

**IDENTIFICATION OF POLITICO-GEOGRAPHIC PROBLEMS INVOLVED
IN ESTABLISHING ECOTOURISM IN THE FORMER HOMELAND OF
QWA-QWA**

by

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SUMMARY

Large portions of rural South Africa can be considered to belong to the Third World. Tourism has been shown to often be the catalyst for the economic empowerment of such regions. There is no exception to this in the Free State, and particularly in the area formerly known as the Qwa-Qwa homeland, which is investigated in this study. Since 1993, there has been no tourism development in Qwa-Qwa, therefore the purpose of this study is to investigate the lack and problems of tourism development in Qwa-Qwa, with emphasis on ecotourism in the Qwa-Qwa National Park (QNP).

The type of information needed to fulfil the study's aim and objective was qualitative opposed to quantitative. Data collection for sections 3-8 was done by means of a literature study. Personal interviews with Qwa-Qwa National Park employees was the major method of data collection for sections 9-10. The lack of co-operation from the Free State Provincial Government, was a major obstacle during data collection.

Three role players were identified to be involved in developing ecotourism in the QNP: the community resident in the Park, Agri-Eco (a parastatal of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, established to administer the Park on its behalf), and the Provincial Government. Although the QNP has all the necessary resources and features to provide specialized tourist facilities, the following were identified as the major factors affecting ecotourism development in the area:

- the dispute over the legal tenureship of the land covered by the QNP,
- the almost endless restructuring and re-organization of departments and reporting structures in Agri-Eco and the Free State Provincial Government,
- the inability of the Free State Provincial Government to provide clear policies and direction for ecotourism development in the QNP, and
- the inefficiency in the manner in which the Free State Provincial Government conduct is funding operations.

OPSOMMING

Groot dele van landelike Suid-Afrika kan beskou word as Derde Wêreld. Dit is dikwels bewys dat toerisme 'n katalisator is vir die ekonomiese bemagtiging van sulke gebiede. Die Vrystaat is geen uitsondering nie, veral nie in die studiegebied, die vorige tuisland Qwa-Qwa, nie. Vanaf 1993 was daar geen toerisme ontwikkeling in Qwa-Qwa nie, dus is die doel van hierdie studie om die gebrek en probleme van toerisme ontwikkeling in Qwa-Qwa te ondersoek, met die klem op ekotoerisme in die Qwa-Qwa Nasionale Park (QNP).

Die tipe inligting benodig om die studie se doelwit te bereik, was eerder kwalitatief as kwantitatief. 'n Literatuurstudie is gedoen om data in te samel vir afdelinge 3-8. Data-insameling vir afdelinge 9-10 was gedoen deur persoonlike onderhoude te voer met die werknemers van die Qwa-Qwa Nasionale Park. Die gebrek aan samewerking van die Vrystaatse Provinsiale Regering was 'n groot struikelblok tydens data-insameling.

Drie rolspelers is geïdentifiseer om betrokke te wees by ekotoerisme ontwikkeling in die QNP: die gemeenskap wat in die Park woon, Agri-Eco ('n semi-staatsinstelling van die Departement van Omgewingsake en Toerisme, gestig om die Park namens die Provinsiale Regering te administreer), en die Provinsiale Regering. Alhoewel die QNP al die nodige hulpbronne en eienskappe het om gespesialiseerde toerisme fasiliteite te bied, was die volgende geïdentifiseer as die belangrikste faktore wat ekotoerisme ontwikkeling in die gebied beïnvloed:

- die dispuut oor die wetlike besitreg van die grond wat binne die QNP val,
- die amper eindelose hersamestelling en -organisasie van die departemente en raporterings strukture in Agri-Eco en die Vrystaat Provinsiale Regering,
- die onvermoë van die Vrystaat Provinsiale Regering om duidelike beleid en rigting vir ekotoerisme ontwikkeling in die QNP voor te skryf, en
- die ondoeltreffendheid in die werkwyse van die Vrystaat Provinsiale Regering by die hantering van fondse.



Ek wil graag van die geleentheid gebruik maak om die volgende mense te bedank:

Dok W - 'n studieleier en dosent wat dit reggekry het om my regtig hard te laat werk. Sy leiding, wysheid, motivering en hulp was onmisbaar gewees. Ek wil egter nooit weer in my lewe "So what, Dottie?" hoor nie.

My ouers - vir hulle liefde, finansiële hulp, belangstelling en ondersteuning.

My skoonouers - ook vir hulle liefde, belangstelling en ondersteuning.

Laastens vir my man - sonder sy liefde, begrip, ondersteuning en hulp sou ek dit nie kon doen nie. Ek dink hy is net so bly soos ek dat die M nou klaar is.

Aan al bogenoemde, nogmaals dankie. Ek waardeer dit opreg.

Thea Schoeman

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1. INTRODUCTION

By the year 2000 tourism will be the world's largest single industry. With increasing real incomes and leisure time there is growing demand for recreation and holidays, and this benefits tourism. Therefore, tourism is often considered to be one of the economic sectors that has realistic potential for growth beyond the short term (Williams & Shaw, 1991). Over the last thirty years the growth in leisure time and the availability of cheap travel have caused a massive world-wide explosion in tourism. Millions of people are now able to travel with increasing regularity and ease beyond their own regions or frontiers. The unspoiled environment and perceived sense of adventure in the wild has allowed tourism in the Third World to increase at a rate above the world-wide average.

Large portions of rural South Africa can be considered to belong to the Third World. As is a general trend in Third World and developing countries, the population is frequently impoverished and in great need of economic growth and job creation. Tourism has been shown to often be the catalyst for the economic empowerment of such regions. There is no exception to this in the Free State Province of South Africa, and particularly in the area formerly known as the Qwa-Qwa homeland, which is investigated in this study.

Qwa-Qwa's tourism potential has not nearly been utilised well enough and the possibilities in terms of jobs and funds is enormous. The issue is simple: the greater the number of tourists, the more people needed to look after them. This means more money for local communities, more jobs and greater funding to continue conservation. Since 1993, there has been no tourism development in Qwa-Qwa, therefore **the purpose of this study is to investigate the problems (social and political) that are responsible for the lack of tourism development in Qwa-Qwa, with emphasis on ecotourism in the Qwa-Qwa National Park.**

Tourism and ecotourism are important for national-policy makers as agents of economic change and as a source of employment creation. Research into tourism and ecotourism is therefore of great importance, not only for national and provincial governments, but also for the communities that can benefit from this type of development.

The importance of tourism and ecotourism is explained in sections 3-5, while sections 6-8 outline the role of tourism in South Africa, the Free State and Qwa-Qwa. Section 9 identifies and discusses the problems associated with this development in Qwa-Qwa after which the study concludes with a summary of its findings and recommendations.

2. METHODOLOGY AND STUDY AREA

For this study, ecotourism in Qwa-Qwa, with emphasis on the Qwa-Qwa National Park (QNP), was investigated. As there has not been recent ecotourism development in the area, **the specific objective is to identify the major factors affecting ecotourism development and how these hinder the development of ecotourism.**

2.1 Methodology

Due to the nature of the study, the type of information needed to fulfil the study's aim and objective was qualitative opposed to quantitative. Data collection for sections 3-8 was done by means of a literature study. Data for sections 9-10 was collected during three field trips undertaken to the study area. Personal interviews with QNP employees and follow-up telephonic conversations, were the major methods of data collection. Standard questionnaires were not used, as the employees have different job descriptions and responsibilities. In addition, the study involved sensitive issues that the interviewed were reluctant to put in writing. An already completed report (Peoples and Parks: Qwa-Qwa National Park) authored by the Free State Rural Strategy Unit, covers the Qwa-Qwa community, therefore no formal interviews with members of the community were held in this study.

Although there is a lot written about ecotourism, very little has been written about ecotourism and politics. This was the only problem encountered during the literature study. The lack of co-operation from the Free State Provincial government, was a major problem during data collection. The responsible MEC (Member of Executive Council) for Ecotourism in the Free State, changed three times within two years. Numerous phone calls were made to the different MEC's offices and the department heads, to no avail. Faxes were also sent to the MEC's offices as well as the Director: Tourism, but to date, no response has been received.

Most QNP employees were under a lot of stress, related to the uncertainty about their future in the company during the time of the interviews. As a result, the objectiveness of the information given in the interviews had to be judged carefully. During data analysis, this posed a problem and careful distinction had to be made between the facts and personal opinions.

2.2 Study area

The Qwa-Qwa National Park is located in the North-Eastern Free State as shown in **Figure 1**. The Qwa-Qwa National Park is about 60 km from Harrismith on the Harrismith/Golden Gate road (R712) and forms an integral part of the Highlands Treasure Route (for more detailed maps, see **Figure 3 & Figure 4**).

