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Environmental Contribution of Urban Tourism Development in Nairobi City County – Kenya

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Abstract

Urban tourism has been explored extensively in the past 20 years. Minimal attention has been directed to urban tourism which occurs in the urban areas. In recent years the impacts of tourism development on cities environment has been ignored. This study offers an exploratory analysis of impacts of urban tourism to the city environment. Starting from a broad examination of the literature on urban tourism and its related impacts, and focusing on primary attractions. Many of these positives are associated with the development of general infrastructure such as roads and airports, as well as tourism facilities such as resorts, hotels, restaurants, shops, and golf courses. This paper focused on the on attractions in Nairobi County. It used qualitative research design while in-depth interviews were used to enrich research findings. Data was collected from a selected sample of 24 stakeholders in Nairobi County. The potential of Tourism to have a positive impact on the environment is immense through contributing to environmental protection and conservation. It is a method of raising environmental awareness and can be used to fund the protection of natural places and boost biodiversity. It is an approach of creating environmental consciousness, as well as a mechanism for financing the protection of natural zones and enhancing their economic importance.

Key words: *Urban Tourism; Environmental Contribution; Sustainable Development; Nairobi City County*

1. Introduction

Since the concept of urban tourism is new, there exists an array of opportunities, accompanied by a host of challenges which should not be overlooked (Maxim, 2017). It is also renowned worldwide as a vital industry that presents potentials for job growth and economic development (Al-Saad, 2017).

The solidification of the tourism, industry in urban areas point towards safeguarding employment for the local residents (Organization & Federation, 2017). Saad (2017) opined that tourism in urban areas, host the majority of the entire trips and the total overnight stays: - that results in most of the socio-economic benefits to those cities, as spaces of attractions for visitors. This proves that urban tourism meets tourist's expectations while making a positive impact to the growth of cities and the well-being of locals (Chad, Jinyang, & Smaldone, 2009).

The metropolitan and urban areas have developed massively over the years, creating an increasing worry for environmental sustainability (Chad, Jinyang, & Smaldone, 2009). Nowadays, cities must take a fundamental role in addressing environmental challenges through efficiency, investment, and innovation production hub centers (Andreea & Razvan, 2015). Therefore, there is need to manage urban tourism development, while accounting to ecological challenges and their international dimensions.

Urban tourism in Nairobi County has been making a positive contribution to the environmental sustainability. The county has made significant efforts to maintain a healthy, clean and quiet environment. The county administration has implemented a number of steps to maintain environmental safety and county resource sustainability. The County Government has created a tourism department, which has been tasked with the responsibility of promoting and protecting the environment. This department has implemented a number of policies and efforts to ensure environmental health. These include the implementation of waste management plans, the setting up of energy efficient lighting. These measures have helped to reduce air pollution, improve air quality and reduce water contamination.

2. Research Problem

Maxim (2017) affirms that inadequate research on the field of tourism in urban areas is associated with multifaceted environment of the phenomenon of urban tourism and the 'multifunctional appearance of urban areas. Scholars studying cities neglect tourism while those studying tourism neglect cities (Akama, 2002). According to Stock, (2007) the overlook of tourism in city studies is an impediment to sufficient philosophy about urban areas.

This is happening while urban areas also have their reasonable share of challenges in the form of traffic congestion, lack of skilled labour, poor management of solid waste, unemployment, water shortages, insufficient healthcare services, sky-scraping costs of living and environmental pollution. Other challenges within urban areas are those linked with providing other essential services such as, protection from crime, child care, electricity, food supply, and hygiene systems to remove solid and human wastes. Moreover, the concept of sustainability has received little attention in urban tourism research when compared to studies on other forms of tourism (Cristina, 2016).

Furthermore, Barbara Vlado and Jutita (2020) affirmed that the focal point of sustainable tourism is on the protected land, rural setting and natural environment although the majority of the people in the world live in urban areas and cities. The use of Nairobi as an exploratory case, this study will add to an enhanced understanding not only on the social, economic and ecological benefits of urban tourism without recognizing additional connected negative challenges which go along with such activity. This is due to the facts that in the deficiency of appropriate management and planning, local residents may become aggressive towards tourism expansion in cities, while the natural and built environment may suffer, which in turn may lead to the declining of attractions over the years.

3. Study Objective

The main objective of this study was to determine the environmental contributions of urban tourism towards sustainable development within Nairobi City County.

