sense of ownership and pride in them. The Centre got a heavy blow when the three key decision-makers left the project as the Project Manager moved due to obtaining another job, the Town Engineer died of cancer and the contract of the Planning Consultant expired. The appointed temporary archaeologist also left mid-project for other employment. This has led to the project dragging on beyond set deadlines. Even though the shop is filled with arts and crafts, only two of the workshops were occupied on a visit by the author in the beginning of August 2003. Interviews were held with various councillors, municipal officials and other interested and affected parties to find out why the project is not running optimally or as planned. Even though none of the people interviewed were willing to go public or be quoted on their views, blame are placed in the court of the politicians, Rasta community in Namakgale for obstructing the people to work at the centre, the core of the project team leaving, public participation being inadequate and general confusion about funding and responsibilities. No conclusion can be made and more questions were created than answered. The Centre got a heavy blow when the three key decision-makers left the project as the Project Manager moved due to obtaining another job, the Town Engineer died of cancer and the contract of the Planning Consultant expired. The appointed temporary archaeologist also left mid-project for other employment. This has led to the project dragging on beyond set deadlines. Even though the shop is filled with arts and crafts, only two of the workshops were occupied on a visit by the author in the beginning of August 2003. Interviews were held with various councillors, municipal officials and other interested and affected parties to find out why the project is not running optimally or as planned. Even though none of the people interviewed were willing to go public or be quoted on their views, blame are placed in the court of the politicians, Rasta community in Namakgale for obstructing the people to work at the centre, the core of the project team leaving, public participation being inadequate and general confusion about funding and responsibilities. No conclusion can be made and more questions were created than answered. The initial people listed as Beneficiaries fell to the wayside and another group of beneficiaries was selected by a process much less open and public as the first group and they are to occupy the workshops from the end of August

2003. Due to the large amount of artists and crafters working in the same material, they are put on rotation base and given taxi fare for their trip from their homes to the Centre.

The shop was a necessity to act as central selling point of all the arts and craft manufactures on site as well as other made by people at their homes within the BaPhalaborwa area. Not all people can be hosted at the Centre as some are grandmothers watching over Aids-orphaned grandchildren and others are mothers or disabled people that do not want to travel the long distances. The idea was that the arts and crafts would be displayed as such that its traditional function (for instance a grass mat), as well as its modified function (for instance a fashionable grass handbag) are demonstrated. Postcards, T-shirts, maps and other memorabilia are also sold at the shop. The shop opened before the Full Solar Eclipse of December 2002²³ and makes an impressive income. All in all, almost 75 direct and indirect jobs have been created by the Centre.

CONCLUSION

It took almost 20 years since the first visitors centre was suggested until the eventual establishment of the Bollanoto Tourism Centre. The Centre has provided a means of unifying the people of the Phalaborwa community and also provides direct jobs to builders and arts and crafts workers, as well as indirect jobs of the people working in the entire tourism industry in Phalaborwa. Not only are the African dream sold at the Centre where tourists can book a leisurely trip down the Olifants River while sipping the locally produced Amarula liquor and watching elephants foraging on the banks set against a beautiful sunset, but also are arts and crafts from beads, clay, grass and recycled goods sold to tourists to take to their homes all over the world.

The lessons that can be learned from the process of establishing the Bollanoto Tourism Centre is that time is indeed relative in Africa and happens at a very slow pace. The money that could have been made and the rural poor people empowered if people could set aside their differences and look beyond their own needs are only evident in the children that could not be sent to school or people dying because they could not afford a taxi to a clinic, because decisions in South Africa are unfortunately still victim to politics and the wills of the powers that be. It is also evident that a Town Planner and project team can only get a project off the ground, but the eventual running and management of a project is outside predictable and pragmatic parameters.

Many tourism centres were built throughout South Africa with money from the LED Fund, some of the earning more than a million dollar annually due to good management and connections and others standing abandoned as monuments of failure in remote settings. Where the Bollanoto Tourism Centre will situate itself on this spectrum in future, only time will tell.

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