

# A link between tourism, local culture and economy

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## **QUESTION: DISCUSS THE IMPACTS OF TOURISM ON THE LOCAL CULTURE AND ECONOMY**

This term paper is aimed at discussing the impacts of tourism on the local culture and economy in Kenya. Using specific examples and illustrations from the Kenyan context this paper examines these impacts in details. The paper engages with the theoretical underpinnings of tourism in attempt to understand its overwhelming influence on the local culture and the economy of Kenya.

According to Hunziker and Krapf (2002) as quoted by (Gartner, 2006), tourism is the sum of phenomena and relationship arising from travel and stay of non-residence in another place so far as they do not stay there permanently nor have an earning activity. There are two main types of tourism, that is; domestic tourism and international tourism. Tourism impacts the local culture and economy in many ways as discussed below.

### **Enhances the economic growth of other sectors**

In developing countries, tourism is the driving force in almost all sectors of the economy: agriculture, construction, industry, infrastructure development, as well as in education, culture, sports and entertainment industries. Tourism growth leads to increased local demand for commodity products and the development of local markets in each sector (Frechtling, 2004). Most of the economic sectors are integrated such that tourism also promotes the other sectors positively. For example, the farmers sell their farm products to the hotels which are then consumed by the tourists who stay in those hotels.

## **Employment**

The most obvious advantage of tourism is creation of jobs in hotels, restaurants, retail shops and transport service organizations. Secondly, although being less beneficial, but still having the right for existence, the support of the industry and its professions (such as consultants of effective management, tourism and university teachers, etc.), many of which bring much more revenue. As with many African nations, tourism provides thousands of jobs to local residents in Kenya. Hotel staff, drivers, cooks, tour guides and airport personnel are all directly employed by the multi-billion-dollar industry. Thousands more are indirectly employed as construction workers, food suppliers among others (Gartner, 2006).

The unfortunate flip side of this is that the jobs are usually seasonal, and often menial. In most parts of Kenya, tourism is a seasonal business, with additional staff being required during high seasons and less hands needed for off peak months. So for the locals who fall under the category of seasonal workers, employment is unsteady, making it difficult financially to get through the year. Furthermore, many hotel chains will generally bring in their own staff from their home country for white-collar positions. This leaves only the low-income unskilled jobs for Kenyans locals, which offer minimal opportunities for advancement and consistency. Local artisans and business owners miss out on the bulk of tourist revenue, gaining some limited income from curio purchases for example, locals are paid less than what they actually deserve (Gartner, 2006).

### **Improved infrastructure**

Tourism has also led to the development of infrastructure, the income generated through tourism is channelled in improving the infrastructures. These much needed funds have helped diversify the economy, and have been put towards developing the country's infrastructure: projects such as public hospitals, schools, and roads have improved the overall standard of living for citizens. For example, in the recent past a lot of schools have been built in almost every county, in these schools technical courses such as hospitality and other tourism related courses are offered so as to improve the quality of service offered in the tourism industry. Roads have also been built which makes remote areas more accessible. Most of the game parks and other tourist attraction sites are located in remote and rural places so when the roads leading to these areas are built farmers and other people in general benefits from them (Mathieson and Wall, 2002).

Tourism also impacts our infrastructure negatively in that, the income generated from tourist activities is not likely to funnel down to locals — the lion's share will generally go to big industry players. Tourists are likely to frequent chain hotels, which are usually owned by foreign companies and divert very little of their income towards the Kenyan economy. For example, in an area where there are only enough funds to either refurbish a local health centre or upgrade a road that leads to an area with a cluster of popular tourist hotels, local officials are likely to fix the road (Mathieson and Wall, 2002).

But as much good as this income does, there is a downside. It is common for local governments to prioritize projects that could potentially help increase

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tourism income over projects that work towards the general well-being of local residents. In this way, locals may miss out on important amenities (such as healthcare, schooling, clean water or irrigation), as they are side-lined in favour of services to help increase tourist traffic (Mathieson and Wall, 2002).

### **National income**

The other advantage of tourism is federal and local income, received from the tax revenues from tourism (Frechtling, 2004). With the help of tourism, the tax burden is transferred to non-residents. For example, more than half of income from currency exchange and tax revenues in Lamu is at the expense of tourism. Tourism in Kenya is a source of foreign exchange and income for the government. This helps reduce dependence on other sectors such as agriculture, which are subject to weather and market conditions that can often be unpredictable. In the past, up to 21% of Kenya's national income has been derived from tourism. In Nairobi national park foreign tourists are charged five times more than the locals. Kenyan adults are charged three hundred Kenyan shillings while foreigners are charged two thousand Kenyan shillings.

The negative thing about tourism is that it makes the prices of commodities and services to escalate to a point where locals cannot afford. For examples, many local residents are not able to afford the rates at tourist-oriented restaurants, clothing shops, and hotels and so forth (Frechtling, 2004).

