

Outside the cities: Tourism pathways in South Africa's small towns and rural areas

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Abstract

In South Africa the major share of tourism and its benefits flows geographically to metropolitan areas and secondary cities. Across the international experience tourism is recognised as a critical sector for economic development in small towns and rural areas. In common with the international trends tourism is increasingly identified as a potential driver for small town economic diversification as well as for promoting rural development in South Africa. Against this policy backdrop the paper examines the nature of tourism development and flows which are occurring outside of South Africa's cities. An analysis of data extracted from the Global Insight tourism base provides a macro-view of tourism trends beyond that of South Africa's metropolitan areas and secondary cities. It is revealed that whereas tourism destinations outside the cities account for 43.5 percent of total tourism trips these areas capture only 31 percent of total tourism spending. Tourism flows outside the cities are strongly dominated by domestic rather than international travellers. In terms of purpose of travel, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) tourism is the most important; small towns and rural areas are destinations for 50 percent of all VFR travel in South Africa. The results of this analysis have implications for tourism-led planning for local development.

Keywords: small town tourism, rural tourism, domestic tourism, VFR travel, South Africa

Introduction

Among others Cornelissen (2005) reminds us that the structural features of a country's tourism sector, and in particular the spatial structure of tourism production and consumption, align closely to the nature and extent of the impact of tourism developments. Accordingly, interpreting the production and organisation of tourism spaces and understanding the changing tourism space economy has been a vital and consistent focus of scholarly interest particularly for the community of tourism geographers (Hall & Page, 2006, 2009; Lew, Hall & Williams, 2014).

In the case of South Africa questions surrounding the spatial distribution of tourism have been of compelling concern especially since the 1994 democratic transition and the accompanying rise of tourism as a developmental sector. Geographers have highlighted the highly uneven character of the tourism space economy and especially its polarization around the country's most prosperous provinces and major metropolitan centres (Rogerson, 2002a; Visser, 2007). Given the essential importance of nature tourism products as a driver for long haul international tourism as well as for domestic tourism (Spenceley & Goodwin, 2007; Rylance & Spenceley, 2013; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014a) it is striking that the major share of tourism and its benefits continues to channel geographically to South Africa's leading

urban centres (Rogerson & Visser, 2007; Rogerson, 2014a; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014b). Although national government has recognised this spatial imbalance in the tourism economy its policy interventions have produced as yet little essential change to the polarised character of tourism development impacts. Indeed, Visser (2003) and Visser and Hoogendoorn (2012) argue that the marketing initiatives of South African Tourism have perpetuated a tourism space economy that is highly uneven. Furthermore, notwithstanding government policy development for tourism to be a critical driver for development of South Africa's less prosperous regions, and more especially the country's economically marginal or distressed areas once again only limited results currently are in evidence (Department of Tourism, 2012; Rogerson, 2015). More promising are the appearance of a number of 'little victories' for enhancing place-based economic development which have been achieved both in certain cities as well as small towns and rural areas. Often these successful initiatives have been secured by mainly private sector driven tourism-led development initiatives (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Donaldson, 2007; Gibb & Nel, 2007; Donaldson & Marais, 2012; Butler & Rogerson, 2016).

The spatial focus of this investigation is squarely upon the tourism pathways taking place beyond South Africa's cities, both its metropolitan areas and second tier cities. Across the international experience tourism is recognised as a critical sector for economic development for small towns and rural areas. In common with these international trends tourism is increasingly identified in South Africa as a potential driver for small town economic diversification as well as for promoting rural development (Rogerson, 2014b). The objective in this paper is to map out the essential trends in tourism flows which are occurring outside the country's metropolitan areas and secondary cities; the role of such areas in the tourism space economy has been documented elsewhere (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014b; Rogerson, 2016). Here attention is centred on analysing the key facets of the contribution of small towns and rural areas to South Africa's tourism space economy. The discussion is situated against the backdrop of a brief sketch of international and local debates around the challenges of small town and rural development and more especially of debates concerning the role and potential for tourism-led pathways of development.

