

Liberation Heritage Route:

Reminiscent of the Painful Past or a Road to the Future?

Olga Bialostocka¹

In 2009, a series of thirteen sites within South Africa was submitted to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) for World Heritage status. Linked together by a common narrative of the liberation struggle, the sites form the so-called Liberation Heritage Route, which aims to preserve the legacy of South Africa's long walk to freedom. It represents the South African national chapter of a much broader programme entitled "Roads to Independence in Africa: The African Liberation Heritage", coordinated by Unesco and supported by the African Union (AU). This brief analyses the long-term benefits of the initiative, both sociocultural and economic, while emphasising sustainable development principles as best practice to balance the need for the conservation of the tangible and intangible heritage that constitutes the substance of the Route with the prospect of using it as a product for tourism development.

Context

As a battle for universal values such as freedom and human rights, the liberation struggle that Africa experienced in the twentieth century is a common narrative and a shared heritage of the continent. Recognising the need to preserve the memory of resistance against foreign rule in Southern Africa – of places, as well as the people who contributed to the struggle – the African Liberation Heritage Programme entails gathering and recording this important heritage for future generations. Besides preserving and conserving

the vestiges of the past, the aim of the initiative is to contribute to the promotion of peace and integration on the African continent, to encourage dialogue and reconciliation, and to revitalise the history of African independence.

South Africa's national Liberation Heritage Route (LHR) is the initial leg of this transnational programme and the first segment of the serial nomination of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to the Unesco World Heritage List. Besides the thirteen sites already identified and included in the Unesco tentative list,¹ over 200 others have already been suggested and are

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presently being studied for possible inclusion in the South African instalment of the Route.² A dedicated website has been created to share the information on the progress of the project, spearheaded by the National Heritage Council.³

The initiative promises significant benefits for the country. Besides the social and educational factors, the economic potential of the project seems very encouraging, given the commercial value of heritage – its ability to attract tourism and enterprise opportunities associated with the development of cultural industries.⁴ In view of all this, the LHR seems to be a useful and, indeed, very needed ‘tool’ for the South African government to get closer to realising the goals identified in the successively issued plans and strategies concerning the growth of tourism in the country: the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA, 2006), the New Growth Path (NGP, 2010), the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS, 2011), the Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy 2012–2020 (DTGS, 2012), and particularly the National Heritage and Cultural Tourism Strategy (NHCTS, 2012).

Driving strategies

Tourism is commonly regarded as a ‘key driver of socio-economic progress through export revenues, the creation of jobs and enterprises, and infrastructure development’.⁵ In South Africa, it has been considered the solution to the many challenges that the country faces – a means to bring about benefits to the economy and improve the life of its citizens. Therefore, as early as 2006 tourism was described in the AsgiSA document as one of the three high-priority sectors, the development of which was expected to bring the awaited economic growth. In 2010 it made the list of six pillars of growth in the NGP, where it was described as an area ‘expected to contribute to the development of, among others, rural areas and culture (craft) by growing the economy and creating jobs’.⁶

A similar driving role was ascribed to tourism in the NTSS in 2011 and the subsequent DTGS, launched in 2012. The NTSS stressed the need to address the questions of sustainability and economic potential of tourism in terms of its seasonality and geographic spread. It also raised the issue of the lack of ‘tourism culture’ among South Africans, particularly the previously disadvantaged groups. The DTGS, in turn, was prepared in response to the decline in domestic tourism, namely in the number of trips taken by

South Africans⁷ and the contribution of the sector to the GDP.⁸ Although South Africa is currently observing a rise in the number of international tourists visiting the country⁹ (of which residents of SADC countries account for 70,2 per cent),¹⁰ domestic tourism growth was prioritised by the government.¹¹ The choice of this strategic focus was motivated by the understanding that the dependence of the tourism industry on foreign arrivals makes the sector vulnerable. It has also been stressed that international tourism is concentrated mainly in the chief urban centres or around key tourist attractions, while domestic tourism covers all provinces and thus is a good answer to the problem of unbalanced geographical distribution. Additionally, both the NTSS and DTGS recognised the need for product diversification and niche-market activation (including heritage and rural tourism) in order to stimulate growth of the tourism sector in South Africa, especially in rural areas.

The NHCTS raised the important question of balancing the divergences between conservation of heritage and development of tourism in order to create mutual benefits for both of them.

The commoditization of cultural heritage through tourism activities has revealed that the domain of tourism tends to thrive on the packaging of heritage resources for tourist consumption only for the purposes of tourism growth and development, and not necessarily for the conservation of cultural heritage resources. On the other hand, the heritage sector has been primarily concerned with the protection of heritage, with little commitment to socio-economic opportunities resulting from the uses of heritage resources.¹²

Moreover, the document recognised inequalities in the distribution of benefits deriving from heritage and cultural tourism among local communities affected by the development.