4. Research Question

What are the environmental contributions of urban tourism towards sustainable development within Nairobi City County?

5. Literature review

Urban tourism sometimes makes enduring physical changes to the natural environment through getting rid of large amounts of land from prospective agricultural production, destroys of natural environment and results in the elimination of individuals from their ancestral land and homes. It sometimes destroys nature with an increase of waste product which in turn destroys water and air quality (Lee, 1988) (Mathieson, 1982).

Atmospheric pollution and congestion has been motivated by an increase in private car ownership within urban areas (Al-Saad, 2017). In addition, as is the case with the majority over-populated areas, pollution and traffic congestion are a major challenge in cities (Rashed, 2013). Andreea and Razvan (2015) assert that a noteworthy influence of the 21st century will be the third Industrial Revolution, which will drastically alter all areas of urban areas.

The metropolitan and urban areas have developed massively over the years, creating an increasing worry for environmental sustainability (Chad, Jinyang, & Smaldone, 2009). European Union (2018) indicated that the key test for today's urban areas is to cope the substantial dependency on ecosystems. The study further argues that these dependence influences in the elimination of natural resources variety while putting more efforts to adapt and mitigate to climate modification, while placing a lot of emphasis on the quality of life and public health. According to Alejandro, Jeremie and Raquel, (2018) overcrowding in urban areas is exemplified by increasing impacts.

6. Research Methodology

The study was carried out in Nairobi County which is the capital city of Kenya which is rich with primary attractions including cultural heritage, forests parks and green spaces. The paper is based on a combination of desk research and interviews. Desk research consisted of academic and professional literature and reports which provided a rich picture of background information and more detailed in insights. The study adopted an exploratory research design using a qualitative research approach.

This technique is usually employed when examining complex phenomena and as a result it contributes to a "better understanding of the whole story by focusing on a key part" for example Nairobi is the largest city and doubles up as the capital city of Kenya appealing to a massive amounts of tourists both local and international. This paper In-depth interview was used to enrich research findings. Data was collected from a selected sample of 24 stakeholders in Nairobi County.

7. Research Findings and Discussion

The study analyses how urban tourism affects the natural environment of a city, such as through increased carbon emissions or waste production. On the other hand, it also examines how tourism positively impacts the built environment, such as through the construction of new tourist infrastructure. The study revealed that positively impacts from tourism occur when the level of visitor use is lesser than the environment's ability to cope with this use within the acceptable limits of change. Therefore, controlled

tourism poses potential benefits to many natural areas around the world. Uncontrolled tourism puts enormous pressure on an area and lead to impacts such as soil erosion, increased pollution, loss of natural habitat loss, increased pressure on endangered species and heightened vulnerability to forest fires. It often puts a strain on water resources, and it can force the local residents to compete for the use of critical resources.

7.1 Environmental Contribution of Urban Tourism in Nairobi

Urban tourism plays an important role in promoting sustainable development in Nairobi County. Sustainable tourism in Nairobi has helped to conserve the environment. Urban tourism Nairobi has also helped to reduce air, water, and soil pollution by increasing trying to promoting waste management, recycling, and encouraging the use of renewable energy sources. It has also helped to minimize the impacts of climate change by promoting the development of green infrastructure, such as green spaces and urban parks while encouraging sustainable development initiatives. Urban tourism in Nairobi has also helped to improve public health and safety by providing access to clean rivers, clean air through afforestation. By promoting sustainable and responsible urban tourism, Nairobi County has been contributing to the overall socio-economic and environmental well-being of the County.

Table 1: Environmental Contribution of Urban Tourism in Nairobi

Environmental Contribution of Urban Tourism	Respondents (N=24)	Response Rate (%)
Awareness Raising	8	33
Preservation and Conservation of Eco System	21	88
Quiet Environment	2	8
Protection of Endangered Species	1	4
Prevention of illegal trade and Exploitation		
Climate Change	5	21
Pollution Reduction and Environmental Management	5	21
Home for Wildlife	8	33

Source: Author 2022

7.1.1 Awareness Rising

From the finding of the study, it was ascertained by 33% of the respondents that urban tourism has been growing rapidly in Nairobi County, and this has increased environmental awareness among the local residents as well as the tourists. In deed as more people explore the city attractions, they become more aware of the challenges that the environment is facing, from air pollution to water conservation. Therefore, they affirmed that this awareness has led to a keen sense of responsibility among local residents to take care of their environments. Hence, the study revealed that Nairobi is full of beautiful landscapes, forests, green spaces, cultural heritage sites, animals in their natural environment, exotic ecosystems that attract visitors from around the globe hence it has become increasingly popular in the city. Indeed, the respondent argued that the attractions are the primary reasons why people travel to get rest from their daily blues and experience ultimate relaxation from the connection with natural world.

