Secondary cities and tourism: The South African record

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Abstract

Urban tourism has been explored extensively in the past 15 years in South Africa. Within the literature on urban tourism there is a large city bias with most research concentrated on the country's major metropolitan destinations. Minimal attention has been directed to tourism which occurs in the country's second order or secondary cities. In recent years the importance of secondary cities for national economic development and urban planning has been rediscovered and re-energised. In South Africa a new 'conversation' about the potential role of the country's secondary cities has begun. This article offers an exploratory analysis of the tourism economies of South Africa's secondary cities. It reveals the uneven and differentiated role of tourism across the country's secondary cities.

Keywords: urban tourism, secondary cities, local development, diversification, South Africa

Introduction

Over the past 15 years there has been mounting research interest in the role and characteristics of urban tourism across sub-Saharan Africa (Rogerson & Visser, 2005; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2011; Rogerson & Visser, 2014; Novelli, 2015). In particular, South Africa has been a major focus for a stream of scholarly investigations about urban tourism (Rogerson & Visser, 2007, 2011a). For the country's tourism geographers in particular the topic of urban tourism has been of compelling interest (Rogerson & Visser, 2011b; Visser & Hoogendoorn, 2011; Hoogendoorn & Rogerson, 2015). Key issues that have been investigated include the different facets of urban tourism in major cities and its potential to contribute to place-based economic development as well as city regeneration (Rogerson, 2002, 2003, 2013; Ferreira & Visser, 2007; Ferreira, 2011; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014; Rogerson & Visser, 2011b). Niche forms of urban tourism have been analysed including adventure tourism, beer tourism, creative tourism, food and wine tourism, heritage tourism, and volunteer tourism as well as the dramatic surge of slum tourism as a particular niche form of urban tourism attractive for international tourists (Rogerson, 2006; Frenzel et al., 2012; Burgold & Rolfes, 2013; McKay, 2013; van der Merwe, 2011; Ferreira & Muller, 2013; Rogerson & Slater, 2014; Booyens & Rogerson, 2015; Koens & Thomas, 2015; Rogerson & Collins, 2015; Frenzel, 2016). The birth and expansion of a commercial accommodation sector, a consequence of the growth of urban tourism as well as prerequisite for further expansion, has been the focus of multiple studies. Most scholarly attention has been devoted to commercial hotels (J.M. Rogerson, 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2012a; 2012b; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2013d; 2013e; 2014a; 2014b), second homes (Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2004; Hoogendoorn et al., 2005; Hoogendoorn et al., 2009; Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b; Long & Hoogendoorn, 2013; Rogerson & Hoogendoorn, 2014) and timeshare accommodation (Pandy and Rogerson, 2013 a; 2013b; 2014a, 2014b). In addition, the importance of guest houses and of self-serviced accommodation also has been scrutinised (Visser & Van Huyssteen, 1997, 1999; Greenberg & Rogerson, 2015).

In terms of the corpus of research on urban tourism in South Africa, it is evident that geographically the largest share of published works relate to the country's metropolitan areas. Tourism issues about Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and, to a lesser extent, Port Elizabeth, Ekurhuleni and Pretoria dominate the agenda of urban tourism scholars. It is with this observation of large city bias in mind that the objective in this paper is to direct attention and explore the nature of the tourism economies of South Africa's lesser researched group of secondary cities (see South African Cities Network [SACN], 2012, 2014). With the exception of a handful of research outputs on tourism in George (Ramukumba, 2012; Ramukumba et al. 2012a, 2012b), Kimberley (van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2013) and Stellenbosch (Ferreira & Muller, 2013), the picture relating to tourism in the country's secondary cities largely has been overlooked. This knowledge gap is unfortunate given the planning challenges facing secondary cities and especially the challenge of diversifying often narrow economic bases. The discussion unfolds in three major sections of material. The next section overviews international definitions and debates about secondary cities. The following sections turn to examine secondary cities in South Africa and to unpack the nature of their tourism economies.