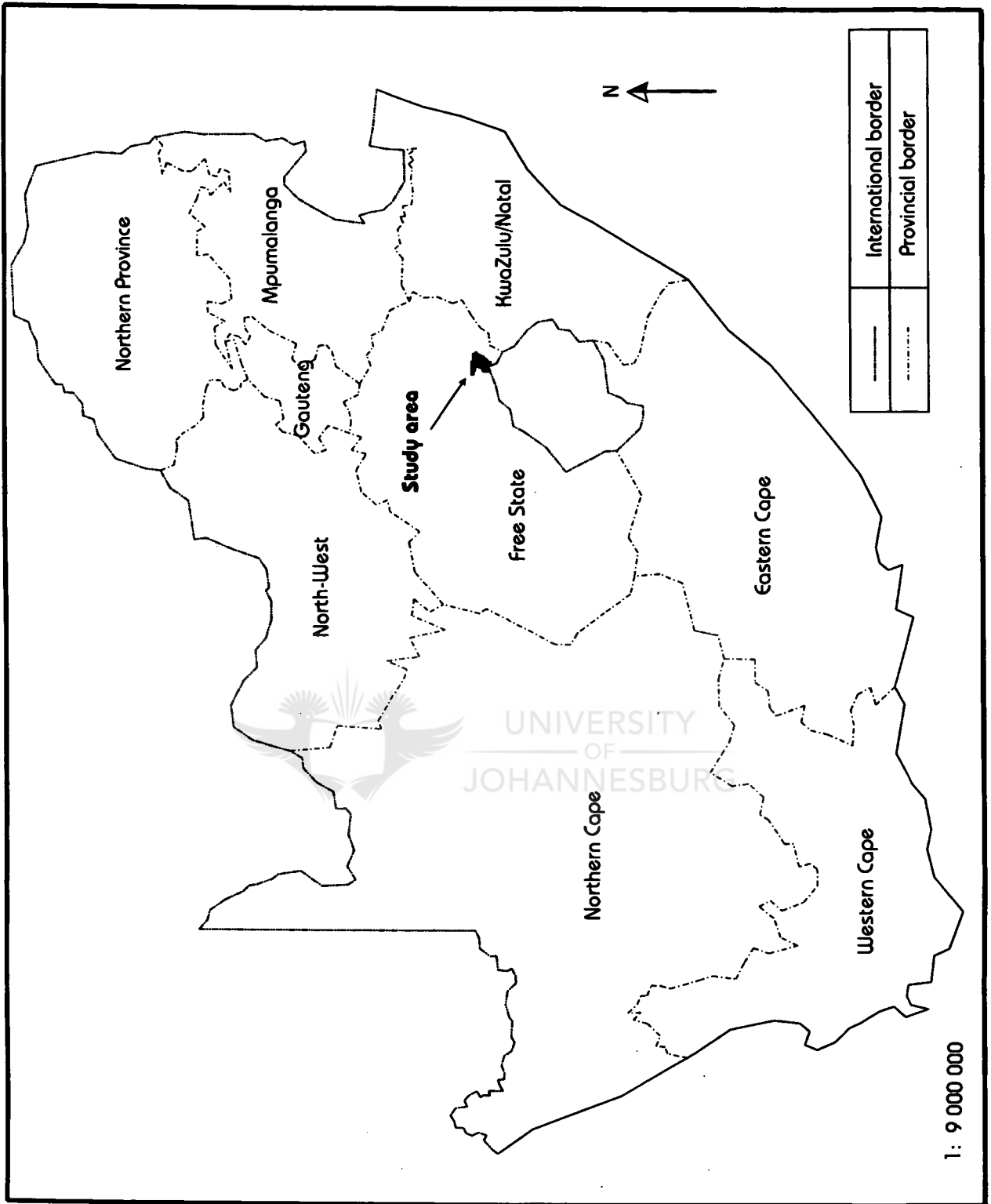


Figure 1: Location of study area in South Africa

3. TOURISM

Tourism can be defined as all travel for whatever purpose, that results in one or more nights being spent away from home. Tourism as it developed in the 1960's and 70's is environmentally self-destructive - it destroys the natural resources that attracted the visitors in the first place. Developing countries are particularly prone to tourism-related environmental damage, given the need for such countries to generate income and the frequently low priority given to environmental issues (Hunter & Green, 1995).

South Africa is a developing country and therefore tourism development must be considered carefully. Tourism does not only have negative impacts, there are actual and potential benefits of tourism, especially with regard to the conservation and protection of natural and built environments.

3.1 Positive impacts

It is very difficult to classify as clearly beneficial or detrimental the diverse and very extensive effects of tourism in visited regions of the Third World. In this section a number of individual aspects will be examined.



3.1.1 National economy

The importance of tourism to national and regional economic development can be measured in a number of ways.

Economy

The most important measure is as a foreign exchange earner. The anticipated foreign exchange income is the most common argument in favour of promoting tourism. Tourism often seems in the short term to be the only potential foreign exchange earner of any real importance. Thus with proper control and under favourable conditions, tourism may produce positive stimuli for development in regions other than the tourist areas.

Tourism has some advantages as a foreign exchange earner - it is not subjected to price fluctuations and is not affected by increased duties, import quotas, etc. Especially in a developing country like South Africa, which is largely affected by price fluctuations in gold, its major export, tourism can become an important earner of foreign exchange.

Other measures include the contribution to the balance of payments, income/GDP, employment and other sectors of the economy via indirect effects. It is also a key foreign exchange provider, an important factor in developing economies like South Africa's. Furthermore, tourism tends to distribute development away from the industrial centres towards those regions in a country that have not been developed as these regions are unspoiled and have the natural resources attractive to tourists.

Most of the provinces in South Africa are reliant on one primary and perhaps a few secondary economic industries. In the Free State for example, the primary industries are agriculture and mining only. Since this is largely an unhealthy economic situation, a great need exists for other forms of development and economic diversification, like tourism. Because tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, it can produce a more diversified regional economy in the Free State.

The development of tourism offers three opportunities for expanding an economy at relatively little cost (Lea, 1988):

- tourism is a growth industry and is therefore desirable for the economic development of a region or country,
- the tourist market comes to the producer as opposed to having to be exported. It is also essentially devoid of protectionist economic policies which artificially support an industry, and
- tourism can represent a diversification of the economy.

Employment

In addition to a beneficial impact upon the developing nations' net foreign exchange movements, tourism is expected to produce an improvement in the employment structure and thus in the general earnings situation. A considerable number of new jobs are created in the development, expansion and maintenance of tourist-related facilities. The relatively labour-intensive nature of tourism strengthens employment creation. Many of these jobs are also located outside the actual tourist regions; in the building and transport industries, in the ancillary industries or in newly established administrative and other service sectors. An important indirect economic benefit of tourism is that it serves as a catalyst for the expansion or development of other economic sectors, such as agriculture, construction, handicrafts, to name a few.

At present, tourism creates 112 million direct job opportunities world wide, which implies that one out of every 15 economically active people in the world is employed in the tourism industry. According to the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, one out of every 25 economically active people in South Africa works in the tourism industry. Research has shown that the South African tourism industry employed more than 300 000 people in 1992. Furthermore, every 8 to 11 tourists lead to the creation of one additional job opportunity. (Strydom & Van der Merwe, 1996).

New opportunities for employment in the supply sector may also result from the stimulation of demand caused by tourism. The consumption habits of tourists as regards certain types of vegetables, meat, dairy products, etc., may encourage innovation and thus lead to diversification on a local or regional basis. Under the influence of tourism, the traditional arts and crafts have generally experienced a strong revival. In some areas this economic field has actually been introduced as a new sector. This is an important factor for improving the regional employment and earnings structure connected with tourism.

Depending on the local economic and cultural development policy, tourism may be seen by a region as being advantageous in teaching technical and managerial skills to segments of its population. Some of these skills can be transferred to other sectors and serve as an encouragement for people to adopt regular employment habits and work for the things they want.

In economically depressed areas, the employment and income provided by tourism, may help to stem migration from those areas, especially migration of young people. Tourism can employ a large percentage of women and, in some traditional societies, may provide an opportunity for emancipation of women through training and employment (Inskeep, 1991).

Infrastructure

Tourism has undeniably caused or accelerated improvements in the general infrastructure, e.g. airports, roads, overnight accommodation, extension of the banking and communications systems. It also has an effect on a range of supply and reorganisation measures for electrification and sewerage up to and including activities in the health sector (Schürmann, 1981). These improvements also serve general national, regional and community needs.

3.1.2 Environment

Tourism is not only a consumer of the natural environment, but also serves as a protector, which has served to enhance the economic value of some aspects of nature that are of no particular value for other activities (Hunter & Green, 1995). Tourism can thus provide an economic

justification for conservation of areas that might not otherwise receive protection. Tourism can not only increase the conservation value of natural habitats, but can also aid in the ecological education of a wide number of people, thus enhancing a sense of environmental stewardship.

A major theme of alternative forms of tourism opposed to mass tourism, is tourism as a means to benefit the environment. These benefits include conservation, protection and even rehabilitation of natural resources. It can act as an instrument for conservation by increasing the awareness of the value of nature. Furthermore, it can also create political pressure to conserve natural resources and by providing socio-economic incentives to maintain wildlife and natural habits through job creation, influx of foreign currency and capital investment (Cooper & Lockwood, 1994). Effective management of tourism can further enhance the quality of the natural resources that attract tourists in the first place, resulting in a 'positive feedback loop'.

3.1.3 Cultural heritage

The influence of tourism is not only confined to the economy and the environment of a region. The cultural heritage of the community in a region is also influenced by tourism.

Conservation

Tourism can be a major stimulus for conservation of important elements of the cultural heritage of an area. This is possible because their conservation can be justified as tourist attractions. These elements include the conservation of archaeological and historical sites and interesting architectural styles. Financial assistance is obtained for the maintenance of museums, theatres and other cultural facilities and activities. The organisation of special cultural festivals and events is also supported because they become important attractions to tourists. Conservation and sometimes revitalisation of traditional arts, handicrafts, dance, music, drama, customs and ceremonies, dress and certain aspects of traditional life-styles are often the result of tourism (Inskeep, 1991).

Renewal of cultural pride

A revived consciousness of their history, cultural and natural values, as well as special characteristics can help to arouse a sense of identity in the Third World's ethnic groups among residents of tourist destinations. This is especially true for some traditional cultures that are experiencing change and loss of cultural self-confidence due to general economic development.

Cross-cultural exchange

A further beneficial aspect of tourism is that it can be used as an instrument for international understanding. Tourism provides tourist and residents the opportunity to learn more about one another's cultures, resulting in greater mutual understanding and respect, or at least tolerance of different value systems and traditions through an understanding of their cultural basis. In a multi-ethnic country like South Africa, domestic tourism can ideally help achieve cross-cultural understanding and build a sense of national unity among diverse groups of people.