Context

Although the developmental challenges of cities continue to dominate the discourse of urban and local economic development researchers it must be recognised that the challenges of small towns and their surrounding rural hinterlands have garnered increased international attention. Globalisation impacts have triggered processes of economic restructuring with far reaching consequences in both developed and developing world contexts for both small towns and rural areas (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2000; Daniels, Keller, Lapping, Daniels & Segedy, 2007; Mayer & Knox, 2010). For at least the past 25 years the challenges of economic development and the making of post-productivist spaces have been the focus of vibrant debates in Europe, North America and Australasia. For example, research in Europe shows a great diversity of experiences and local responses as the effects of globalisation were imprinted on small towns and rural areas with a record of both successful new development trajectories in some areas as well as economic decline in others (Fertner, Groth, Herslund & Carstensen, 2015; Fitjar & Rodríguez-Pose, 2015).

The importance of innovation policies and for the implementation of local innovation policies is a recurring theme for ensuring successful local response, competitive economic revival and restructuring in relation to the challenges of globalisation in most developed countries (Shearmur & Bonnet, 2011; Ferrannini & Canzanelli, 2013; Lazzeroni, Bellini, Cortesi & Loffredo, 2013; Mei, Arcodia & Ruhanen, 2015; Parrilli, Dahl-Fitjar & Rodríguez-Pose, 2016).

Indeed, Feldman and Choi (2015) maintain that policies to promote innovation (and entrepreneurship) within geographically defined concentrations have become an increasingly significant development strategy particularly in North America and the European Union. For small towns Knox and Mayer (2009) argue the imperative for residents to collectively fashion innovative alternatives to the forces of neoliberal globalization that usually commodify and homogenize places. It is argued that small towns must seek to promote sustainability through networks, exchanges and local initiatives. These authors recommend the fostering of place-based economies and carving out unique niches by reclaiming their inherited identities and sense of place (Knox & Mayer, 2009). Good practice cases of small towns addressing economic restructuring challenges through adopting a sustainable development strategy emphasize flexibility and greater customisation of products. Among examples Meyer and Knox (2010) highlight the slow food movement, creativity using the intrinsic value of arts and culture and of “economic gardening”, which is defined as an economic development strategy that focuses on expanding the economy from the inside-out through the support of entrepreneurs and small businesses.

In the global South some parallels exist with debates ongoing in developed countries about the vital role of innovation and creativity for small town and rural economic restructuring. This said, the debates in the context of the global South are centred particularly upon the need to move beyond the costly failures of growth centre or growth pole policies and instead foreground the imperative for livelihood diversification and the growth of non-farm employment (Tacoli, 1998; Satterthwaite & Tacoli, 2003; Tacoli, 2004). Within this viewpoint the connecting role of small towns is critical as they are “seen as playing a key role in linking their rural hinterlands with both domestic and international markets as well as in providing the rural population with non-farm employment opportunities and thus broadening the local economy’s base” (Tacoli, 1998: 153). In a useful review Tacoli (2004: 21) stresses that in the context of liberalisation and globalisation “recent thinking emphasises the importance instead of increasing the level of diversification” of local economies. Special roles are attached to the need for local governance that is accountable and to the potential for local governments to identify local needs, priorities and opportunities and provide adequate responses to them thereby unleashing the energy for unique place-based economic development programming (Satterthwaite & Tacoli, 2003: Tacoli, 2004). The promotion of small towns and leveraging their role for local development in surrounding rural areas is considered in certain African countries (most notably Ghana) as a vehicle for successful poverty reduction and the achievement of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Owusu, 2005, 2008).