Secondary City Debates

With rapid rates of urbanization a characteristic phenomenon of the global South it is recognised that an increasing share of urban populations are living not only in large or mega- cities but also in clusters of small and medium-sized cities. Scholarship on these 'second order cities' or secondary cities was popularized by the appearance of Rondinelli's (1983a, 1983b) investigations in the 1980s. These are focused on the role of secondary centres for boosting growth in surrounding rural hinterland areas. It is acknowledged that this pioneer research "assisted in arriving at an improved understanding of secondary cities, emphasised the dual role of these cities in national and regional development and suggested that an integrated settlement system should facilitate regional planning" (Marais et al., 2014: 205). Indeed, within national urban development strategies for the 1980s an increasingly popular strategy was that of promoting growth at a limited number of secondary cities. These 'secondary city strategies' essentially could be distinguished from the planning of 'growth centres' in that they focused on the promotion of indigenous development rather than the attraction of external investment, particularly of incentivised industrial development (Richardson, 1981, 1987).

During the 1980s Fair (1986: 78) styled research on secondary cities as a "new frontier" for academic policy analysis. For Marais et al. (2014: 205) the period of the 1980s represents something of a 'golden period' for secondary city research. Since the 1980s, however, the topic of secondary cities has been somewhat neglected by urban scholars and given only limited research attention as compared to that accorded to large or mega-cities (Roberts, 2014; SACN, 2014; Marais, 2016). Satterthwaite & Tacoli (2003) argue that the potential contribution of secondary cities to local economic development and poverty reduction in the developing world is all too often ignored in planning. Likewise, Bolay & Rabinovitch (2004: 407) maintain that national urban policy makers still lack a comprehensive understanding of these places. This remains the case despite in several countries the continued support of secondary city promotional strategies as a key element for equitable urban and regional development which build upon the regional role in economic development assumed by such cities (Marais, 2016).. In Kenya, for example, planning for secondary centres is intended to relieve population pressure in the countryside, help to better integrate the country's urban and rural economies, reduce congestion in the largest cities, and thereby improve quality of life in the country's leading urban centres (Otiso, 2005). For spatial planners the potential role of secondary cities for contributing towards more balanced and dispersed patterns of economic development is their compelling attraction for policy analysts (Kihato, 2013).

Although the definition of secondary cities is contested, the term frequently is applied in terms of a national settlement system to the group of cities which fall immediately below a country's metropolitan areas. In the original definitions of secondary cities the focus was upon issues of population size with some definitions suggesting an urban area with a population of between 100 000 and 500 000 people (Rondinelli, 1983a, 1983b; Roberts, 2014). Among others Hardoy & Satterthwaite (1986) argued, however, that a single universally valid threshold could not be justified to distinguish the group of secondary centres from larger urban centres. In a globalised world the meaning of the term has shifted. As Roberts (2014: 13) maintains a secondary city likely will have a population or economic size between 10 and 50 percent of a nation's largest city but today it is the *function* and the role

played by these centres in national (and global) systems of cities which defines them as secondary cities. Traditional hierarchical classifications of cities founded on population size alone are being challenged (Roberts, 2014). In contemporary scholarship on secondary cities the focus on definition is not so much on population size but upon the functional roles assumed by these cities (Rodriguez-Pose & Fitjar, 2013; SACN, 2014; Marais, 2016).

In national settlement systems secondary cities "play a very important functional role" (Roberts, 2014: 21) and as many of them are growing rapidly and confront urban development challenges, they merit closer attention. It is observed that recently the category of secondary cities "have become the subject of renewed interest by scholars and international development organizations" (Roberts, 2014: 11). In part this growth of interest in a 'blind spot' of urban studies can be understood by shifts from top-down planning to place-based approaches which emphasize the role of local responses in a period of increased globalisation (Marais et al., 2014; Rogerson, 2014). Petzer (2015: 1) asserts that at the international scale secondary cities "stand to innovate and generate new responses to collective challenges". Arguably, these responses in secondary cities might be different to those in large cities (Bolay & Rabinovitch, 2014; Petzer, 2015). Marais (2016) points out that much local economic development planning for these centres is (by necessity) inward-looking. Indeed, it is evident that commonly the economies of secondary cities are characterised by "narrow economic bases and so are extremely vulnerable to changes in one or two economic sectors" (SACN, 2012: 2). The impacts of globalisation require an appropriate response from policy makers in secondary cities (Rodriguez-Pose & Fitjar, 2013). In a recent international 'state of the art' review on managing secondary cities it was observed the need exists for "a greater focus on supporting endogenous growth in secondary cities, since many do not have the capacity or advantages to engage in exogenous, export-oriented growth" (Roberts, 2014: 14). Accordingly, it was concluded that "new combinations of exogenous and endogenous growth strategies are necessary to develop secondary cities" (Roberts, 2014: 14).