3.2 Negative impacts

As mentioned before, if tourism is not well planned and controlled, it may generate negative impacts or reduce the effectiveness of positive ones. Therefore, it is necessary to outline the negative impacts of tourism.

3.2.1 National economy

Tourism can bring jobs and can revive stagnating local economies, but it can also be detrimental to other economic activities, destroy the environment and contribute to the informalisation of labour markets (Williams & Shaw, 1991).

Loss of potential economic benefits

If tourist facilities are owned and managed by outsiders, the loss of potential economic benefits to the local area can occur and local resentment can sometimes be generated. If only a few local persons or families own and manage tourist facilities and services, this can create local elites, with most of the community receiving minimal benefits.

In general, tourism is an unstable source of income, greatly influenced by uncontrollable factors such as weather, political instability and violence. Another drawback to tourism is its seasonal nature, resulting in cash-flow problems when repaying capital investments loans and only seasonal employment opportunities.

Expansion of tourism in the Third World generally leads to increased imports from industrialised nations. This increases the balance of payments deficit (Schürmann, 1981). Potential foreign exchange earnings are reduced when imported goods and services are utilised in tourism, while foreign exchange earnings can be eroded by tourism-induced changes in the native population's consumption behaviour.

Economic and employment distortions

If tourism is concentrated in only one or a few areas of a country or region, without corresponding development in the other areas, economic distortions can take place geographically. This can cause resentment by residents in the underdeveloped areas, while in the tourism areas, there may be resentment of persons earning relatively good incomes as a result of tourism, by those who are unemployed or have lower income jobs.

The demands of tourism can place financial hardship on residents because of the inflation of local prices of land and certain goods and services. The stimuli which tourism gives to agricultural production can have even further negative impacts. Bottlenecks in supplies lead to higher prices for the local population and farmlands formerly reserved for growing traditional foods are now planted with more profitable varieties of fruit and vegetables preferred by foreign tourists.

Concerning the development of infrastructure, misdirected capital expenditure can and does occur. When the infrastructure has been oriented primarily towards the needs for tourist development and only secondarily towards the needs of other regional economic structures, the non-tourism utility value of those infrastructural developments is often very modest when set against the cost (Schürmann, 1981).

Employment distortions may be created if tourism attracts too many employees from other economic sectors, such as construction and agriculture. Perceived employment opportunities, whether real or fictitious, often induce vast immigration of the rural population into the tourist regions. This places a strain on the tourist area's resources and can unleash the resentment discussed earlier. The issue of conflict between residents and migrant workers of different cultural backgrounds can also become significant

3.2.2 Environment

The relationship between tourism and the environment is complex. It involves many activities that can have adverse environmental effects, like air pollution from aircraft and buses, water contamination by sewerage, ecological damage caused by trampling and road construction, etc. The problem is that all of these impacts add up and there are many examples of severe local environmental impacts. Tourism also causes fundamental changes to the landscape, such as the urbanisation of coastal zones. Furthermore, tourism exerts pressure on wildlife and creates liquid and solid waste management problems. Tourism is often also associated with various forms of environmental degradation, such as trail erosion, soil compaction, litter and deforestation.

The likely trend of tourism growth in regions that have seen very little tourism in the past, will involve infrastructural development such as hotel and road building. This can cause increased use of natural resources and cause water and air pollution.

3.2.3 Cultural

Tourism has been known to leave appalling consequences in its wake. In many instances it has resulted in inappropriate development which has not been limited to the physical environment alone. In many countries it has also had an adverse effect on the traditional ways of life, and on the distinctiveness of local cultures (Croall, 1995).

Cultural impacts

Insensitivity or lack of understanding of tour operators or handicraft organisers, can lead to the overcommercialisation and loss of authenticity of traditional arts and crafts, customs and ceremonies, especially if these are over-modified to suit tourist demands. Uncontrolled use and misuse by tourists may result in the deterioration of cultural monuments and loss of cultural artifacts. In extreme cases, there may be loss of cultural character, self-respect and overall social identity because of submergence of the local society by the outside cultural patterns of seemingly more affluent and successful tourists (Inskeep, 1991).

The demonstration effect, which involves residents observing and imitating the behavioural, dress and life-style patterns of tourists from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, may take place and influence residents, especially young people. This may drive a wedge and create conflicts between different generations in a community. Conflicts and misunderstandings can arise between residents and tourists because of differences in languages, customs, religious values and behavioural patterns.

“Critics repeatedly complain about the ‘social pollution’ caused by tourism. This term refers not only to increased criminality, prostitution, etc., but also for example, to the destruction of ‘original’ ways of life. In the longer term, modernisation processes cannot be held in check even at a regional level, whether we wish it or not” (Schürmann, 1981, p. 89).

Overcrowding and loss of amenities for residents

Domestic tourists may become resentful of international tourists if their own attractions are congested by foreigners and if local features such as beaches are closed off to the local population and maintained for the exclusive use of tourists. Residents lose access to their own amenities and become hostile towards tourism. A further contribution to residents becoming resentful to tourism is when there is overcrowding of amenity features, shopping and community facilities and congestion of transportation systems by tourists.

Social problems

An increase of crime occurs, especially on a seasonal basis. This occurs through the generation of friction between the host population and tourists. Tourism expands the target for criminals and situations are created where gains from crime may be high and the likelihood of detection small. Problems of drugs, alcoholism, crime and prostitution may be exacerbated by tourism, although tourism is seldom the basic cause of such problems (Inskeep, 1991).

Aspects of both the positive and negative impacts of tourism has been outlined above. But is there a way to limit the negative impacts of tourism? The next section will examine the need for an alternative to mass tourism.

4. IS THERE A NEED FOR AN ALTERNATIVE TO MASS TOURISM?

Tourism today can ruin landscapes, pollute the natural resources, destroy communities, trivialise cultures, bring about uniformity and contribute to the degradation of communities and the natural environment. As the negative side of tourism has become more evident and well publicised, many of those people, institutions and structures working in or concerned with tourism have come to recognise the need for action to try to ameliorate the situation.

Tourists increasingly want to learn about local cultures, engage in recreational or sporting activities, or develop special interests. Among these special interests is the natural environment, a growing interest that has resulted in the promotion of alternative forms of tourism. There are thus good reasons for future tourism development to show greater environmental sensitivity than in the past. Ecologically insensitive schemes may not be viable in a tourist market in which the 'green minded' tourist is becoming more important.

Tourism and its supporting industry are dependent upon a given community's stock of natural, constructed and socio-cultural attributes which lend themselves to the satisfaction of tourist needs. They must be managed in a way that allows the economic needs of industry and the experiential needs of tourists to be met while at the same time maintaining cultural integrity, preserving or enhancing biological diversity and maintaining life support systems (Harris & Leiper, 1995).

What can be done to achieve this ambitious goal? An increasing environmental awareness in many countries is leading to a growing understanding of the need to develop alternative approaches to tourism. Furthermore, some people in the tourism industry are at last beginning to realise that they are slowly killing off the very resource on which their livelihoods depend. A

new approach to tourism development must encourage and promote a different kind of tourism that both recognises the fragility of the natural environment and respects the needs and aspirations of the communities, that live in the areas affected.

According to Hunter & Green (1995), there are a few factors responsible for the enhanced awareness of alternative forms of tourism. These include:

- a greater awareness of the environmental impacts of tourism,
- a growing demand for new tourism experiences,
- increased attention to the integration of environmental conservation and economic development policies, and
- concern from the tourism industry about future trends in the tourism market.

Mere talk is not enough and attempts must be made to persuade tourism businesses and governments that a sustainable approach is not only morally desirable and environmentally wise, but also good for the tourism industry in the long run. Hunter & Green (1995) stated that there are four main approaches to decrease the pressure of tourism on the environment. These are:

- changing the tourist type,
- changing the resource for resistance,
- education, and
- curbing tourist numbers.



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At the heart of all major tourism developments there exists a paradox: that tourism will destroy or degrade the environmental resources which attract tourists in the first place, such that the tourism industry associated with a particular area will fail to fulfil its optimum potential, or decline, because it becomes environmentally unsustainable (Hunter & Green, 1995).

From the above it is clear that there is a need for an alternative form of tourism. At the opposite end of the spectrum to mass tourism stands a new kind of tourism, which has been given many labels. Among the most common are 'ecotourism', 'green tourism', 'responsible tourism', 'alternative tourism', 'soft tourism', 'low-impact tourism', 'nature tourism', 'gentle tourism', 'progressive tourism', 'appropriate tourism' and 'sustainable tourism'.

Ecotourism allows or facilitates the protection and enhancement of natural, built and cultural features, providing an environmentally conscious means of economic growth. Furthermore, it also enhances the quality of life of local residents, while at the same time, giving the tourist a valuable set of experiences. But what is ecotourism?

5. WHAT IS ECOTOURISM?

In 1983 a Brazilian naturalist, Hector Ceballos-Lascurian, defined ecotourism as “travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery, its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestation found in these areas” (in Turco, 1996, p.34).

According to the Environmental Design Partnership (1992) ecotourism capitalises on the growing interest in the environment and that the aim of sustainable tourism development is to produce net benefits to the economy over the long term, while at the same time, conserving the environment and social resource base for future generations of both residents and tourists.

Ecotourism also includes sustainable tourism development and recognises the interdependence between the environment and the economy in that:

- a healthy economy is essential to maintain environmental quality, and
- a quality environment is necessary to sustain tourism.

Members of the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) agree that, “ecotourism must not be a destructive force. Any form of ecotourism that demeans, violates or destroys tribal peoples’ rights, or the habitat and future of flora and fauna should be opposed. Ecotourism must be subject to the desires of local communities and the furtherance of indigenous animals and plant species” (in Turco, 1996, p.34).