In terms of contemporary debates surrounding innovation, economic restructuring and creativity in the global North as well as about livelihood diversification and non-farm employment in the global South the role and potential for tourism development is one common thread. Lane and Kastenholz (2015) assert that rural tourism has existed as an alternative tourism form in the developed world as far back as the 1970s and since then has attracted mounting attention from policy makers concerned with both conservation and more especially with rural regeneration. Among others, rural tourism and agritourism are discrete sectors of the tourism industry which increasingly have been promoted for economic revival of declining localities and rural regions (Lane, 1994; Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014c). In many rural areas and small towns of developed countries tourism is regarded as an essential tool or vehicle for building competitive local development (Seaton, 1996; Butler *et al.*, 1997; Runyan, 2006; Hall, 2007). More especially, in marginalized, peripheral or rural areas tourism is viewed as a vital driver for local economic growth, employment and welfare improvement (Müller & Jansson, 2007; Brouder, 2012a) and as one way by which marginal regions and localities potentially can overcome stagnation or decline

and instead prosper anew as 'post-productive' places (Davis & Morais, 2004; Hall, Hultman & Gossling, 2011; Brouder, 2012b). In Poland innovation and creativity has spawned the concept of theme villages for generating new rural tourism experiences (Idziak, Majewski & Zmyslony, 2015). Innovative niche products linked to local foods, cuisine and beverages are at the heart of new approaches towards rural and small town tourism (Sidali, Kastenholz & Bianchi, 2015). Across Europe, however, Brouder (2013) forwards that tourism sector promotion is deemed often as a last resort for many rural communities, small towns and peripheral areas which have few other resources to exploit than marketing the only thing they have of appeal to people in prosperous regions, namely the expanse that surrounds them ie. the "wilderness" or "rural idyll" experience.

In several parts of the global South tourism is considered a new anchor for economic diversification, small town regeneration and rural revival (Hoefle, 2016; Rainer, 2016). In addition, much policy focus attaches also to the pro-poor credentials of tourism thus giving it a heightened role in poverty alleviation strategies (Saarinen & Rogerson, 2014). As occurs in the global North small town and rural tourism policy initiatives are (re)positioned as essential boosters for energising peripheral or marginal localities and areas (Nair, Munikrishnan, Rajaratnam & King, 2015). This situation certainly is common in the case of South Africa where the loss or contraction of the economic mainstay of many communities has prompted a turn to tourism as a potential key local driver (Nel & Rogerson, 2007). A recent overview of local economic development strategies across all the country's municipal authorities revealed that tourism was the most popular sector for promotion (Nel & Rogerson, 2016). For South Africa as a whole a remarkable 87 % of local authorities were targeting tourism as a potential economic engine of local development and in the country's distressed areas, which include a large proportion of mainly small town and rural municipalities, it was disclosed that 85.7 percent were seeking to promote tourism as an element of local development (Rogerson & Nel, 2016). This finding lends credence to the importance of expanding the research base concerning issues of tourism development trajectories outside of South Africa's metropolitan areas and secondary cities.

Outside the cities: existing studies on tourism in South Africa's small towns and rural areas

Hoogendoorn and Visser (2016) argue that in South Africa the corpus of small town scholarship remains limited as a whole and correspondingly that major investigatory gaps relate to the surrounding rural spaces. Overall, the existing body of research is viewed as region-specific or place specific with a narrow geographic focus which is "often located in the empirical realities of the Free State province and parts of the Karoo region which straddles the Eastern, Northern and Western Cape" with a secondary focus on the small towns and rural areas of Western Cape (Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2016: 97). Neglected spaces for research are small town and rural areas of Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and North West provinces and most especially the towns and rural spaces of the former apartheid Homelands.

In common with the international record on the role of tourism in marginal areas it is observed that across small town and rural areas of South Africa "a tourism-driven approach is seen as one of the few opportunities to tap into underutilised or unused local assets and to draw in external expenditure given the exhaustion of traditional economic mainstays in many areas" (Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2016: 99). With questions concerning economic regeneration and local economic development being amongst the most common topics for small towns research a number of investigations have been produced on aspects of the policies, practices and challenges for tourism-led local development (Visser & Hoogendoorn, 2011).