### **Tourism promotes international trade and international relations**

Tourism stimulates the export of local products. Based on estimated costs for tourist gifts, products and souvenirs made of tissue and other raw materials

are ranged from 15 to 20 % of their costs (Walsh, 2006). The extent, to which these products are manufactures or assembled in this particular area, provides an economic impact on the local economy. Tourism — more so international tourism — provides an opportunity for good relations between countries. Key government interactions lead to business opportunities and development partnerships that are beneficial for both countries involved, especially the less financially able third world countries. Maintaining good international ties fosters a kinship that allows Kenya to develop in ways that would otherwise have been difficult to access (Walsh, 2006).

### **Tourism promotes cultural exchange**

Cultural exchange between Kenyan citizens and tourists also helps paint a positive picture of the country overseas, fighting the stereotypical starving African child image commonly associated with our continent, as well as broadening Kenyan horizons by introducing them to cultures outside our own. For example, the Maasai “shukas” are seen as an aspect of poverty in the tourist’s home countries which they come to learn it is contrary to their perspective. When they visit Kenya they actually learn that it is a way of life and some of them appreciate and embrace this culture to the extent that they buy the “shukas” and take them back home as souvenirs. On the other side we also copy their way of life such as adapting their western style of dressing (Johnson and Barry, 2002).

Cultural exchange also has its negative side. This interaction of cultures can go awry, where more conservative Kenyan cultures meet more liberal foreign cultures. The more permissive Western approach to clothing, partying and sex could possibly offend a deeply traditional Kenyan. A few vices have been

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indirectly associated with an increase in tourist activity, in spite of Kenyan laws regulating them: the sale and use of narcotics, prostitution, etc. Traditional cultures are also being slowly eroded as youth gravitate towards Western culture and abandon their language and customs in favour of “modernity” (Johnson and Barry, 2002).

### **Conservation of cultures**

Positively there is the recovery and conservation of cultural values that but for the visiting tourists would have disappeared. Funds as a result are made available for preservation of artefacts and restoration of forgotten historical monuments. Local communities would be unable to provide such resources. Various tactics are applied in such privileged places of tourist interest. Many local customs have been revitalized and tourist resources are being made available for the reappearance of folklore, festivals, craft pursuits and gastronomy. There has occurred marked improvement in facilities and services such as sanitary, modes of transport, parks etc. (Ritchie and Charles, 2007).

### **Tourism causes neo-colonialism and erosion of some cultures**

Nevertheless again negative impacts exist. The immediate negative factor is that of the social disparities between the indigenous population and that of the visitors. For some destinations essentially those to be found in Kenya there is a kind of imperialistic relationship with the inhabitants becoming servants of the tourists. Inevitably there arises social tension and resentment. A new kind of colonialism appears with dependency upon the foreign currency. Outside workers with better qualifications obtain the contracts. With such clear indications of the socio-economic differences the

negative impact takes effect. Gaming, increasing prostitution and drugs make their appearance where previously they had not existed. Tourist arrivals are therefore linked to such manifestations. Loss of culturization occurs as a result of such negative impacts. The local population observes the tourists and then seeks to adapt to their customs paving the way for the destruction and disappearance of the very thing that the tourists originally arrived for (Ritchie and Charles, 2007).

### **Tourism helps in conservation of resources**

Tourism has the positive side effect of encouraging wildlife conservation efforts. Tourists visit Kenya to see animals and landscapes unique to the country, giving the government incentive to protect them. Though the incentive is primarily financial rather than humanitarian, forests, games parks, and cultural heritage sites are preserved as potential sources of income and will continue to remain as so, to the benefit of Kenyan locals, culture and history.

But this creates its own problem: unfortunately, tourist visits also cause a great disruption to wildlife, as natural habitats are invaded for the sake of viewing and photographing it. Likewise, tourists' preferences for certain commonly visited places like the Maasai Mara and the Kenyan coast puts pressure on local resources in those areas. Congestion and displacement of locals from their homes are just two ways this plays out.

For example, the Maasai people have only recently begun to be resettled after loss of their land, much of which was taken over to develop tourist-oriented activities and facilities (Andereck, 2003).

**Pollution**

The size of the negative impacts of tourism, which the economy of many countries is currently experiencing today, is huge and many countries do not have sufficient technical and financial capacity to replenish the resources used by tourists and for the disposal of their waste. Negative impacts of tourism on the environment, which has recently been underestimated, are now becoming an object of close attention of the international community. Such effects are varied and numerous : pollution of natural objects; consumption of natural resources; development of land; degradation of natural landscapes , threats to wildlife and habitats , with consequent loss of biodiversity , finally, the breakdown of local customs and social structures. Pollution is a massive impediment to economic growth and also local residents are affected massively by pollution. Funds which were supposed to be used in development are directed towards taking care of the pollution (Andereck, 2003).

**Conclusion**

Conclusion from all the mentioned above is clear: there is a direct and very precise link between tourism, local culture and economy. This paper has shown that there are two sides to the Kenyan tourism coin: tourists are an important part of the Kenyan economy and they directly and indirectly help to preserve the country's history and economy, but this comes at a price. Tourism often has less than pleasant implications. The role of the government in this process is to provide the laws and regulations for sustainable tourism development in order to prevent the negative impacts of tourism to the cultures and economy of Kenya, the government should also

consider other dynamics such as global warming, loss of biodiversity and destruction of landscapes, pollution of coastal waters and freshwater shortages and air pollution