A Decade of Progress in African Urban Tourism Scholarship

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Abstract This article introduces a theme issue of *Urban Forum* on the topic of urban tourism in Africa. A context is provided for the issue by an overview of key themes which have been represented in a decade of African urban tourism research. Although most extant research is on urban South Africa, there is an emerging literature on other African cities. The major themes of research have surrounded tourism and urban economic restructuring with the establishment of new products for leisure tourism; slum tourism and pro-poor tourism; the role of the accommodation sector; African cities as non-leisure destinations; and, informal sector tourism. It is argued that within the evolving international scholarship on urban tourism, aspects of African urban tourism research exhibit distinctive features and offer challenges to Northern conceptions of urban tourism and urban tourists.

Keywords Urban tourism · Africa · South Africa

Introduction

A decade ago, *Urban Forum* published a special issue on the theme of tourism in Urban Africa. The collection of papers that appeared in that particular issue, mainly focused on South Africa, greatly extended the scope of the pioneer investigations of African urban tourism which had been published during the early 2000s (Shackley 2001; Rogerson 2002a, b, 2003; Visser 2002, 2003a, b). It can be argued that the 2005 Urban Forum collection was influential as it not only provided the foundation for a subsequent edited book on urban tourism in Africa (Rogerson and Visser 2007) but also seemingly acted as catalyst for what has been a burst of investigations around urban tourism in subsequent years particularly among tourism geographers (Rogerson and Visser 2011a, b; Visser and Hoogendoorn 2011).

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This article introduces a second theme issue of *Urban Forum* on the topic of urban tourism in Africa which appears now almost a decade after the first collection. The task of this introduction is modest, namely to offer a context for this theme issue and provide an overview of key issues which have been investigated in the last decade (2004–2014) of African urban tourism research. Recent international overviews of urban tourism research, such as by Ashworth and Page (2011) or Selby (2012), are centred on Northern cities. This bias confirms a need for continued reflection from the global South on the terrain of urban tourism research (Rogerson and Visser 2007, 2011a). Overall, this analysis is informed by the viewpoint that "a review of past research efforts is an important endeavour in all academic research areas" (Nunkoo et al. 2013: 5). Among its benefits can be that of signposting topics where additional research is required as well as potentially to facilitate theoretical advances.

Key Research Foci in African Urban Tourism Research

A search for relevant scholarship on African urban tourism was undertaken for the period 2004–2014 using the contents of leading serials of tourism and hospitality research as well as other significant outlets for African tourism research. The move beyond the mainstream of tourism and hospitality journals was driven by observations that much tourism research about Africa appears outside internationally ranked tourism serials and instead is showcased in journals of urban studies, human geography, development studies and African studies (Rogerson and Rogerson 2011, 2013; Yankholmes 2014).

The results of the search disclosed over 100 published articles as well as a number of book chapters and monographs which directly address central issues in African urban tourism. Geographically, the majority of this literature is concentrated on South Africa where tourism has emerged as a leading topic for urban researchers during recent years (Rogerson and Visser 2005; Visser and Hoogendoorn 2011; Visser 2013; Visser and Rogerson 2014). Nevertheless, there is an identified welcome growth of a stream of relevant studies concerning different aspects of urban tourism across several other African countries including Botswana (Mbaiwa et al. 2007), Egypt (Fawzy 2010; Azmy and Atef 2011), Ethiopia (Mitchell and Coles 2009), Ghana (Coles and Mitchell 2009; Adam 2012, 2013; Adam and Amuquandoh 2013; Adam and Mensah 2013), Kenya (Sarmento 2010; Spenceley 2010; Magio 2012; Chege and Mwisukha 2013; Kieti and Magio 2013; Chege and Wewere 2014), Lesotho (Rogerson and Letsie 2013), Morocco (Lee 2008), Mozambique (Vignati and Laumans 2010) and Namibia (Buning and Grunau 2014). In terms of thematic focus a number of clusters of issues can be isolated, albeit it must be acknowledged these are not discrete. Five clusters are discussed relating inter alia, to (1) tourism and urban economic restructuring associated with the establishment of new products for leisure tourism; (2) the role of the accommodation sector; (3) slum tourism as a distinctive form of pro-poor tourism; (4) African cities as non-leisure destinations and (5) informal sector tourism. Relevant contributions in each of these clusters of work are highlighted below.