Since the early 2000s questions around destination development and the implementation of tourism-led initiatives for place-based development have been under scrutiny in a number of small town and rural case studies with popular sub-themes being those of festival promotion, SMME development and route tourism initiatives (Nowers, de Villiers & Myburgh, 2002; Rogerson, 2002b, 2002c; Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Marais, 2004; Van Staden & Marais, 2005; Donaldson, 2007; Ferreira, 2007; Donaldson, 2009; Halseth & Meikeljohn, 2009; Booyens & Visser, 2010; Donaldson & Marais, 2012; Ramukumba, 2012; Sitinga & Ogra, 2014; Rogerson & Collins, 2015; Rogerson & Harmer, 2015; Butler & Rogerson, 2016; Grobler & Nicolaides, 2016; Irvine, Kepe, de Wet & Hamunime, 2016). A second vibrant thread in tourism research outside the cities is examination of the local impacts or development opportunities which are associated with the expansion of a host of niche forms of tourism including adventure, agritourism, astro-tourism, avitourism, beverages tourism, book tourism, cultural tourism, fishing tourism, heritage tourism, wedding tourism, youth tourism and, of course, an array of different issues about nature-based tourism (see Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2004; Spenceley & Goodwin, 2007; Rogerson, 2007; Nzama, 2008; Hoogendoorn *et al.*, 2009; Magi & Nzama, 2009; Du Preez & Lee, 2010; Govender & Rogerson, 2010; Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2010; Ingle, 2010; Nzama, 2010; Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2011a, 2011b; Donaldson & Marais, 2012; Rylance & Spenceley, 2013; Hoogendoorn, 2014; McKay, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014a, 2014c; Van der Merwe, 2014; McKay, 2015; Ivanovic, 2015; Rogerson & Collins, 2015; Rogerson & Harmer, 2015; Rogerson & Wolfaardt, 2015). A third group of investigations span a diverse range of themes which include the making of the accommodation landscape (Rogerson, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c), conflicts between tourism and other sectors such as mining (Leonard, 2016), environmental issues and sustainability (McKay, 2013; Hoogendoorn, Grant & Fitchett, 2016) and, of the critical role of visiting, friends and relatives (VFR) tourism within the neglected rural spaces of the former Homelands areas (Hoogendoorn, 2011; Rogerson, 2014c; Rogerson & Hoogendoorn, 2014).

Of this body of emerging works on tourism in small towns and rural areas of South Africa the important point is observed by Hoogendoorn and Visser (2016) that most investigations are framed as single case studies. In terms of knowledge production, therefore, one missing issue is that of the overall directions and flows of tourism into the small towns and rural spaces of South Africa. The position of these areas within the tourism space economy of South Africa is interrogated in the next section of analysis.

The role of small towns and rural spaces in South Africa’s space economy of tourism

In terms of sources the analysis draws upon the 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 and origins of trip; bed nights by origin of tourist (domestic or international); and calculation of tourism spend. In this section data on these issues is analysed for the period 2001-2012 across South Africa’s small towns and rural areas which are defined collectively as those municipalities which are not classified as metropolitan areas (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014b) or as part of the group of secondary cities (Rogerson, 2016).