From the observations, these attractions serve to train visitors on the importance of living sustainably, while also providing a much-needed escape from the hustle and rush of city life. In addition, many attractions in Nairobi are now integrating sustainability into their industry models, ensuring that their practices protect the environment and support the local economy. As a result, there has been an increased focus on eco-tourism and green development, both of which support sustainable development in Nairobi County. In turn, this has helped to create a culture of environmental responsibility that in turn, helps to safeguard the future of the city and its inhabitants.

It was also revealed from the study that the local residents as well as the visitors learn the best experience of interacting with nature directly hence values what they have for life therefore the memories encourage them to be environmentally-conscious in travel and personal life as it was articulated by one of the respondents. Interv. 18 3.1.9 noted:

"Tourism in Nairobi has been enhancing education, learning and knowledge about conservation and protection of the environment, which includes the forests, the parks, as well as the green spaces, this is done through study tour, field attachment and internship programmes as well as field trips training offered to school students". Inter 18 3.1.9.

7.1.2 Preservation and Conservation of Ecosystem

Findings from this study provide enhanced evidence on Preservation and Conservation of Ecosystems within Nairobi environs. 88% of the respondents indicated that urban tourism is an important sector to regional development thus conflicts and environment development needs to be managed carefully because tourism and environment form controversial relationship. This relationship needs to be in a perfect balance to benefit each other.

Therefore, the preservation of the natural environment in Nairobi County has been a fundamental aim for the future generations, not only for tourism but for other related sectors. In terms of environment, this means consumption of natural resources within acceptable limits, protecting biodiversity and making sure that essential ecological processes can take place, while providing a pleasant experience to visiting tourists. On the other hand, the efforts in cleaning of Nairobi river was identified as a positive move within the City as a focus of future development, which requires a good quality of physical environment, this will also ensure factories with potential pollution are not permitted to pollute river. Consequently, it would appear that tourism development in Nairobi County provides a significant positive effect on environmental conservation, as it was emphasized by one of the respondents. On this front interviewee 18 3.1, 18 3.1.8 noted:

“Urban tourism has been preserving and conserving its natural spaces like Uhuru park, Karura forest Ngong Forest, Nairobi National Park, City park for tourists both international and domestic tourists to enjoy”. Inter 18 3.1.

Another respondent further added;

“Urban tourism has been reducing the environmental impacts associated with the city. In fact, we have seen in our parks they don’t allow single use plastic bottles in the parks. We have also seen places like Karura forest and Michuki memorial park has been fenced to keep off land grabbers therefore protect the interferences of natural resources from local residence”. Inter 18 3.1.8.

7.1.3 Quiet Environment

From the finding of this study, it was declared by 8% of the respondents on the importance of Forests, green spaces and the parks in Nairobi County. These green places have been providing a tranquil environment for sustainable development in the County. Trees, shrubs, the entire ecosystem have been acting as natural air purifiers and air conditioners, reducing air pollution and creating cooler temperatures in the area. Forests in Nairobi also provides habitats for various wildlife species and act as important carbon sinks, trapping carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and helping therefore, combat climate change. The presence of lush vegetation in Nairobi also provides a calming environment for people living in the urban areas of the county and helps to reduce stress levels.

In addition to providing a calming environment, forests and the parks in Nairobi also help to protect the local watersheds by reducing soil erosion and providing a natural filtration system for water runoff. This helps to ensure that the region has an abundant supply of fresh, clean water and minimizes the chances of water-borne illnesses. Furthermore, forests in Nairobi provide natural resources that can be used to create sustainable products such as timber, fuel, and medicinal herbs. Thus, forests in Nairobi have been essential in providing a peaceful environment for sustainable development in the region. Therefore, it is clear to conclude forests as well as green spaces in Nairobi County do contribute to carbon sequestration through enhancing of air quality as it reduces air as well as noise pollution within the city hence improving the quality of health of the city residents as it was also claimed by one of the respondents. Interviewees 16.2.5, 16. 4.0 and 16.4.10.0 noted that;

“When you are in the city center you will feel that the city is polluted all over, leave alone the industrial area which is far away from this place since we have very few industries near here still the motor vehicles which forms our biggest polluters of air in Kenya. But with trees around you can’t feel that, when you are in town you can feel smell of lubricants which are used by the vehicles” Inter 16.2.5.