Recently, concern for conservation has seen ecotourism promoted as a means of sustainable development. Ecotourism combines conservation with economic development and has also been linked to a positive environmental ethic and tourist education, while at the same time promoting a cultural tourism dimension and a concern for local communities.

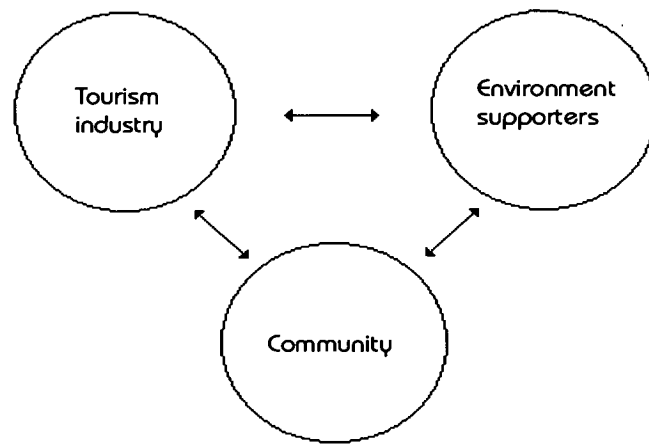
The South African Tourism Board (SATOUR) states that “ecotourism involves travelling to destinations with the main purpose of experiencing firsthand the attractive and well-managed natural environment and cultural heritage of an area, without having a negative impact on these. It’s an enlightening experience about local communities and natural ecosystems, in which the tourist actively participates. And it works in the other direction too, bringing both economic and social benefits to local communities, and ensuring the conservation of the natural and cultural resources” (Explore South Africa, 1996, p.1).

In the White Paper for Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa (1996, p. v) the following definition of ecotourism is given: "ecotourism is environmentally and socially responsible travel to natural or near natural areas that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local people."

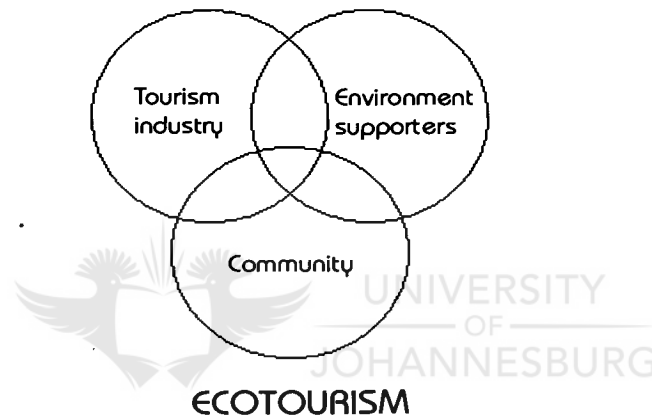
Tourism in general can be described from the perspective of three groups. The first group consists of the visiting tourists. The second group encompasses the providers of tourist facilities and associated services, while the third group comprises the community resident in the area of interest.

In mass tourism, the three perspectives are mostly disconnected. Tourists generally wish to have a good time and spare little thought to how they may affect other groups. The providers are out to operate a profitable business, also often at the expense of both the tourists (inflated pricing) as well as the community (artificial rise in the price of consumer goods). Since the community can experience hardship in such a scenario, they are often less accommodating and tolerant of the "foreign invaders", resulting in unfriendliness and in severe cases rudeness and assault. The disconnected groups are shown in the upper schematic of **Figure 2**.

In ecotourism, the three perspectives are more closely connected. The tourists attracted by ecotourism are generally interested in the unspoilt beauty of the ecotourism area, the observation of wildlife, familiarization with local traditional customs and to an extent the preservation of the ecotourism area. The mere nature of ecotourism makes this a much more considerate tourist. The providers of facilities are generally still interested in operating a business, but not at the cost of the environment. Destruction of the latter would after all affect the very existence of their business and drive away their clientele. They are also often interested in the upliftment of the community through the provision of jobs and secondary industries. Finally, the community finds it a lot easier to get along with the visitors because they do not just destroy the area under the auspices of having a good time. The fact that visitors may come to appreciate their traditional customs leads to an upliftment of cultural pride, while the provision of employment in an industry that they feel confident and comfortable with, can provide a most welcome income. For ecotourism, the interaction between the three groups can be modeled as intersecting sections as shown in the bottom schematic of **Figure 2**. Each group still has its own interests, but a lot more is shared between the different parties.



MASS TOURISM



ECOTOURISM

Figure 2: Mass Tourism vs Ecotourism (Modified from World Tourism Organization, 1993:17)

In developing countries around the world, ecotourism is becoming increasingly popular. As both domestic and international visitors flock to natural areas, conservationists have a cause for both enthusiasm and concern. Ecotourism also generates badly needed revenue, serves as protector of the natural environment and creates new incentives for governments and local communities in and around natural areas to preserve them. However, the demands placed on ecosystems and natural resources from increased tourism can destroy the very attractions that draw people.

The development of a destination area may bring substantial economic and other benefits to the local community. Tourism today is a crucial component of many regional and national economies around the world. The promotion of ecotourism is a means to link economic incentives with the preservation of natural resources. Therefore, it is necessary to recognise the contribution that local communities and cultures make to the experience of tourists and it is important that local people must share in the benefits of tourism development. For ecotourism to become a reality, governmental authorities and local people must show a willingness to participate and be allowed to participate, in the shaping of the local tourism industry.

Ecotourism seeks to maintain and enhance the quality of life and the quality of the tourist experience. This is possible because ecotourism recognises the inter-dependency between the long-term viability of economic investment in tourism developments, programmes and policies and the successful management of the natural, built and human environments.

The fostering of appropriate tourism development can be a potent force for environmental 'good'. Ecotourism facilitates the protection and enhancement of natural, constructed and cultural features, providing an environmentally conscious means of economic growth. Furthermore, it also enhances the quality of life of local residents, while at the same time, giving the tourist a valuable set of experiences.

The attributes of mass tourism and ecotourism are compared in **Table 1**. From this, one can summarise that whereas mass tourism brings with it the self-centred, "have a good time" tourist and the equally inconsiderate "develop regardless of anyone or anything, let's make money" infrastructure, ecotourism strives to provide a long-term win-win situation which is to the benefit of all parties and not at the expense of the environment.

Table 1: Comparison of the attributes of mass tourism and ecotourism (Modified from Hunter & Green, 1995:81)

	Mass tourism	Ecotourism
General features	sectoral rapid development maximises uncontrolled short term	holistic slow development optimises controlled long term
Tourist behaviour	fixed programme large groups tourist directed comfortable and passive no foreign language nosy loud	spontaneous decisions singles or families tourist decide demanding and active language learning tactful quiet
Basic requirements	untrained labour holiday peaks publicity clichés hard selling	trained labour force staggered holidays tourist education heart selling
Development strategies	project-led unplanned new buildings outside developers	concept-led planned re-use of existing local developers

6. THE ROLE OF TOURISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

“With a population of approximately 41 million and a land area of 1.27 million km², South Africa’s resource base for tourism is phenomenal (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 1996:1).” The tourism attractiveness lies in South Africa’s diversity and includes: wildlife, varied scenery, unspoiled wilderness areas, diverse cultures, a generally hot and sunny climate, hiking, hunting, diving, etc. These resources make South Africa ideally suited for ecotourism. Ecotourists’ primary interest relates to the natural environment and traditional cultures - resources South Africa has in abundance.

6.1 Current situation

With South Africa becoming ‘more accepted’ internationally, there are hopes and predictions of an international tourist boom. Already there has been an increase in international tourism, especially in areas like the Western Cape and Mpumalanga. South Africa’s competitiveness in tourism is not only ‘judged’ by the stock of natural resources, but also by how these resources are managed and to what extent they are complemented with man-made innovations.

According to the White Paper for Tourism (1996), South Africa scores well on three important fronts. Firstly, there is already a well-established network of national parks, together with private reserves. Thus South Africa is very much on track with the demands of the increasingly environmentally sensitive tourist. Secondly, some companies are already global leaders in ecotourism, while others have created Disneyland-like attractions, boosting the country’s name internationally. Thirdly, the recent developments in South African politics have opened the country’s tourism potential to the rest of the world.

Despite these advantages, South Africa has not been able to realise its full potential in tourism. As will be discussed in section 9, the political transformation definitely has negative effects on ecotourism development in the Qwa-Qwa National Park. The contribution of tourism to small business development, employment, income and foreign exchange earnings remains limited.

It is estimated that in South Africa as a whole, 810 000 people are directly or indirectly employed in tourism (Futter & Wood, 1997). This represents just over one in 20 economically active people, including both formal and informal sector workers. If the expected growth in tourism materialises, this can create up to 350 000 jobs. **Table 2** compares employment in tourism to employment in other major industrial sectors. From the table it can be seen that tourism employs 810 000 people (5.6% of total economically active workforce).

Table 2: Tourism's contribution to employment (1994) (Modified from Futter & Wood, 1997:50)

Industrial sector	Employment figures	%of Total Economically Active
Manufactured Goods	1 399 513	9.8%
Agriculture	982 616	6.9%
Mining	613 584	4.3%
<i>Tourism</i>	<i>810 000</i>	<i>5.6%</i>

As can be seen from **Table 3**, employment in tourism is very low in the Free State compared with the other provinces. The provinces with the highest share of tourism related employment are Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, as they received the largest share of tourism expenditure (Futter & Wood, 1997). These provinces also report a proportionally higher usage of hotels, shopping facilities, restaurants, banking services and car rentals by foreign tourists. As tourism demand increases, they are as a result likely to enjoy a greater than proportional increase in tourism related employment creation.