Table 1: Small towns and rural areas: definitional scope

Province	Definition
Western Cape	All LMs except Cape Town metro, Stellenbosch, George and Drakenstein
Northern Cape	All LMs except Sol Plaatje and //Khara Hais
North West	All LMs except City of Matlosana, Madibeng, Mafikeng, Rustenburg and Tlokwe
Mpumalanga	All LMs except Steve Tshwete, Mbombela, Govan Mbeki, Emalahleni

Limpopo	All LMs except Polokwane and Lephalale
KwaZulu-Natal	All LMs except eThekweni metro, Msunduzi, Newcastle and Umhlatuze
Eastern Cape	All LMs except Nelson Mandela Bay and Buffalo City metros
Gauteng	Only LMs are Randfontein, Westonaria, Midvaal and Merafong City.
Free State	All LMs except Mangaung metro and Matjhabeng

South Africa has 278 local municipalities (LMs), the vast majority of which fall into the category of small towns and rural areas. Table 1 indicates the definition of the category small town and rural areas. As is evident the scope of small towns and rural areas includes virtually all of Northern Cape and Limpopo province as well as the majority of local municipalities in all other provinces. The only exception is Gauteng, South Africa's urban economic heartland, where the majority of local municipalities are either metropolitan areas (Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni) or secondary cities (Mogale City, Emfuleni).

Table 2: The tourism space economy: the position of small towns and rural areas

	2001		2006		2010		2012	
	Trips	%	Trips	%	Trips	%	Trips	%
Metropolitan Areas	9018345	39.0	11825467	35.6	14026046	37.5	13586902	39.3
Secondary Cities	3976670	17.2	5777507	17.4	6300378	16.9	5928450	17.2
Small towns and rural areas	10152687	43.8	15633302	47.0	17046467	45.6	15030548	43.5
South Africa	23147702	100	33236276	100	37372891	100	34545900	100

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Table 2 provides a first basis for understanding the role of small towns and rural areas in the tourism space economy of South Africa. It discloses that in terms of tourism trips that small towns and rural areas are significant destinations as they account for 15 million trips in 2012 which represents an increase of approximately 50 percent from the 2001 baseline of 10.1 million trips. In terms of the tourism space economy small towns and rural areas are destinations for as much as 43 percent of tourism trips. Across the study period it is observed that the peak of tourism trips to small towns and rural areas occurs in 2010 with a decline recorded during the period 2010-12 which reflects the national economic downturn and slowdown in the tourism economy as a whole after the hosting of the FIFA World Cup.

Table 3: Small towns and rural areas: growth of tourism 2001-2012

	Total tourism trips	% National total	Total bednights	% National total	Estimated total tourism spend (R'000s)	% National total
2001	10 152 687	43.8	85 448 646	43.0	19 587 471	30.6
2006	15 633 302	47.0	84 365 305	44.5	39 197 304	32.9
2010	17 046 467	45.6	94 113 594	43.6	56 031 278	32.3
2012	15 030 548	43.5	91 864 775	42.4	51 284 685	31.0

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Table 4: Small towns and rural areas: growth and share of tourism by source, 2001-2012

	No of trips (mill)		Share		RSA %	
	Domestic	International	Domestic	Int'l	Dom	International
2001	9.01	1.14	88.8	11.2	83.6	16.4
2006	13.88	1.75	88.8	11.2	83.4	16.6
2010	14.73	2.32	86.4	13.6	79.9	20.1
2012	12.20	2.83	81.2	18.8	75.0	25.0

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Tables 3 and 4 provide further insight into the nature of tourism pathways in small towns and rural areas. Table 3 shows a comparison of small towns and rural areas in terms of not only tourism trips but estimated total bednights and total tourism spend. In absolute terms the data on Table 3 reveals an expansion in both total bednights and total spend. Nevertheless, the most critical finding relates to the capture of tourism spend data which discloses that small towns and rural areas account for less than one-third of total tourism spend as compared to the 43 percent share of tourism trips. This result signposts the existence of particular structures and distinctive forms of tourism outside the cities with the preponderance of relatively low spend per trip as compared to the higher value of tourism trips which occur in urban tourism destinations (see Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014a). Table 4 differentiates the numbers of trips in terms of origin of travel, whether domestic or international. The findings reveal the growth of numbers in both domestic and international (including regional African) travellers with a net expansion between 2001 and 2012 of 3.19 million domestic trips and 1.69 million international trips. In relative terms the analysis reveals the overwhelming importance of domestic tourism for small towns and rural areas with domestic trips accounting for close to 90 percent of trips in 2001 and 81 percent for 2012. The growth in the relative share of international as opposed to domestic trips in small town and rural area destinations aligns with the national pattern for 2001-2012 which also discloses an increased significance of international as opposed to domestic trips. Overall, what is most significant to observe is that a comparison of the share of domestic and international trips in small towns/rural areas as compared to the national pattern shows the over-representation of domestic trips and under-representation of international trips. This demonstrates that domestic tourism is of critical importance for tourism in small town and rural area destinations.