In addition, another respondent further added that;

“Noise pollutions it minimal unless you are on the other side of the road near arboretum drive that is where you will find a lot of noise pollution because of the roads but when we are inside here the place is very cool” Inter 16.4.10.0.

It was also noted by another respondent;

“Of course, one of the most important one is tree offers fresh air, breeze, while it support the ecosystem we have some animals around here. Environmentally speaking it is one of the best place in the city where people can come and enjoy fresh air. The rivers are not very clean because of the sewage coming from upstream” Inter 6. 4.0.

7.1.4 Protection of Endangered Species

Based on Nairobi County analysis, it was realized that rare and endemic species symbol are attractive in the eyes of urban tourists due to their uniqueness in nature. Wild animals, virgin forests and a colorful palette of exotic plants are becoming an unusual sight in urban attractions. Therefore, urban tourism in Nairobi has a history of conservation success despite high population in the city hence the city is safe for endangered species that inhabit them as it was articulated by some of the respondents. Interviewee 12.2 notes the following on Protection of Endangered Species.

"Since we renovated Michuki Memorial Park the number of bird has increased the noise from the bird plus the number of nests on the trees will tell you the environmental contributions of this place. Inter 12.2."

The respondent also added.

Here we have flogs, one small crocodile which came immediately after we cleaned the river.

From the observation, today the animal orphanage exhibits many carnivores. the respondents explained the reason to be a place meant for animals that has been rescued in distress in the wild either if they have been left out by their mothers due to injury or sickness.

"You will find that the cats are very vulnerable to this, you will find a cheeters which have given birth and the cabs has disappeared from them same thing with lions and the same things with hyenas. These animals they are not brought to the orphanage just for the sake of brining in a rescue centre. It is very hard that you will find a buffalo that have been left so if it is left you will find it with the other group but a lion cub you will find a lions cub being misplaced given that either the mother has died the cub is nowhere either it is left behind some of them are sported in the community land they are brought here to be given another chance that is the reason you will find majority the animals are cats." Inter 24. 1.39.

The respondents also added.

"They are very vulnerable you will also find animals like hyenas as they are getting extinct there are no hyenas currently we are taking care of hyenas because the numbers are going down. You see hyenas are not like lions people kills. If you call as that you have sported a hyena somewhere will come for them and bring them into our park. So you will find there are so many cats more than any other animal in the animal orphanage. Hyenas are getting extinct in the country we have very few hyenas" Interv. 24. 1.40.

Thanks to Derrick Shedrick, Nairobi Animal orphanage. Giraffe Centre, Nairobi National Park for granting protection to various orphaned animals. It was also observed that Kenya Forest Service has been protecting some of engendered plant species at Hon. Michuki Memorial Park.

7.1.5 Prevention of Illegal Trade and Exploitation

Nairobi urban tourism is a fast-growing industry thus it must follow the principles of sustainability in order to last longer while maintaining positive impacts of the city. Therefore, 4% of the respondents revealed that urban tourism in Nairobi brings new opportunities through attracting both local as well as international tourists.

The tourists come to connect with the natural environment, this in turn gives locals residents a chance to sustain their families from urban attractions. Consequently, the local residents are given chance to realize the need to protect what they have in order to attract tourists, as the stream of income from attractions is long-term and more advantageous than one-time sales of illegal loggings or poached animals.

While, local residents are trained to help with protection of both flora and fauna tourists are encouraged to comply with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). During the game drive in the parks, consumption of plant and animal species is prohibited. At the same time tourist are advised to maintain a safe distance from wildlife and should not make noise or feed animals during excursions in animal orphanage safari walk, forests as well as park. As it was noted by one of the respondents.

Bush meat is real Inter 24. 2.2.3.