The role of urban tourism in economic restructuring has been a core focus in the last decade of urban tourism scholarship in Africa. This particular thread of scholarly research mirrors the global North where tourism "has become an essential tool for

economic regeneration and employment creation, for place promotion, for re-imaging cities and helping to create identity in the new global system" (Williams 2009: 208). Specifically, this issue is strongly represented in South Africa where all local governments have a developmental mandate to spur place-based development initiatives (Nel and Rogerson 2005; Rogerson 2014a). From metropolitan level to small towns, local governments have sought to galvanize the private sector to foster economic growth, employment creation and small business development through tourism promotion. All the country's major cities are involved in active initiatives for job creation, economic promotion and a search for inclusive pro-poor forms of development interventions incorporating the driver of tourism (Rogerson 2002a, b, 2008a, 2013). This linkage of tourism to local economic development (LED) is, in part, a parallel with Northern cities where tourism is viewed often as "economic panacea especially in light of the decline of traditional economic sectors" (Ioannides and Timothy 2010: 149). The challenges of building urban tourism destinations for image enhancement, employment creation, economic growth and the physical regeneration of declining areas are investigated across South Africa's leading cities (Rogerson 2002b; Rogerson and Kaplan 2005; Ferreira and Visser 2007: Rogerson and Visser 2007; Ferreira 2011; Rogerson and Visser 2011b; Rogerson 2013; Ferreira and de Villiers 2014). Divergent trajectories of urban tourism development are disclosed in the experience of urban South Africa (Rogerson and Rogerson 2014).

Reflecting the broader phenomenon of cultural commodification, the prime focus of tourism development in South Africa has been the production of experiences for leisure consumption. Waterfront developments, the hosting of festivals and sports events, the building of casinos, new shopping and leisure complexes and the creation of heritage products have been at the forefront of new urban tourism boosterism. In addition, several niche forms of tourism have been cultivated including supporting youth tourism, gay tourism, creative tourism, cultural tourism and even urban adventure tourism (Visser 2003a, b; Rogerson 2006; Rogerson and Visser 2006, 2007, 2011b; Van der Merwe 2013; McKay 2013). Outside the major cities, different forms of tourism have taken centre-stage such as adventure, agritourism, avitourism, fishing, food and wine tourism, golf, and especially second homes tourism. The packaging of tourism products into themed routes is another critical aspect of tourism-led expansion (Nowers et al. 2002; Lourens 2007; Rogerson 2007; Stoddart and Rogerson 2009). Over the past decade, the tourism LED challenges of South Africa's secondary centres (Ramukumba 2012; Ramukumba et al. 2012; Van der Merwe and Rogerson 2013) and especially of its small towns have been dissected (Rogerson 2002a; Marais 2004; Donaldson 2007; Gibb and Nel 2007; Nel and Rogerson 2007; Donaldson 2009; Booyens and Visser 2010; Donaldson and Marais 2012; Hoogendoorn 2014). Unpacking the local economic impacts of second home tourism has been a special focus in South African research (Hoogendoorn and Visser 2004, 2010a, b, 2011; Hoogendoorn et al. 2005, 2009; Pienaar and Visser 2009; Hoogendoorn 2011).

The establishment and growth of a vibrant commercial accommodation sector is both a consequence of the growth of urban tourism and prerequisite for further expansion. Indeed, the success of cities as tourism destinations can be correlated with the evolution of a diverse set of accommodation offerings (Jansen-Verbeke 1986; Law 1993). Over the past decade, the accommodation sector has been a vibrant focus for research both in South Africa and other parts of the continent. Greatest attention has been accorded to an enhanced understanding of the hotel industry particularly in urban