Table 5: Small towns and rural areas: growth of tourism by purpose, 2001-2012

	Leisure	%	Business	%	VFR	%	Other	%
2001	1819982	17.9	707526	7.0	6681631	65.8	944200	9.3
2006	2119922	13.6	913289	5.8	11546601	73.8	1063065	6.8
2010	2864888	16.8	1042195	6.1	11964486	70.2	1176206	6.9
2012	2443652	16.3	977441	6.5	10527554	70.0	1082199	7.2

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

Table 5 differentiates the data concerning total numbers of trips to destinations in small towns and rural areas by purpose of travel. The standard four categories of tourism are analysed. These are leisure, business, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and other, which is mainly accounted for by religious travel and travel for health purposes. In terms of absolute numbers of trips – in common with the national pattern of trips – it is evident that the largest proportion of tourism to small towns and rural areas of South Africa is accounted for by VFR travel. Further, it is shown that between 2001 and 2012 there is a net increase in VFR travel of 3.85 million trips and an expansion in the relative share of VFR travel in total trips to small town and rural area destinations from 65.8 to 70.0 percent. It is calculated that small towns and rural areas of South Africa are the destinations for 50 percent of VFR travel. This high proportion of VFR travellers is the major factor which explains the low tourism

spend per trip observed for tourism as a whole in small towns and rural areas. The significant volume of VFR trips is the result of the persistence of circular migration. Lohnert and Steinbrink (2005) explain the continuation of oscillatory movements after the removal of apartheid travel restrictions on black (African) communities. It is argued that its persistence must be understood in relation to individuals' and households' agency because after the close of apartheid "the informal organisation of translocal livelihoods replaced the state-enforced migrant labour system" (Steinbrink, 2010: 40). The concept of the multi-locational or translocal household linked to the articulation of translocal livelihoods in South Africa therefore explains the continued strength of oscillating circulatory flows and correspondingly of VFR travel to destinations in South Africa's small towns and rural areas (Rogerson & Hoogendoorn, 2015).

Beyond the importance of VFR travel to small towns and rural areas a number of other points emerge from Table 5. First, is that the critical categories of leisure and business travel, albeit recording a net growth between 2001 and 2012, are demonstrated in relative terms to be of declining significance for destinations in small towns and rural South Africa. These results are of policy concern in a context that the majority of local governments are seeking to promote (especially) leisure tourism as an economic driver for local economic development. Indeed, the relative advance in the share of VFR travel in total trips is paralleled by a relative decline in the numbers of leisure and business trips as well as the category of other trips to small towns and rural areas. Undoubtedly, this signals the need for further research on small towns and rural areas as VFR travel destinations and of potential opportunities for leveraging greater local spend from VFR trips in these destinations.