The respondent also added,

Another way we mitigate Illegal Trade and Exploitation is through education conservation awareness so we educate the young ones about the importance of conservation of the wildlife in connection to tourism, another way is that we have fenced the park on one side we are looking on ways we can fence the entire park. Naturally an ecological zone Inter 24. 1.2.2.

7.1.6 Pollution Reduction and Environmental Management

Urban tourism plays a vital role in pollution reduction in Nairobi County effectively enhancing the communities' well-being. Some forms of pollution include solid waste and debris, noise, air and visual pollution majorly found in central business district. At some places, it was established by the study that congestion and atmospheric pollution have been aggravated with the increase

of private car ownership transporting tourists to sites of their choice within the city. This has necessitated the government to work together with stakeholders in the city to reduce pollution in the city as it was informed by some respondents.

"Nairobi National park being an urban park there is no way we can say that it is not polluted from urbanization as well as from the visitors. In 2020 June plastics were banned from entering into the parks but even today if you go to there you will find plastic things. The human behaviour they will hind and will throw them in the park and you know impact of plastic to the environment so pollution is there as we have water pollution, air pollution we have, all sort of pollution in the park but we are trying to work with other stakeholders like NEMA the police to try and mitigate this. It seems that something needs to be done to these people who are polluting the environment" Inter 24. 1.2.6.

Another one also said.

In fact, I have seen with competency based curriculum where pre- primary 1 and pre-primary 2 children are currently learning about the environment and are so happy by the way they are taught about the environment. Social media is another forum which has also assisted the young generations. I have seen that they have formed a group which deals with tree nurseries and cleaning of the rivers even myself, I have received a group of Wamiti Foundation based in Nairobi. They come here and request to be given an opportunity to take part in cleaning the river. Especially, during the rainy season the river, has a lot of waste products mostly solid wastes like pieces of clothes, plastic materials, every kind of waste of waste it carried by water the river. So you will find that by the time it gets into this place these materials are trapped by the roots as water flows down the river. During the rainy seasons that is the time when you get that the river is too dirty. This is the time these organized groups come to assist us and we are very happy and we usually welcome the move. Others come to request to do public awareness about trees others come to learn about seedbed management as they don't know anything about trees and we train them. So we have two groups one is in Githurai while the other one is in Kamukunji which we have trained from here and they have moved on. The training has been assisting them so we do appreciate these groups Inter 12.4.0.

The respondent also added

We are under Kenya forest service so we are funded by the government even the income project that we have here the money goes to the government. The good part of this place since 2018 we no longer allow plastic bottles in the in the forest not only here but all parks in Kenya. If visitors get into the park with a bottle or water, they are forced by security to leave their bottles at the gate and the moment they leave they pick the bottles from the gate. We only accept the re-usable bottle and it's not only Michuki memorial park but all forests across the country. A part from bottles we have also dust bins placed all over for our visitors to dump their wastes in these containers. They have been segregated for plastic and other wasted across the park. They are placed at different places and even our visitors have adopted this culture. Inter 12.4.9.

7.1.7 Home for Wildlife

On this based on the study 33% of respondents acknowledged that attractions in the city serve as home for wildlife as it was claimed by a respondent.

"The park is also home for wild animal there are some monkeys there are birds and other small animals like warthogs. There are people who come here to enjoy many things other comes for nature walk other comes to sit under the trees and i believe there are some who come to do bird watching even though they are not many species given that monkeys eat their eggs that have reduced their numbers. Inter 6. 4.3.

Another respondent also noted.

Reasons when there is draught which is as a result of climate change like now there is in Northern area of Kenya we receive more orphans than when there is enough pasture. When the land is green we receive few orphans that the impact, when there is draught it puts pressure on us given that we have more orphans to feed. Inter 9. 9.7.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed major positive impacts of urban tourism on the environment. In Nairobi County urban tourism has been on an upward trajectory and has introduced many green space for tourists to visit. In some attractions such as Karura forest having the option of welcoming tourists to green spaces. Some of the positive environmental contributions include; Preservation and Conservation of Eco System, Protection of Endangered Species, Prevention of illegal trade and Exploitation, Pollution Reduction and Environmental Management and climate change mitigation.

The government is to create a comprehensive tourism plan that promotes sustainable tourism, and encourages the development of eco-friendly infrastructure. Initiatives like providing incentives for tourists to use public transportation and using green energy sources for hotels, restaurants and other businesses should be encouraged.

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