One economic sector that so far has received minimal attention in the existing corpus of writings around secondary cities is tourism. Given a context of much expanded international scholarship around tourism-led strategies for economic development this investigatory void is somewhat surprising. A first step in understanding is to unpack the character of tourism which takes place in secondary cities as a foundation for strategy formulation. The next sections explore in greater detail this issue in the context of the growing 'conversation' which is taking place about the role and directions of secondary cities in South Africa (SACN, 2012, 2014; Kihato, 2013; Marais, 2016).

Secondary Cities in South Africa

In urban studies scholarship on South Africa the major research focus has been on the country's metropolitan areas with the second order cities commanding much less attention (Visser, 2013; Visser & Rogerson, 2014). The research and advocacy activities of the South African Cities Network (SACN) have been highly influential in renewing debates in South Africa in recent years about the role and significance of the country's second order cities. The SACN (2012: 17) acknowledged that the "South African debate on secondary cities is highly under-developed" and sought to improve the foundation for urban policy, analysis and debate (Kihato, 2013).

Table 1: The SACN Group of Secondary Cities in South Africa

Province	Local Municipality	Major Centre
Western Cape	Stellenbosch	Stellenbosch
Western Cape	George	George
Western Cape	Drakenstein	Paarl
Northern Cape	Sol Plaatje	Kimberley

Northern Cape	//Khara Hais	Upington
North West	City of Matlosana	Klerksdorp
North West	Madibeng	Brits
North West	Mafikeng	Mafikeng
North West	Rustenburg	Rustenburg
North West	Tlokwe	Potchefstroom
Mpumalanga	Steve Tshwete	Middelburg
Mpumalanga	Mbiombela	Nelspruit
Mpumalanga	Govan Mbeki	Secunda
Mpumalanga	Emalahleni	Witbank
Limpopo	Polokwane	Polokwane
Limpopo	Lephalale	Ellisras
KwaZulu Natal	Msunduzi	Pietermaritzburg
KwaZulu Natal	Newcastle	Newcastle
KwaZulu Natal	Umhlathuze	Richards Bay
Gauteng	Mogale City	Krugersdorp
Gauteng	Emfuleni	Vereeniging
Free State	Matjhabeng	Welkom

Source: Based on SACN 2012: 18.

At the outset it was conceded that no official list of secondary cities exists for South Africa. Accordingly, in terms of opening up a conversation about secondary cities in the country, the SACN (2012) examined international definitions and criteria for classifying secondary cities and then as a baseline sought to identify a "starting line-up" of such urban places for South Africa (Table 1). Although it was conceded that the list was subject to debate and that there may be other cities that might be classed as secondary cities the SACN (2012: 18) isolated a list of 22 cities for exploratory analysis in order "to begin a discussion into South African secondary cities". Overall, the analysis points to the importance of these centres for national development in South Africa in terms of their potential contribution for poverty alleviation and provision of economic services and infrastructure to proximate impoverished areas (SACN, 2014: 45). Among other key findings from this investigation it was revealed that the group of secondary cities were far from homogenous and indeed were differentiated in terms of their development situations and current challenges (SACN, 2012). For example, some centres are rapidly growing but others (most notably, Welkom) are experiencing situations of population decline; some have strong local revenue streams and others not (Kihato, 2013: 20). One of the most striking findings concerns the economic vulnerability of secondary cities. It was disclosed that many of the cities have narrow economic bases which heightens their vulnerability to changes taking place in one or two sectors, such as manufacturing or mining (SACN, 2014). In particular, the high level of economic dependence of these centres on single economic sectors makes them highly vulnerable to the volatility of global markets. Importantly, these cities "have significantly less economic diversity and scale than metropolitan areas" (SACN, 2014: 46). It is within this environment of economic uncertainty that the nature and role of tourism development in South Africa's secondary cities is explored.

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Tourism in South Africa's Secondary Cities

The group of 22 local municipalities as indicated on Table 1 forms the basis for interpreting the tourism economies of the country's secondary cities. In terms of sources the study draws upon an analysis of a local level data set on tourism which can be accessed from Global Insight. This data base contains details of the tourism performance of all local authorities in the country in respect of *inter alia*, the number of tourism trips differentiated by purpose of trip; bednights by origin of tourist (domestic or international); calculation of tourism spend; and of the contribution of tourism to local gross domestic product. In the following section tourism data is analysed for the period 2001-2012 across the group of secondary cities.