Table 3: Total tourism related employment by province (modified from Futter & Wood, 1997:51)

Province	Foreign tourism (000s)	Domestic tourism (000s)	Total (000s)
Gauteng	107	30	137
Western Cape	89	120	209
KwaZulu-Natal	67	158	225
Northern Cape	5	11	16
Eastern Cape	15	48	63
Free State	5	25	30
Mpumalanga	15	32	47
Northern Province	8	25	33
North West	5	33	38
<i>Total</i>	<i>316</i>	<i>482</i>	<i>798</i>

Although an estimated 810 000 jobs are directly or indirectly created by tourism, tourism currently plays a relatively small role in the economy of South Africa. This is illustrated by the following estimates:

- Economist Intelligence Unit estimated the value added to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by tourism to be no more than 2% in 1994, and
- Kessel Feinstein and South African Tourism Board (SATOUR) estimated a contribution of 4% to the GDP in 1995.

The World Travel and Tourism Council estimated that tourism contributed 10.9% to the GDP of the world economy in 1995, 13.4% to the European economy, 10.5 % to the US economy and 12.3 % to the British economy. If these estimates are compared to those of South Africa, it is clear that tourism's contribution to the South African economy is below the world average. The recent performance of tourism in South Africa is as follows:

- In 1995 South Africa received 4.48 million international visitors, with just under 1.1 million of these overseas visitors originating from outside Africa,
- Africa generated the bulk of international arrivals (73%),
- Europe accounted for about 15% of international arrivals, and
- North and South America, Australasia, the Middle East and Indian Ocean Island were marginal contributors , accounting for only 12% of international arrivals.

What are the reasons for South Africa not being competitive on the world tourism market?

If South Africa's history had been different, it would probably have been one of the countries in the world that attracted the most visitors. Therefore, tourism development in South Africa has largely been a missed opportunity. The White Paper on Tourism (1996) identifies the following key constraints:

- the tourism industry has been inadequately resourced and funded,
- myopic private sector,
- the integration of local communities and previously disadvantaged groups into tourism have been limited,
- inadequate tourism training, education and awareness,
- inadequate protection of the environment,
- lack of infrastructure, particularly in rural areas,

- poor service,
- transportation sector not geared to service tourists,
- lack of appropriate institutional structures, and
- tourism security.

More than any other sector, tourism has the potential to achieve the objectives of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of the new government. Tourism can play a strategic role in dynamizing other sectors of the economy, can create opportunities for the small entrepreneur, help to save the environment, can cultivate a unique informal sector, and can promote understanding and awareness among different cultures.

6.2 Ecotourism and the RDP

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is the strategy for the fundamental transformation of the country and is based on the notion that reconstruction and development are parts of an integrated process. It is a strategy developed by the Government of South Africa and integrates growth, reconstruction, development, redistribution and reconciliation into a unified programme.

Although the delivery of some programmes of the RDP are slower than communities would like, some progress is being made. Some of the objects of the RDP are job creation, building the economy, building democratic institutions and practices, protection of the environment, providing transport, etc. In short, the population needs to be provided with employment and entrepreneurial opportunities so as to be able to meet the costs of basic needs like housing, water and sanitation, electricity, etc. The growth potential of ecotourism in South Africa is phenomenal. Ecotourism can therefore provide the necessary opportunities for the people and Government of South Africa to make the RDP work for them.

6.3 Ecotourism - benefits and principles

The communities can benefit from the rewards of well-managed ecotourism in the new South Africa. Ecotourism can add considerable and significant benefits to the RDP by creating employment, protecting the environment, generating a healthy economy and earning millions of rands in foreign exchange. The RDP wants to meet the needs of the country's disadvantaged people - with the greatest need in the rural areas where poverty and unemployment are at their worst. Ecotourism concentrates and is principally located in these rural areas, but the major challenge lies in ensuring that local communities benefit and participate in the development of tourism.

A recent survey indicated that a very small percentage of South Africans had heard of or even understood the term 'ecotourism' (*Explore South Africa*, a SATOUR initiative). South Africans are unaware of ecotourism or misinformed about its implications and benefits. The South African Tourism Board is striving to inform South Africans about the benefits of ecotourism, especially if one considers the far-reaching implications of a successful ecotourism industry in this country.

Ecotourism has many and various benefits. First of all, tourism creates job opportunities for the local people and people living in the surrounding areas. For every 30 new tourists, one direct and two indirect job opportunities become available. It also provides rural communities with the opportunity to use otherwise non-viable land for commercial purposes. Local communities can also become important shareholders in ecotourism ventures and participate in the development process. Tourists bring money into an area by buying local wares, such as art and handicrafts, thereby contributing to the general upliftment of communities.

Infrastructural development takes place in order to support ecotourism areas. This includes the building and maintenance of roads, the provision of water and sanitation, the establishment of electricity and banking facilities, etc. in ecotourism areas. Certainly one of the most important benefits of ecotourism is that it supplies essential funds for the conservation and management of the environment.

It is clear from the above that South Africa has all the ingredients to become one of the leading ecotourism destinations. However, to establish ecotourism in South Africa, all parties involved should agree on some principles. According to *Explore South Africa* these principles are:

- the general upliftment and improvement in the quality of life of all our people should be the main goal of ecotourism,
- ecotourism should be a total experience combining natural and cultural attractions, resources and hospitality of local communities, professional tourism operators and responsible and conductive behaviour of the ecotourist,
- participation of local communities should be encouraged in order to become true partners and shareholders,
- joint decisions should be made by partners and shareholders so that they could take joint responsibility and share in the benefits,
- the environment should be regarded as the ecotourism product and therefore, it must be efficiently managed to ensure sustainability and maximum benefit to local communities, and
- all parties should be involved in the management of the environment - the local community, tourism industry and tourists.

The White Paper on Tourism (1996) gives the following principles to guide the development of responsible tourism:

- tourism will be private sector driven,
- government will provide the enabling framework for the tourism industry,
- effective community involvement,
- sustainable environmental practices will underpin tourism development,
- cooperation and close partnership among key stakeholders is vital for tourism development,
- tourism will be used as a development tool for previously disadvantaged communities and should focus on the empowerment of women,
- tourism development will take place in the context of close cooperation with other states within Southern Africa, and
- tourism development will support the social, economic, environmental goals and policies of the government.

6.4 Ecotourism - South African examples

Many protected ecotourism areas in South Africa are situated in some of the poorest rural areas. The local communities in these areas have experienced very little of the benefits of tourism in the past. They very often bore the cost of tourism development, including forced removals in the apartheid and colonial eras. They did not receive any of the benefits of tourism, but this is slowly but surely changing.

The private sector and state conservation agencies introduced innovative integrated conservation community development initiatives. These initiatives are based on the provision of tangible benefits to communities living in and surrounding ecotourism areas. According to *Explore South Africa*, most of these pioneering initiatives actually predate the political and social transformation in South Africa. In the past, local communities were becoming alienated from the conservation areas because they did not share in the benefits. Pilot projects are finding ways to restore the pride of people in their natural heritage by sharing the benefits of tourism with them. There are some specific ecotourism partnerships in South Africa, they include:

6.4.1 State or provincial conservation agencies

The Pilanesberg National Park, which is managed by the North-West province's Parks and Conservation Authority, is an example. The conservation agency has assisted the local community to establish a community reserve, and a range of eco-development projects have been initiated in surrounding villages. The local community also receives ten percent of gate revenues.

Another example is the Mkuze Game Reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, managed by the Natal Parks Board. The Board is planning to build a Zulu cultural village and education centre, in partnership with local communities, and revenues will go towards social development programmes.

6.4.2 The private sector

Private game reserves like Mala-Mala, Sabi-Sabi and Londolozi (all in Mpumalanga) strive to involve local communities in some form of participation in management and decision-making processes. They also attempt to generate entrepreneurship in rural settlements surrounding the game reserves.

6.4.3 Community-driven projects



At Kosi Bay (KwaZulu-Natal), a non-government organisation assists a group of local communities to run a tented camp. Another local community owned and managed camp in KwaZulu-Natal is being planned at the Lebatlane game farm, which is owned by the Bakgatla people.

Although most of these projects can still be considered experimental, they did produce economic benefits. The quality of life of the local communities has improved by new job opportunities and spin-offs such as arts and handicrafts, development of vegetable gardens, etc. The result - local people are becoming more positive in their attitudes to what they now perceive as their own parks and tourism development.

7. TOURISM IN THE FREE STATE

As this study concentrates on the Qwa-Qwa National Park, which forms part of the Free State, ecotourism in the Free State and tourism in Qwa-Qwa will be discussed in the next two sections.

7.1 Current tourism

The tourist industry in the Free State currently does not have any real impact on the economy of the province. According to Strydom & Van der Merwe (1996), the reason for this is the lack of a strategic plan to serve as a guideline for marketers, developers and other role players. The Free State possesses sufficient tourist attractions and thus has the potential to stimulate the regional economy. Strydom & Van der Merwe (1996) give the following characteristics of tourism in the Free State:

- the area is relatively unknown as a tourist destination,
- lack of efficient marketing strategies,
- no database available for planning purposes,
- uncoordinated tourism development,
- very little cooperation between towns in the area,
- provision of services is not up to standard, and
- lack of cooperation with the private sector.

Ecotourism has been practised in the Free State for many years, although not under the name of ecotourism. There are a variety of hiking and pony trails, angling, etc. Most of these activities have been regulated to some extent by the Directorate of Nature and Environmental Conservation, local governments and private landowners. Ecotourism in the Free State faces many problems, some of which are:

- no marked increase in funds for tourism in the Government's budget,
- conservation and environmental management are not receiving the attention and funds from the Government,
- no coordination in ecotourism activities by product owners and organisations responsible for ecotourism,

- facilities do not always comply with the expected standard,
- the Free State has not been marketed as an ecotourism destination,
- not enough specialized and skilled people in the province who could form a basis from which to drive ecotourism, and
- absence of a tourism culture in the Free State.