areas of South Africa. Issues of concern have related to inter alia, hotels as a property asset class (Rogerson, J 2012a), the segmentation and appearance of different forms of hotel (Rogerson, J 2010, 2011a, b, 2013a), liquor and the changing character of hotels (Rogerson, C 2011a), the greening of hotels and responsible tourism practices (Frey and George 2012; Rogerson and Sims 2012), food sourcing patterns (Pillay and Rogerson 2013) and shifting geographies both at the inter-urban and intra-urban scales of investigation (Rogerson, J 2012b, 2013b, c, d, e, 2014a, b; Ferreira and Boshoff 2014). Further work has appeared variously on *riads* as an element in urban regeneration (Lee 2008), the role of government in urban hotel development (Azmy and Atef 2011), consumers' urban hotel choice behaviour (Fawzy 2010), the mushrooming of new hotel investment across Africa (Rogerson, J 2014c) and on hotel location decision-making in urban Ghana (Adam 2012, 2013; Adam and Amuquandoh 2013; Adam and Mensah 2013). Outside of the hotel sector, other forms of accommodation have been given scholarly attention. For example, research has appeared on backpacker hostels, bed and breakfasts, guest houses, second homes, and timeshare forms of accommodation (Visser and Van Huyssteen 1997, 1999; Visser 2003b; Hoogendoorn and Visser 2004, 2010a, b, 2011; Rogerson 2004a, b; Hoogendoorn et al. 2005; Pienaar and Visser 2009; Pandy and Rogerson 2013a, b, c, 2014; Rogerson, J 2013f).

One highly distinctive leisure focus for urban tourism research not only in South Africa but also increasingly in other African urban destinations concerns what Rolfes (2010), Steinbrink (2012) and Frenzel (2013) style as a 'new niche' in international tourism, namely slum tourism. The essence of slum tourism is "organized tours to deprived areas" (Frenzel 2012: 49). Its defining characteristic "is the touristic valorization of poverty-stricken urban areas of the metropolises in so-called developing or emerging nations which are visited primarily by tourists from the Global North" (Steinbrink et al. 2012: 1). The niche of 'southern slumming' is anchored upon the guided 'poverty' or 'slum tour' which became popular during the 1990s both in urban Brazil and post-apartheid South Africa. Over the past two decades, there is witnessed a geographical diffusion of slum tourism and its establishment in several other urban African destinations including Kenya, Egypt and Namibia. Rolfes et al. (2009: 11) assert that "guided tours into the slums are slowly becoming a standard in the city tourism of the 'developing countries' or 'emerging nations'.

Research on slum tourism in Africa has burgeoned over the past decade becoming now what Burgold et al. (2013: 101) view as "an established field". Although the earliest academic forays in slum tourism were studies of the development and workings of township tourism in South Africa, there now exists a range of African destinations where slum tourism has been examined. Controversy surrounds these poverty tours. For example, Magio (2012) questions whether slum tourism is philanthropic travel or the organised exploitation of poverty. Township tourism in South Africa is seen as akin to social bungee jumping as "the bourgeois thrill seeker – driven by a certain appetite of fear – wants to directly experience a social divide in order to sensually fathom the height of a social fall – but without running a real danger of a hard landing" (Rolfes et al. 2009: 37). A more positive perspective is forwarded by other African slum tourism scholars who point to its educational value raising people's social awareness of poverty as well as opening opportunities for local small business development and empowerment (Rolfes 2010; Burgold and Rolfes 2013; Kieti and Magio 2013). Considerable research attention centres on pragmatic issues of whether this form of

tourism exerts pro-poor impacts and thus contributes to improve the poverty condition in destination slum areas (Rogerson 2008b; Booyens 2010; Koens 2012; Frenzel 2013). Questions of empowerment, entrepreneurship and small enterprise development, of residents' perceptions of slum tourists, safety and security, as well as representation and authenticity in the narratives and practices of slum tour operators and the potential impacts of slum tours for re-imaging slum areas also have come under critical scrutiny in urban African research (Rogerson 2004a, b; Nemasetoni and Rogerson 2005; Frenzel et al. 2012; Koens 2012; Magio 2012; Chege and Mwisukha 2013; Frenzel 2013; Kieti and Magio 2013).