Cultural capital and the economic value of heritage

The concept of route tourism can be summarised as ‘bringing together a variety of activities and attractions under a unified theme and thus stimulating entrepreneurial opportunity through the development of ancillary products and services’.¹³ The idea is to boost the economic development of less developed, particularly rural, areas through tourism by stimulating

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communities to work in partnership with each other. The concept is not new to South Africa. Some of the scenic routes developed thus far in the country have proved very successful (such as the Midlands Meander in KwaZulu-Natal),¹⁴ while others have been less fortunate (such as the Magaliesberg Meander in Gauteng and North West Province).¹⁵

Since its conceptualisation, the LHR has been regarded as a means that 'can be utilized to catalyse socio-economic development and infrastructural investment',¹⁶ taking into consideration the 'great potential that heritage embedded places carry as magnets for ... cultural tourism'.¹⁷ Indeed, endorsed by the AU and Unesco, the Route has the much-needed institutional support to develop into a successful tourist attraction. Moreover, given its scope and character, it promises equitable tourism spread, with no constraints in terms of season. However, taking into account the historical values that the Route is to convey to visitors, tourist infrastructure needs to be integrated into the heritage in a way that does not put it at risk.

Two approaches towards heritage assets prevail nowadays. On the one hand, conservationists emphasise the cultural values of heritage and focus on identification, interpretation, protection, and restoration of that inheritance. On the other hand, economists are interested in cultural resources as a commodity. Neither of these attitudes seems to make use of the full potential of heritage, and neither seems entirely defensible in the present-day reality.¹⁸ Therefore, it has been suggested that a balance between the conservationist and market-driven approaches should be established to deal with cultural heritage.¹⁹ Consequently, the concept of sustainability has been identified as a reconciliatory link between the two.²⁰ A number of principles have been established to assess sustainability, in both cultural and economic terms, of investment projects that make use of cultural capital. Accordingly, the decisions affecting the heritage of the LHR should be informed by the following criteria:

- Generation of tangible and intangible benefits
- Intergenerational equity (interests of future generations taken into consideration)
- Intragenerational equity (equal access to the benefits across all groups of the population)
- Maintenance of diversity (contribution to the preservation of cultural diversity of the community)
- Precautionary approach and prevention (extreme caution when dealing with possible

irreversible change and prevention of negative impacts and damage)

- Subsidiarity (decentralised decision making, input of local people into the approval and management of the project)
- Recognition of interdependence (acknowledgment of connections between specific items of cultural resources and the benefits they bestow).²¹

Meticulous cooperative planning and institutional development, paired with a high level of community participation, are required to assure that heritage resources will be commodified for tourism revenues in keeping with the principles of sustainability. Moreover, the valuation of meaning, authenticity and integrity of the historic value of heritage sites that make up the LHR must be prepared to serve as reference for identifying impacts that may affect the significance of the Route. A mitigation plan that would help diminish the negative effects of the investment should also be in place.

Sustainability as best practice in the development of the Liberation Heritage Route

As a project of national significance with countrywide scope, the LHR demands political drive and collaboration from all levels of the government – national, provincial, and local. And while in the past there have been various initiatives among the government appointed bodies linking conservation and tourism (e.g. SANParks' community-based conservation strategy),²² some problems in the approach to such a model of development persist. One of the issues that still need attention is the general apathy, lack of leadership and understanding of the notion of tourism on the part of local government. According to the NTSS, there are [in local government] 'few dedicated or part-time tourism personnel; experience and knowledge of tourism are extremely limited and, with rare exceptions, no budget is allocated for tourism planning and development activities'.²³ Capacity building is thus critical to improve the operation of the government in terms of assistance to the tourism industry.²⁴

Another area that needs immediate attention is legislation. At present, there is no appropriate statutory law regulating the development of tourism in South Africa. The Tourism Act (Act 72 of 1993), which represents the legislative framework, deals only with the promotion of

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tourism. The White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism (1996) has a much broader scope but constitutes merely a policy framework. Unfortunately, the Act has not been amended to comprise recommendations included in the White Paper. Moreover, given the character of the LHR, its development and management must be informed by a combination of policies relating to different areas, such as preservation and conservation, territorial organisation, sustainable development, and tourism. Meanwhile, sectoral policies functioning in South Africa are not integrated with each other. Inclusion of the aforementioned principles of sustainability into policies and management plans concerning cultural heritage tourism should also be considered.