There are positive aspects for the development of ecotourism in the Free State. These include:

- the Free State has a wide diversity of landscapes, indigenous fauna and flora, wide open spaces and unique cultures,
- ecotourism can provide major socio-economic advantages for the people of the province,
- added revenue to conservation bodies for conservation purposes can be provided by ecotourism,
- the province has not been as extensively developed like many other regions in South Africa, and
- the Free State is located in the centre of South Africa and is therefore ideally situated for tourists.

The responsible body for ecotourism was the Government through the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs until July 1996. Since then a new department, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism has taken over the responsibilities. The nature reserves, like the Qwa-Qwa National Park, are the major ecotourism destinations and are controlled by this Department. Prior to July 1996, ecotourism did not fall under the Directorate of Tourism in the Free State. The Directorate of Tourism formed part of the Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism. The Directorate of Tourism will in general:

- protect and develop primary tourism resources,
- create a tourism culture in the province,
- act as a coordinating body for all tourism affairs,
- market the Free State as a tourism destination,
- initiate the creation of tourism products, and
- formulate guidelines and policy on tourism.

7.2 Vision for ecotourism

Ecotourism is based on unique cultural and natural features of an area. These features must be developed in such a way, so that all citizens of the Free State could benefit from it. The vision for ecotourism in the Free State is as follows:

- to view the province's unique wildlife, flora, scenic beauty and the hospitality and diversity of life styles of the people living in the province,
- responsible managing of the ecotourism resources in a sustainable manner by the state and private owners,
- to empower the people of the province to take responsibility for the ecotourism environment,
- a sustainable number of visitors so that the ecotourism destination will not deteriorate, and
- to provide quality experiences for ecotourists.

8. TOURISM IN QWA-QWA

In studying the status of tourism in Qwa-Qwa, two important documents were considered. The first of these is a study entitled "Qwa-Qwa Maluti Bewaringsgebied - Beplanningsvoorstelle" - translated as "Qwawa Maluti Conservation Area - Suggestions for Planning". The report was compiled by Gouws, Jordaan, Uys and White, a Pretoria-based firm specialising in landscaping architecture. The report was completed in 1988 and was commissioned by the South African Development Trust Corporation.

The second document of significance is a five year development plan for tourism in Qwa-Qwa which was produced by Landplan & Associates, a consultancy firm based in Aliwal North. This was completed in September 1991 and was commissioned by the Qwa-Qwa Tourism and Nature Conservation Corporation.

8.1 Current Tourism Patterns

The report produced by Gouws *et al* (1988) states that the exact determination of tourist numbers in Qwa-Qwa is difficult and problematic. First of all, there is no mechanism by which the number of tourists moving from Golden Gate through Qwa-Qwa can be measured, since access is not controlled by means of a guarded boom and its associated sign-in procedure. The only point where the tourist flow can be measured, is the entrance gate at Mont Aux Sources (Royal Natal National Park), while some indication of flow can be also deduced from the occupation figures of the Berg Resort at Witsieshoek and the Swartwater Dam (**Figure 3**).

Gouws *et al* draws attention to the fact that only very short stays of tourists are recorded at the Witsieshoek Berg Resort. Reasons for this could be insufficient facilities and a lack of supporting resources. Even in peak season the average number of tourist vehicles that visit the Berg Resort is only 20 per day. Of these visitors, 60.72% are from the former Transvaal, with 51.58% from the PWV area alone. This indicates that Gauteng (as it is known today) is the main source of tourists in Qwa-Qwa, although visitors from the Free State and Natal should not be discounted.

Gouws *et al* (1988) also suggests that tourism activities in Qwa-Qwa are concentrated at a few specific points. The main attraction is the hiking trail at Mont Aux Sources, with the Berg Resort as a supporting facility. Currently, the Berg Resort is also the only facility that provides standard accommodation in Qwa-Qwa. The Swartwater Dam also attracts anglers, usually day visitors, but in small numbers.



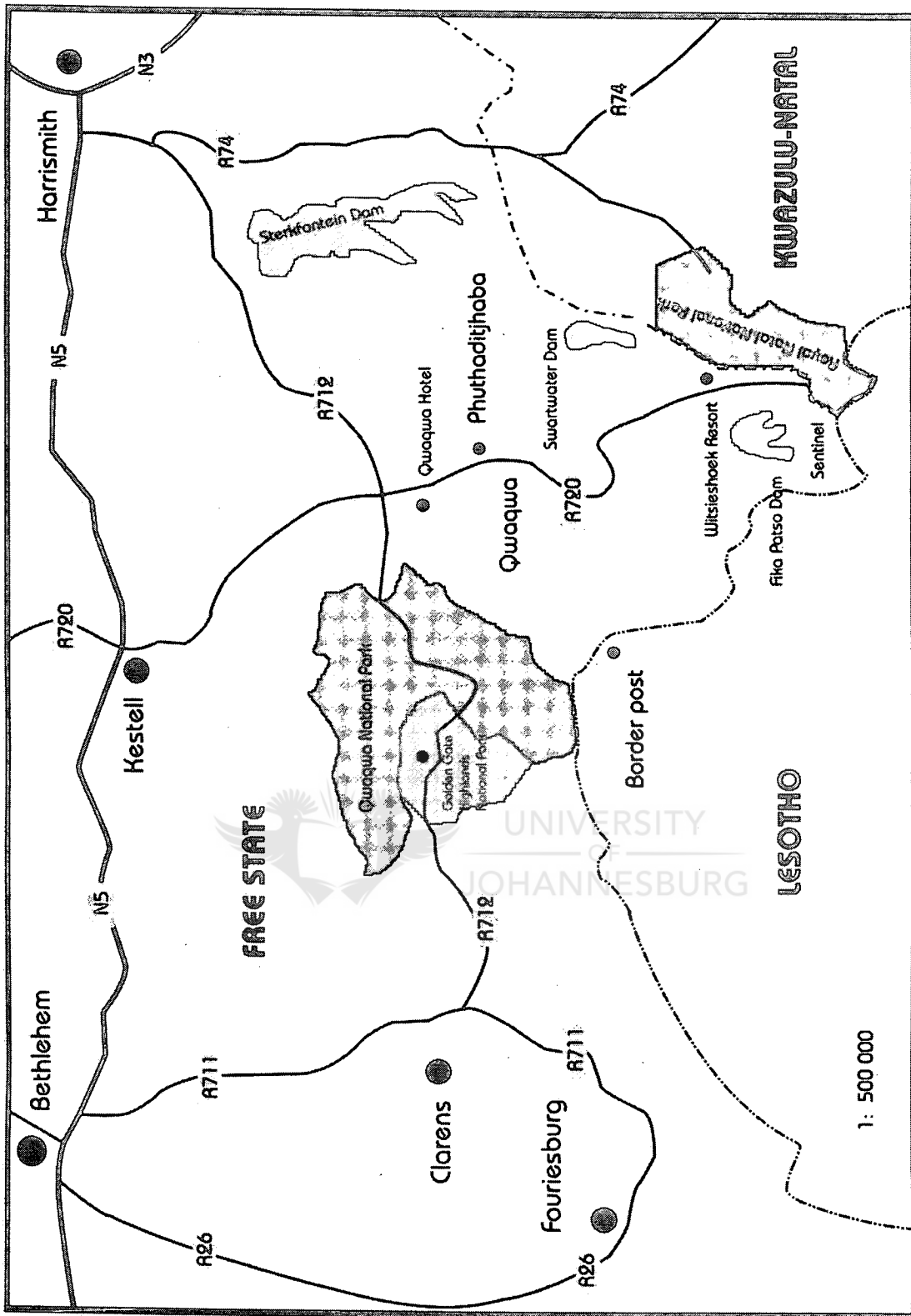


Figure 3: North-Eastern Free State

8.2 Qwa-Qwa as a tourist destination

In their report, Landplan & Associates discussed tourism development in Qwa-Qwa on the basis of three zones. The first of these is known as the Elandsriver catchment zone and is located at the easternmost extent of the former Qwa-Qwa homeland. The second and third zones are known as the Liebenbergsvlei and Klerkspruit catchment areas respectively, the former being located in the westernmost and the latter in the central area of the former Qwa-Qwa homeland.

8.2.1 The Elandsriver catchment zone (eastern zone)

This zone is classified by Gouws *et al* (1988) as the most scenic area within Qwa-Qwa. The zone features breathtaking mountain views, is home to the Swartwater, Fika Patso and Sterkfontein dams and is easily accessible via relatively major roads (**Figure 3**). As such, it has obvious tourist potential. It is however also in this zone that the potential is most at risk, due to several perturbing issues. Certainly the most serious of these is the high population density of Phuthaditjhaba, the former capital of the Qwa-Qwa homeland which is situated in this zone. In addition, the overstocking of the mountain veld surrounding the residential areas poses a threat to the tourism potential in that the destruction of the natural vegetation is leading to excessive erosion and the loss of the area as a productive zone.

The tourist potential of the area is further degraded by the fact that tourists have no alternative to travelling through about 20 km of the densely populated Phuthaditjhaba town. This has a negative impact on tourism as tourists who want to get away from it all, are confronted with an urban settlement and its related problems of air pollution (especially in winter), gravel pits, insensitive town planning and traffic.

The existing tourism attractions in this area are the Witsieshoek Mountain Resort, the Sentinel Car Park and Cable Car, the resort development on the slopes above the Fika Patso dam, the Qwa-Qwa hotel, an overnight hut at the Swartwater dam and the Tseki Youth Centre.

8.2.2 The Liebenbergsvlei catchment zone (western zone)

The Liebenbergsvlei catchment area has the lowest tourism potential rating of the three zones. It does not share the spectacular scenery of the easternmost zone, nor is its use as a tourism development area recommended by either Gouws or Landplan. The reason for this is more than its inferiority in scenic beauty - the steep mountain slopes within this zone are considered to be a sensitive environmental area to which strict conservation principles should be applied. Landplan

& Associates particularly discourages any form of development in order to limit erosion in the area where the Liebenbergsvlei feeds the Saulspoort dam. Today, the Liebenbergsvlei catchment area is part of the Qwa-Qwa National Park, which is responsible for the conservation of the area.