Table 2: Secondary Cities: Growth of Tourism 2001-2012

	Total Tourism Trips	% National Total	Total Bednights	% National Total	Estimated Total Tourism Spend R'000s)	% National Total
2001	3976670	17.2	24488967	15.5	10699802	16.7
2006	5777507	17.4	29066644	15.3	18846532	15.8
2010	6300378	16.9	32127215	14.9	25520302	15.1
2012	5928450	17.2	34014338	15.7	25479304	15.4

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Table 3: Secondary Cities: Growth of Tourism by Source, 2001-2012

	No of trips		Share		Bednights		Share	
	Dom	Int.	Dom	Int'l	Dom	Int	Dom	Int
2001	3171493	805177	79.8	20.2	17889015	6599952	73.0	27.0
2006	4734032	1043474	81.9	18.1	21876405	7190238	75.3	24.7
2010	4841190	1459188	76.8	23.2	22163597	9963618	69.0	31.0
2012	4270199	1658251	72.0	28.0	23014275	11000064	67.7	32.3

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Table 4: Secondary Cities: Growth of Tourism by Purpose, 2001-2012

	Leisure	%	Business	%	VFR	%	Other	%
2001	929 579	23.4	511 054	12.9	1910799	48.1	625 237	15.7
2006	940 669	16.3	577 962	10.0	3568464	61.8	690 411	11.9
2010	1248575	19.8	668 224	10.9	3735710	59.3	627 869	10.0
2012	1035505	17.5	690 095	11.6	3531737	59.6	671 112	11.3

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Tables 2, 3 and 4 provide a profile of tourism expansion in the group of secondary cities as a whole for the period 2001 to 2012. Several important trends are observed. Tables 2 and 3 show that between 2001 and 2012 there has been a net growth in indicators of numbers of tourism trips, bednights and estimated visitor spend. The net expansion of trips and bednights was respectively 1.9 million trips and 9.5 million bednights or 47.8 percent and 38.8 percent growth. It is observed that whilst the numbers of tourism trips to secondary city destinations peak in 2010, the year of South Africa's hosting of the FIFA World Cup, that bednights have continued to grow between 2010 and 2012. Over the period 2001-2012 little change occurs in the relative share of secondary cities in the national totals for trips or bednights. In 2012 South Africa's secondary cities record an estimated 17.2 percent of trips and 15.7 percent share of bednights. A significant observation from Table 2 is that the share of total tourism spend which is captured by secondary cities is consistently less than the respective share of trips. This points to particular structures of tourism in secondary cities with relatively low spend per trip as compared to the higher value of the kind of tourism trips occurring to metropolitan areas (see Rogerson and Rogerson, 2014).

Table 4 dissects the data concerning total numbers of trips and bednights in terms of source of visitors, whether domestic or international. The category 'international' includes both the lucrative market of long haul travellers to South Africa, mainly leisure tourists from Europe and the USA (and increasingly from Asia), as well as the market of regional African tourists, most of which are involved in cross-border shopping/trading and business tourism rather than leisure tourism (Rogerson & Visser, 2007). It is shown on Table 3 that as indexed both by trips and bednights that the relative importance of secondary cities for international tourists as opposed to domestic tourists seemingly is expanding in significance. This finding should be viewed, however, in relation to the contribution of secondary cities to national data for domestic and international trips. This reveals that between 2001 and 2012 the relative contribution of secondary cities to domestic tourist trips remained relatively stable from 16.4 percent (2001) to 16.5 percent (2012). By contrast, for international trips the relative contribution of secondary cities to national total trips falls from 21.1 percent in 2001 to 19.2 percent by 2012. These different directions in respect of domestic and international tourism trips warrant further detailed exploration.

Table 4 disaggregates the numbers of trips to secondary city destinations by purpose of travel. Four categories of tourism are analysed, namely leisure, business, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and other, which is mainly represented by religious travel and travel for health purposes. It is shown that in terms of absolute numbers of trips - in common with the national pattern of trips - the largest proportion of tourism to secondary city destinations is represented by VFR travel. It is observed that between 2001 and 2012 there is a net increase in VFR travel of 1.6 million trips and an expansion in the relative share of VFR travel in total trips to secondary city destinations from 48.1 to 59.6 percent. This significant flow of VFR travellers in part accounts for the relative low tourism spend per trip which was observed for tourism as a whole in secondary cities. The important categories of leisure and business travel, albeit recording a net growth between 2001 and 2012, are shown in relative terms to be of declining significance in secondary cities. This finding is of potential concern for the role of tourism as a base for economic diversification for secondary cities. In particular, secondary cities as a whole show a marked downturn between 2001 and 2012 in the relative share of leisure trips from 23.4 to 17.5 percent. The category 'other' shows a fluctuating contribution to total trips and for secondary cities mostly is accounted for by religious travel to the Polokwane area. In relative terms the share of other travel in secondary city destinations is much higher than the national pattern. By contrast for 2012 in terms of leisure, business or VFR travel the secondary cities as a whole are underrepresented as they record a share which is lower than the national share in terms of these purposes of tourism trip.