Planning and management of the Route: key considerations

Heritage can be a valuable asset of the tourism sector, but its own aesthetic, spiritual, social, historical and symbolic values have to be recognised, apart from the economic benefits. Tourism development around the LHR should be perceived as a long-term goal, rather than an ad hoc investment. Thus, it must be preceded by careful planning and subjected to a suitable management system. Good administration of the sites also has to be guaranteed in view of the prospective inscription of the Route on the World Heritage List.²⁵ The Unesco Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, ratified by South Africa in 1997, state clearly that:

All properties inscribed on the World Heritage List must have adequate long-term legislative, regulatory, institutional and/or traditional protection and management to ensure their safeguarding (II.F.97);

Each nominated property should have an appropriate management plan or other documented management system which must specify how the Outstanding Universal Value of a property should be preserved, preferably through participatory means (II.F.108);

In the case of serial properties, a management system or mechanisms for ensuring the coordinated management of the separate components are essential (II.F.114).²⁶

The above guidelines stress another important aspect of the proper protection and management of heritage, which has also been recognised in the

White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism. The latter reads: 'Tourism is ... firmly based in local communities'.²⁷ Commentators seem to agree that a cooperative partnership between local communities and the public and private sectors is a prerequisite for attaining sustainability in the tourism sector.²⁸ However, the involvement of local residents should not be limited to a consultation on a draft proposal, but must take the form of an inclusive public participation process. Rural populations that will be affected by the development of tourism destinations on the Route have the right to participate in all phases of the project development, from planning to decision making to implementing; for them, in the first place, would pay the social and environmental costs of a mishandled investment. Moreover, they should also have equal access to the benefits coming from the initiative.

The development of a cultural route for tourism purposes should guarantee in any case that priority is given to the participation of the local community and to local and regional tourist companies. Every effort should be made to prevent the creation of monopolies by large international companies.²⁹

Inclusion of communities in the process of tourism product development would further lead to the public's taking ownership of the heritage. Consequently, the responsibility for management and conservation of the sites, as well as maintenance of tourism infrastructure, would be shared by the community who, as co-owners, would value more their 'property'. It is thus recommended 'to help local communities take ownership of their heritage and related tourism projects. ... Local participation, drawing on local perspectives, priorities and knowledge, is a precondition for sustainable tourism development'.³⁰

As for the role of the public sector, its initial investment in a project like the LHR is critical to create the basis for growth and induce tourism demand for the Route. National government should take responsibility for developing tourism infrastructure and products on the LHR, as well as devising a strategy to publicise them internationally. Marketing of the Route should be targeted especially towards the SADC countries, given that the theme of the LHR speaks to the memory of the said region, as well as that SADC tourists constitute the majority of international travellers visiting South Africa. Concurrently, the publicising of the LHR should focus on

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domestic tourists, in keeping with the DTGS. Therefore, regional governments must play a role in integrating the promotion of the LHR in each and every province, securing adequate funding for advertising, as well as coordinating and harmonising programmes of their constituencies. A dedicated guidebook and website in different national languages with information on distances, key attractions, available accommodation, as well as other data relevant to each and every site on the Route should be envisaged. It is important to create and 'sell' a unique brand, recognised nationally and internationally.

The LHR could help to spread the benefits of tourism into the provinces that have thus far seen little tourist activity. It could grow as a distinctive selling feature and a product of a specific area, without jeopardising other cultural services and initiatives, or competing with them. Moreover, rural tourism can develop side by side with heritage and cultural tourism. By offering an authentic and unique experience, the LHR could contribute to the diversification and enhancement of the tourism product, which should further translate into widening of the tourism audience.

However, for the potential of the heritage and rural tourism to be fully realised, the government has to play a part in its development. Besides raising awareness and understanding of tourism among public administration officials in charge of its implementation on the ground, the government should facilitate access to tourism at grassroots level. This implies equipping rural communities with the skills needed to unpack the potential of tourism. Well-designed capacity-building programmes must be easily accessible and adapted to the needs of local residents. Ingenious mentorship and skills transfer agendas should be offered to empower rural communities and unleash their entrepreneurial spirit, in view of integrating grassroots initiatives into mainstream tourism. Financial support, especially for emerging enterprises and their marketing, should be provided as start-up funds to help the proactive entrepreneurs. Capacity building should be perceived in terms of investment in human capital that will eventually be repaid in the form of a knowledgeable society capable of sustaining its livelihood and managing the heritage in an economically, socially and environmentally responsible way. It is noteworthy that conservation of heritage itself is also a source of skills and competencies useful in other sectors of the economy.

The Route as a didactic tool: Recommendations

The route links key aspects of destination management such as preservation of cultural heritage, rural regeneration, product development and institutional strengthening'.³¹ Thus, if planned, designed and implemented well, a tourism route like the LHR can bring manifold benefits on economic, social, and institutional levels.