8.2.3 The Klerksvlei catchment zone (central zone)

The Klerksvlei catchment area is located in the central part of the former Qwa-Qwa homeland. Although it is not as spectacular as the easternmost zone, it still features scenery that is highly rated by SATI (South African Tourist Industry). At present, it is wholly contained within the Qwa-Qwa National Park.

The Landplan Report identified this area as most suitable for the development of tourism. It recommended that such development should focus solely on offering activities and facilities not offered elsewhere in the area. It discouraged the development of mass-tourism icons such as hotels, casinos and the like, not only because these were already available in surrounding areas, but also due the large capital requirements involved. In particular, projects such as hiking, trout fishing and gamebird hunting, all of which attract specialized groups were suggested.

It should be noted that the Qwa-Qwa National Park had not been established at the time of the Landplan & Associates Report. However, it is obvious that the Park Management had heeded the recommendations of the report. As a result, it is being promoted as an ecotourism destination. Tourist accommodation is available at Eerstegeluk Farmhouse, which is fully equipped, while rustic accommodation is available at four overnight dwellings named Avondsrust, Spelonken, Welgedacht and Kliprivier (**Figure 4**).

As suggested by the Landplan report, tourism activities offered include game viewing, bird watching, night drives, horse riding, hiking and bird hunting. In addition, provision is also made for trophy hunting during the hunting season, while adventure trails specifically designed to be navigated by four wheel drive vehicles (commonly known as 4x4 routes) are proving to be popular.

A must-see attraction is the Basotho Cultural Village which is situated within the boundaries of the park. The Village is a reconstructed traditional village illustrating the South Sotho's culture and history. It features several specimens of the building methodologies of this tribe at various points in time, cleverly arranged to show both the lifestyles and the influence of the tribe's interaction with other tribes in the area and the early European settlers. The village prides itself in accurately reproducing the exact styles of each period in its depicted history. As such, the village offers the visitor an unsurpassed experience of South Sotho culture and history.

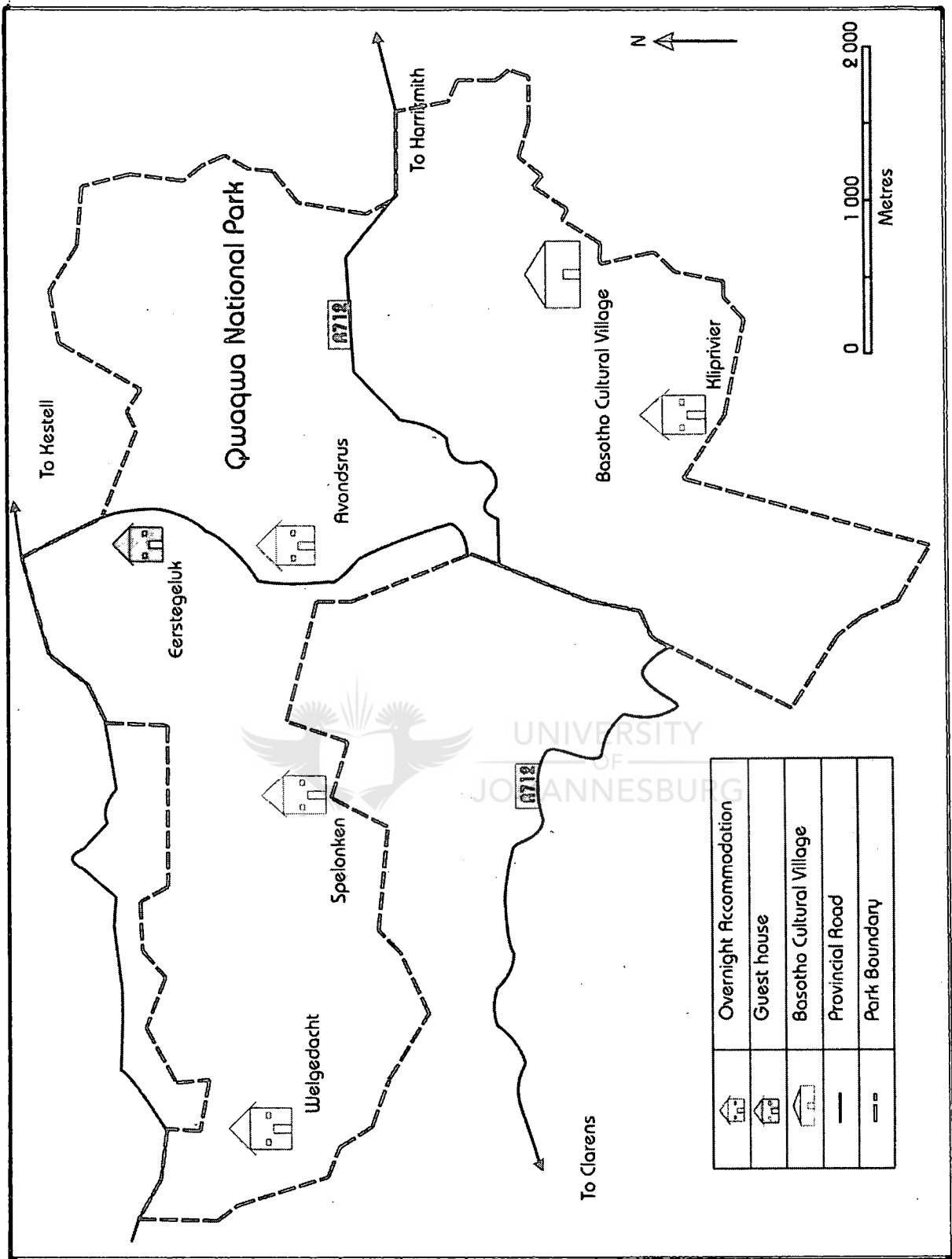


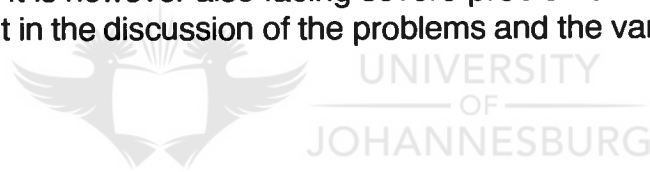
Figure 4: Qwa-Qwa National Park

8.2.4 Summary

Qwa-Qwa has all the necessary resources and features to provide specialized tourist facilities as recommended by Landplan & Associates. It certainly has the potential to draw tourists since it fulfills many of the requirements set by holiday makers when choosing a destination. Primarily these are the relatively short distance from the populous area of Gauteng which Gouws has identified as the largest source of tourists to the area, the already mentioned beautiful scenery, the friendly attitude of locals and the unique nature of facilities offered.

The efforts of the Qwa-Qwa National Park in applying and expanding on the recommendations of the Landplan & Associates report are commendable. A program consisting of three phases towards the full implementation of ecotourism is being followed. Phase 1 and 2, dealing with the establishment of administrative and service components as well as the fencing off and introduction of game into the park, have been completed. Phase 3, dealing with the further development of already existing and new ecotourism facilities, has come to a standstill due to various problems. Having previously been disadvantaged by the already well established tourism industry below the escarpment of the Drakensberg range, the Qwa-Qwa National Park is now in a position to capitalize on the tourist flow passing from Gauteng to the lower Drakensberg area.

The Qwa-Qwa National Park can truly be said to be one of the few organizations committed to the concept of ecotourism. It is however also facing severe problems in continuing this leading role as will become apparent in the discussion of the problems and the various role players in the following section.



9. ROLE PLAYERS IN THE QWA-QWA NATIONAL PARK

As discussed in the previous section, the Qwa-Qwa National Park is well-suited to and actively promoting the concept of ecotourism. It is however experiencing some difficulties in the further implementation and development of this. The primary factors affecting the development of ecotourism can largely be attributed to socio-political issues in the area. Three role players are involved: the community resident in the park, Agri-Eco (a parastatal of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, established to administer the Park on its behalf) and the provincial government. These role players and their associated problems are outlined below.

9.1 The Community

The community as discussed here, is defined as the people resident within the boundaries of the park. At the time of writing, they consisted of 35 indigenous families. The definition excludes formal employees of the parastatal Agri-Eco who are also accommodated in the park.

9.1.1 Background

Qwa-Qwa National Park was formerly owned by white commercial farmers. In 1984, the National Government acquired this land through the South African Development Trust with the objective of extending the Qwa-Qwa homeland. The commercial farmers vacated their farms later in the same year, leaving their farm workers behind. In the ensuing uncertainty of land allocation, these former farm workers and their families made the land their home and used the land for subsistence farming. No restrictions on the cultivation or the keeping of livestock were introduced, since there was not yet a firm policy on how to allocate the newly acquired land. Eventually, the Qwa-Qwa Government did lease part of the land to new outside farmers. The introduction of this leasing arrangement was also supposed to be applicable to the population already living on the land, although it does not appear as if this was formally stated or rigidly applied.

It emerged from a study by Conchuir (1996) that very few residents of the Park knew exactly how they came to be on the land, just that they were born there and thus were exercising their birthright to the land. When further questioned, it usually emerged that they were largely part of the original commercial farming workforce or their descendants.

In 1991, the land was proclaimed as a National Park for the purpose of tourism and nature conservation. Rules and regulations emerged to control the residents concerning their livestock, usage of land, resources and tenureship in 1992. In April 1994, Qwa-Qwa was reincorporated back into South Africa and Agri-Eco became the official administrator of the Park.