Table 5: Select Secondary Cities: Share of Trips by Purpose and Origin, 2012

Major Centre	Purpose	Purpose	Purpose	Purpose	Origin	Origin
	Leisure	Business	VFR	Other	Domestic	International
Stellenbosch	52.5	17.3	28.1	1.9	65.5	34.5
George	32.2	12.5	52.7	2.5	68.7	31.3

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Paarl	48.5	22.2	21.5	7.8	57.7	42.3	
Kimberley	21.2	20.3	54.9	3.7	75.8	24.2	
Upington	25.0	23.5	44.6	6.8	72.4	27.6	
Klerksdorp	6.4	9.5	73.1	10.8	79.5	20.5	
Potchefstroom	15.0	8.9	71.5	4.4	79.1	20.8	
Middelburg	17.6	11.7	61.5	9.1	70.8	29.2	
Nelspruit	29.6	12.3	53.5	4.5	62.0	38.0	
Witbank	7.9	19.0	57.4	15.6	74.4	25.6	
Polokwane	11.5	8.7	31.5	48.1	78.3	21.7	
Newcastle	2.8	4.8	84.4	8.0	94.5	5.5	
Krugersdorp	30.1	14.9	48.4	6.5	50.7	49.3	
Vereeniging	6.4	12.3	71.6	9.7	70.6	29.4	
Welkom	3.4	6.6	84.7	5.2	71.5	28.5	

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Finally, Table 5 provides a first attempt to reveal critical aspects of the tourism economies of a crosssection of fifteen of the group of secondary cities. A number of critical points can be observed. First, is that the destinations which are, in relative terms, most dependent on leisure are the Cape Winelands areas of Stellenbosch and Paarl, the second-home and golf tourism destination of George, Krugersdorp with its heritage tourism attraction of the Cradle of Humankind, and Nelspruit which is close to Kruger National Park. Correspondingly, the secondary cities with the most limited leisure tourism base are the industrial centres of Newcastle, Vereeniging and the declining mining centre of Welkom. Second, for business tourism the highest relative shares in local tourism trips are recorded in the provincial capitals of Kimberley and Upington, in Stellenbosch and Paarl - popular conference destinations in the Winelands - and at Witbank in Mpumalanga. Three, for VFR travel the largest shares are recorded in the mining centres of Welkom and Klerksdorp and in Newcastle, the source area of considerable flows of migrants to Gauteng's major metropolitan centres. Four, in respect of origin of travel it is evident that the highest relative share of international trips relate to the most significant leisure tourism destinations with Paarl, Stellenbosch, Krugersdorp, Nelspruit and George once again the most prominent. Overall, these findings underscore that considerable differentiation exists in the tourism economies of South Africa's secondary cities and correspondingly of the relative prospects for tourism as a local development driver.

Conclusions

A welcome revival of interest among urban scholars and spatial planners is taking place around the role of secondary cities. In the context of expanding rates of urbanisation the importance of secondary cities must be recognised. The management of the challenges of growth in secondary cities is under scrutiny in a number of international investigations (see Roberts, 2014). The South African Cities Network (2012, 2014) has been instrumental in redirecting the attention of South African scholars to the need for an enhanced evidenced-based understanding of the dynamics and role of the country's secondary cities. It has been argued that one of the most pressing challenges for these cities relates to often their economic over-reliance on one or two major economic sectors. In light of this challenge and of the national growth of the tourism sector for national economic development in South Africa as a whole the role of tourism in the country's secondary cities merits closer attention. This analysis opens up the conversational window about secondary cities in South Africa. It highlights the relative role played by secondary cities for South Africa's tourism economy and very importantly the different

trajectories of development of tourism across the country's secondary cities. In final analysis, a much expanded tourism scholarship is merited to explore further the dynamics and economic potential of tourism in South Africa's secondary cities.

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