Yet it can only be a success from the commercial point of view if it attracts visitors. At the moment, the statistics do not present an optimistic picture when it comes to heritage or cultural tourism among South Africans, and the culture of holidaying more generally. Although interest in cultural services of domestic tourists is on the rise,³² cultural services, which include performing arts, museums, and nature reserves among others, represent a negligible portion of tourism expenditure;³³ in the case of domestic tourism, it is barely 0,1 per cent of the total tourism spending.³⁴ Much more often than visiting cultural/heritage sites or taking part in cultural events, South Africans choose eating out or shopping as a way of spending their free time while travelling, or have no reason to travel at all.³⁵ Of South Africans, 33 per cent claim not to have money for travelling (overnight trips).³⁶ Almost the same percentage of respondents admit to having relatives and friends close enough not to have to travel any further. According to the research by South Africa Tourism, finances should not be an obstacle to travelling for 8,2 million adult South Africans.³⁷ Thus, it seems that the problem is of a different nature and has to do with lack of holiday incentive, or simply 'tourism culture'. After all, most South Africans associate vacations with visits to relatives and friends, or shopping trips,³⁸ while 4,8 per cent of South Africans admit to not seeing any reasons for travelling at all.³⁹

Addressing the issue of the decline in domestic tourism, the NTSS recommended, first of all, focusing on the marketing of tourist attractions to raise awareness of tourism and provide information on its products to society. The need to enhance tourism product development and distribution was also mentioned in the document. The approach proposed was 'to create a culture of travel, focusing on the young and upcoming, as they constitute a lucrative market segment'.⁴⁰ Thus, apparently, the actions were intended to encourage South Africans to spend more money, and not necessarily to make them revise their 'spending trends', so that they could make more

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use of the tourism assets and get to know their country better.

Meanwhile, having ratified the Unesco Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, South Africa committed itself to 'endeavor by all appropriate means, and in particular by educational and information programmes, to strengthen appreciation and respect by their peoples of the cultural and natural heritage'.⁴¹ Concurrently, the NHCTS found that it is mostly highly educated South Africans who find interest in heritage.⁴² Taking into account, on the one hand, the government's strategy to activate niche markets such as heritage and rural tourism, and on the other hand, the poor rates of cultural tourism in the country, promotion of the LHR should be combined with an educational campaign that would make young people discover their own heritage. Therefore, it is recommended to:

- include trips to the LHR sites in school programmes, to inculcate respect for the past from a young age and convey the social values that the heritage transmits;
- prepare educational packages for schools that would help trigger in young people an interest in the South African liberation struggle, by presenting the history in an accessible and interesting way;
- design promotional and educational materials for teachers with outlines of possible history lessons on the LHR; and
- develop a series of historical theme festivals at the LHR sites in each province, the profit of which would be dedicated to the conservation of the sites; such festivals are a great way of disseminating knowledge using 'edutainment' – teaching through entertainment.

Creating an inclusive ticket for the whole LHR, as well as group tickets for families and school groups, would make the Route more attractive and accessible from an economic point of view and would encourage visitors to plan and make trips to other sites on the LHR, not only the nearest one.

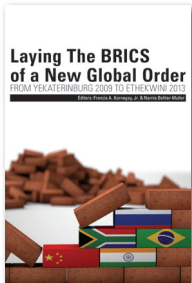
'Though Cultural Routes have resulted from both peaceful and hostile encounters, they present a number of shared dimensions which transcend their original functions, offering an exceptional setting for a culture of peace based on ties of shared history as well as the tolerance, respect, and appreciation for cultural diversity that characterize the communities involved'.⁴³

Promotion of the LHR should be combined with an educational campaign that would make young people discover their own heritage

Notes and references

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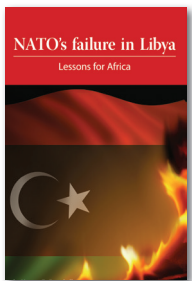
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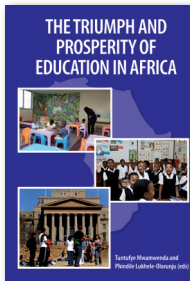
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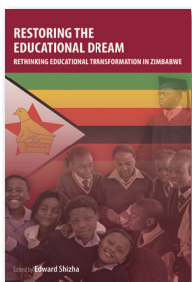
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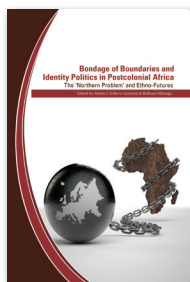
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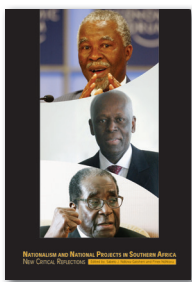
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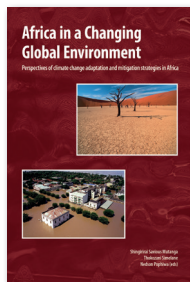
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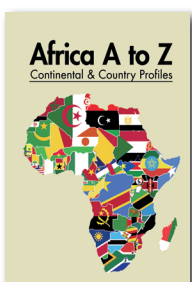
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