A fourth cluster of urban tourism research concerns studies which go beyond merely the lens of leisure consumption. In many destinations in Africa, it must be acknowledged that urban tourism is growing largely because of non-leisure forms of tourism. With the economic resurgence of Africa's cities, as observed by Turok (2013), business tourism emerges as a key driver for urban tourism. Coles and Mitchell (2009: 3) assert that Africa is "the only continent where the number of business tourists consistently exceeds leisure tourists"; its most economically vibrant cities are the major foci for business tourists. The recent burst of business tourism across Africa is evidenced by the expansion of intra-African or regional tourism, the construction of dedicated conference and exhibition facilities, and a building boom of upmarket hotels in order to fuel its growth. Business tourism is critical in the landscape of cities such as Accra, Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. The vital significance of business tourism in these and other African cities has been documented in a small group of investigations (Rogerson, C 2005, 2011b, 2014a, b; Rogerson and Lisa 2005; Mbaiwa et al. 2007; Coles and Mitchell 2009; Mitchell and Coles 2009; Spenceley 2010; Donaldson 2013; Rogerson, J 2014c).

Given its critical importance for tourism development in Africa as a whole and for urban tourism in particular, the phenomenon of business tourism remains a major investigatory gap within contemporary African urban tourism scholarship. Besides business tourism, the potential contribution of health tourism and of VFR tourism also cannot be overlooked. The important recent work of Crush and Chikanda (2014) highlights the significance of a South-South movement to urban centres in South Africa by groups of African health tourists seeking basic procedures or medical care that is not offered in their own countries. It is made clear that 80 % of total medical tourist flows to South Africa are made up of formal and informal movements from neighboring countries where public health systems "are in a state of crisis, under-resourced, understaffed and overburdened" (Crush et al. 2012: 2). Other research shows that, as measured by absolute numbers of tourism trips, the largest volume of tourism for metropolitan destinations in South Africa is represented by VFR travel and that between 2001 and 2012, the largest absolute growth of trips to urban destinations is for purposes of VFR tourism (Rogerson and Rogerson 2014).

The final cluster of urban tourism research on Africa concerns the existence of informal sector tourism. This research foci in African urban tourism is also one of the most neglected which is partly a reflection of Northern conceptions of what constitutes a 'tourist'. As Gladstone (2005: 130) argues, the largest share of tourism scholarship concerning the global South "deals with the international formal sector of five star hotels, upscale restaurants, and similar tourist facilities demanded by pleasure and business travelers from the First World". In an important contribution Gladstone (2005: 7) pleads for alternative formulations of tourism and an acknowledgement that

"most (Northern) tourist typologies deal only with tourists from Western industrial societies, they are hard to apply in China, India, Iran, Mexico and other Third World countries where many travellers are pilgrims or temporary migrants and do not have the same motivations for travel as tourists from the United States, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan". Only recently has there been recognition in tourism scholarship that much (if perhaps even the majority) of travel and tourism in the global South is of an informal sector character. The existence of a substantial informal sector of tourism encompasses mobilities for the purposes of leisure, business, VFR and religious pilgrimage (Cohen and Cohen 2014). The agenda of urban informal sector tourism research in Africa so far has barely been scratched. The only available investigations relate to the activities of informal sector shopper traders in Southern Africa. The international and domestic manifestations of informal sector business tourism and pro-poor impacts are highlighted by investigations relating to Southern Africa (Rogerson and Letsie 2013; Rogerson 2014b, c, d).

Towards a New Decade of Research

It is against this backdrop of the existence of a growing, if uneven, corpus of urban tourism research in Africa that this theme issue of Urban Forum was prepared. The issue offers a set of new and original contributions on urban tourism in Africa. Among the issues under scrutiny in this collection are *inter alia*, the application of new technologies by tourism enterprises, the environmental impacts of tourism accommodation, revisiting township tourism, new inner-city frontiers in slum tourism, volunteer tourism in cities, authenticity in heritage tourism attractions and neighborhood change linked to urban tourism consumption. In addition, the new challenges posed for urban tourism research by scholarship in evolutionary economic geography are profiled. Different perspectives and methodological approaches are reflected across the collection of papers. Taken together, the articles in this theme issue raise new agendas for contemporary urban tourism research in Africa and for furthering a distinctive urban tourism scholarship of the global South.

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