Table 6: Select small town and rural area local municipalities: share of trips by purpose and origin, 2012

Local municipality	Purpose				Origin	
	Leisure	Business	VFR	Other	Domestic	International
Overstrand	66.0	19.6	13.0	1.3	59.3	40.7
Bitou	74.3	16.9	8.3	0.5	52.4	47.6
Beaufort West	41.5	17.3	38.0	3.2	68.2	31.8
Camdeboo	42.9	10.6	42.5	4.0	84.5	15.5
Emakhazeni	47.9	10.7	33.5	7.9	61.5	38.5
Greater Giyani	2.9	3.3	83.2	10.6	94.6	5.4
Musina	13.6	5.2	80.9	0.3	58.8	41.2
Port St Johns	12.2	2.2	76.3	9.1	92.8	7.2
Richmond	1.5	1.6	91.5	5.4	94.8	5.2
Umzimkhulu	0.5	0.5	97.8	1.2	96.8	3.2

Source: Author calculations from Global Insight data

The category small towns and rural areas is far from homogenous and contains a broad spectrum of different local municipalities which exhibit different tourism pathways and possibilities. Several observers of small town South Africa, most recently Hoogendoorn and Viiser (2016), argue that the sharpest distinctions can be drawn in terms of development strategies between two different areas. On the one hand are those small towns and rural areas which are located in the former apartheid Homelands. On the other hand are those more prosperous small towns and rural areas which formerly were constituted as part of so-called space of former 'White' South Africa. These areas have starkly different legacies and their tourism trajectories still reflect the apartheid imprint. Table 6 offers an attempt to begin unravelling the different tourism pathways of these areas. It presents a breakdown of patterns of tourism trips by purpose for ten selected local municipalities, five of which are situated (mostly) in the former White South Africa and the other five are situated exclusively in former Homelands. The five selected local municipalities which represent the first sub-

category are Overstrand (Hermanus), Bitou (Plettenberg Bay), Camdeboo (Graaff Reinet), Beaufort West and Emakhazeni (Dullstroom). The five local municipalities in former Homelands are Greater Giyani and Musina in Limpopo, Port St Johns in Eastern Cape, and Richmond and Umzimkhulu in KwaZulu-Natal.

It is evident from Table 6 that major differences exist in the tourism pathways of these two sets of local municipalities. First, the local municipalities in the areas of former White South Africa exhibit much higher proportions of both leisure and business travel than those in the former Homelands. In the case of the Western Cape coastal areas of Overstrand and Plettenberg Bay leisure tourism is as high as two-thirds of all tourism trips. Second, these areas exhibit relative low shares of VFR travel as compared to the national share. Three, tourism trips recorded for the local municipalities in the former Homelands are massively dominated by VFR travel with correspondingly lower shares of leisure travel and minimal business travel. In many small towns and rural areas of the former Homelands the proportion of tourism trips accounted for by VFR travel is 90 percent or more. Four, a general pattern emerges that international travel is of much greater significance in destinations in the former White space as compared to those in the former Homelands. For example in Overstrand and Bitou over 40 percent of trips originate with international as opposed to domestic travel. By contrast domestic travel overwhelmingly dominates small towns and rural areas of the former Homelands. The only exceptions are those areas close to international borders with Musina illustrating a higher proportion of international travel – in this case of regional cross-border visitors. These detailed findings concerning origin and purpose of travel carry important policy implications for local tourism planning across the small towns and rural areas of South Africa.

Conclusion

Unravelling the shifting trajectory of the tourism space economy remains a major scholarly challenge. This paper offers a modest contribution to understanding the changing mosaic of South Africa's tourism space economy. As a whole it shows that tourism flows outside South Africa's cities are strongly dominated by domestic rather than international travellers and that the core purpose of travel for most small towns and rural areas is VFR tourism. This said, beyond the general picture critical local differences must be acknowledged. The most important differentiation is shown as between small towns and rural areas which under apartheid were part of the space of White South Africa as opposed to the demarcated racialized space of the former Homelands. This macro-perspective on the role of small towns and rural areas as tourism destinations opens up the research agenda for comparative locality-based studies to flesh out further and explain the local differences across the tourism space economy. In addition, the findings of this analysis can serve also to inform local tourism planning as they highlight the particular need for policy innovation in respect of maximising the opportunities from the critical mass of domestic VFR travellers in much of small town and rural South Africa.

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