The aforementioned park population has increased to approximately 300 rural dwellers residing in 11 villages within the boundaries of the Park. Legislation introduced in 1995, makes it clear that residents in the park have no right to claim ownership or grazing rights. There is now a move to reduce the number of livestock, and permanent employees of the park are not permitted to keep livestock.

This situation is causing conflict and tension between the residents of the Park, Park Management and the Neighbouring Communities. Park Management is bound by their mandate to develop the park for the purposes of tourism and conservation. In this respect they have recourse to the 1995 legislation when effecting these two goals. The park residents feel that they

are being denied full utilization of land which they consider to be their own. Neighbouring communities feel that the residents of the park are enjoying unfair commercial and residential advantages due to their being accommodated in the park. Continual discussions to raise and possibly resolve the tensions are taking place. The nature and effects of these are discussed in section 10 of this dissertation.

Despite the conflict and tensions mentioned above, some positive interactions between the three role players do take place. These interactions have beneficial results for all the players involved, and are discussed in more detail in the following two sections.

9.1.2 Benefits to Park Management

Park Management has in the past indicated that they do not only have problems with the residents in the Park, but that the Park also benefits from their presence. In particular, some of these benefits include :

- residents form 50% of the workforce in the Park,
- in a spirit of co-operation, farm labourers often inform Park Management of animals that have strayed from the park area. In many cases this has even been done when the Park Offices are a several hours' walking distance from the person's residence, and
- during informal talks with residents (usually when residents are offered a lift by an Agri-Eco employee), information is obtained about the movement of animals as well as outsiders in the Park. This is an invaluable source of information in the battle against poaching.

9.1.3 Benefits to the Community

The residents in the Park share in the following benefits:

Employment

About 90% of the park residents are involved in some form of employment generated by the park. This takes the form of permanent work, contract work, temporary work or project work. Residents from Qwa-Qwa National Park make up 50% of the permanent workforce. The removal of the old farming infrastructure is handed out on a contract basis. Work assignments of a temporary nature include the cutting of thatch-quality grass during the winter months. Project work provides an array of casual employment opportunities. An example of the latter is the provision of employment for the filling of gullies as part of a soil conservation project, funded by a grant from the National Economic Forum.

A substantial amount of secondary employment is also generated directly from Park/Community interaction. This benefits not only residents of the park, but also the neighbouring communities. At regular intervals, neighbouring farmers are given the opportunity to cut natural and cultivated grasslands for fodder on a share basis with the Park, which is in turn sold to consumers in the area.

In addition, Park Management has started a broader community development programme. This programme specifically addresses the need to develop local business by more than just the provision of casual labour. Key elements of this plan involve the provision of park-generated opportunities to local entrepreneurs. The park, where possible, assists with a small loans to provide the entrepreneurs with the necessary tools and infrastructure and supports the new small enterprises by purchasing their product. Purchase of the product goes hand in hand with the repayment of the loan.

An instance of this plan that has worked exceptionally well, is the park's exotic plant control project. This project involved the cutting of black wattle trees. Each of ten local entrepreneurs obtained a loan from a revolving fund managed by the Park in order to buy a power saw. The Park purchased the all the wood and sold it to the neighbouring communities. The Park only purchased wood until the loan was amortised. On completion of the repayment term, the entrepreneurs retained the opportunity to cut down the unwanted trees, but gained control of the sales as well. This in turn created further employment, as two tractor drivers were employed to transport the wood. Residents from neighbouring communities have also benefited from the community development programme by buying the wood from the Park, and selling it in their local communities.



Use of natural resources

Residents get to use the natural resources of the Park, without paying for it. Natural resources are mainly used for cattle farming. Therefore, grasslands for grazing are the natural resource with the highest utilisation by residents. Residents do not pay for any services, including water. The free use of natural resources is the major point of conflict with resident of neighbouring communities.

Other benefits

Park residents benefit directly from the presence of Park Management in the Park. Residents often contact Park Management when there is a need for water to be transported or when a family member needs to be taken to hospital. Often residents are offered a lift within the Park or to one of the urban areas like Kestell or Phuthadithjaba.

9.1.4 Problems

As a result of the Park's alternative income generation projects, there has been an influx of family members from other areas. Family members move back to the Park to make use of the job opportunities generated by these projects. This in turn is leading to the problem of the Park not being in a position to accommodate them. The resulting uncontrolled movement of people in and out of the Park is a significant matter of concern expressed by Park Management.

At present, Park Management allows park residents free use of land for grazing. The use of this concession is however becoming a problem to management due to a substantial increase in livestock under residents' control. **Table 4** shows current resident ownership of livestock in the Park. It illustrates the percentage of park families that have a certain size herd of a specific livestock type. As it can be seen from the table, all families owned cattle, while 46% owned horses, 26% owned goats and only 25% owned sheep.

Table 4: Residents' ownership of livestock (Modified from Conchuir, 1996:13)

Livestock type	Cattle	Horses	Goats	Sheep
Herd size				
1 to 4	26%	32%	03%	07%
5 to 10	18%	14%	14%	07%
11 to 20	39%	-	03%	11%
21 to 35	11%	-	03%	-
36 to 60	03%	-	-	-
Over 60	03%	-	03%	-
Total	100%	46%	26%	25%

Although very few residents own large cattle herds, Park Management pointed out that a few can be classified as commercial farmers. Livestock farmers with herds exceeding 150 animals are considered to be commercial. Furthermore, some of the residents hire out grazing inside the Park to people outside the Park. These animals do not belong to the Park residents and they are operating their Park concession as a profitable scheme. Although the Park encourages entrepreneurship, this practice is detrimental to the Park in terms of overgrazing and the resultant erosion, and actually violates the basic Park mandate of conservation.

Other problems experienced by Park Management due to the presence of residents in the Park include fire hazards, dogs and the cutting of fences. During the bitterly cold winter months, it is not uncommon for residents moving through the Park to start a fire for warming. This has led to devastating veld fires on more than one occasion. Dogs owned by Park residents have been known to hunt and kill some of the game in the Park, and may also pose a security threat to visiting tourists and hikers. People moving in and out of the Park have been known to cut fences, which results in game and cattle straying from the Park.

9.1.5 Summary and discussion - Community

As seen from the previous discussions, the community resident in the Qwa-Qwa National Park has a definite effect on the operation of the Park and hence also on its tourism development efforts. It is true that the Park benefits from the community resident within its borders and vice versa. Yet, the problems (and benefits) are an issue purely because the community is actually resident in the Park. From the Park's perspective, if the community were not present, the majority of the problems would not be there. Without Park residents, the Park could concentrate on its mandated tasks of conservation and the development of tourism supporting it. In addition, all the benefits from the community could actually be obtained through employment.

From the community's perspective, the situation is almost identical. If the Park were non-existent, the community would be able to utilise the land as they pleased. They would not have access to any of the benefits that they are enjoying as a result of the existence of the Park, but this would also nullify the socio-political argument that residents are enjoying unfair advantages when compared to neighbouring communities.

The real issue is actually a dispute over the legal tenureship of the land covered by the QNP, an issue which is of course faced by all National Parks in South Africa. One cannot dismiss the expectations of the population in the light of the new political dispensation. In addition, there are favourable arguments in support of the community's claim to the land. In the same breath, one cannot ignore previous legal acquisitions of the land or the mandate of conservation given to the Park by previous governments.

This dissertation cannot make a judgement on which party's claim is more legitimate. What it does however highlight, is that leaving the issue unresolved is likely to compound the problem in the future.

9.2 Agri-Eco

The second role-player in the development of ecotourism in the Qwa-Qwa National Park is Agri-Eco. Agri-Eco, properly known as Free State Agriculture and Ecotourism Development (Proprietary) Limited, was formed on 11 May 1994. The background, structure, functions and problems of this parastatal is discussed in the next sections.

9.2.1 Background

In 1990 the Qwa-Qwa Tourism and Nature Conservation Corporation was founded with the Qwa-Qwa Government as the sole shareholder. From 1990-1993, ecotourism in Qwa-Qwa was managed and developed under the auspices of this corporation. At the end of 1993, just before the general elections of April 1994, the Qwa-Qwa Government rationalised all state-controlled corporations. A new corporation, Highlands Development Corporation, took over the management and development of ecotourism in Qwa-Qwa.

The establishment of new provincial governments after the 1994 elections, had an immediate and urgent impact on the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs of the former Free State province. In essence, the Department was charged with the incorporation, restructuring and where necessary, dismantling of the fragmented Agricultural Parastatals belonging to Qwa-Qwa, Bophuthatswana and the 'old' Free State governments.

The initial view taken during the incorporation process was that the previous parastatals had been designed to support the master plan of apartheid. They were therefore deemed to have no legitimate role in a future vision for development in the Free State. A major exercise was undertaken and an in-depth study conducted to redefine the role of these former parastatals. The study and consultation on a wide front revealed that, with restructuring and re-orientation, the resources of the former parastatals had the potential to become a major delivery agent for the reconstruction of agriculture and ecotourism within the Province.

As a result, parastatals such as the Highlands Development Corporation were unbundled and put under the direct control of the MEC (Member of the Executive Committee of the Provincial Government). This control was (and still is) exercised through Agri-Eco, a private company funded by the Free State Government with the MEC for Agriculture and Environmental Affairs as the sole shareholder.

Agri-Eco's board of directors, with guidance from the Rural Strategy Unit (RSU) recognised that the rural communities would require a range of services which would take them from poverty, beyond subsistence, to become full participating members of the broader South African economy.

The company's new focus is specifically geared towards the development of entrepreneurs in agriculture and ecotourism. It is interesting to note that this entrepreneurial development beyond subsistence is considered so crucial, that even Agri-Eco is expected to become self-sufficient within four years of its inception.

9.2.2 Structure and functions

Agri-Eco is divided into three departments (Figure 5). These are Rural Entrepreneurship Development, Support Services and Entrepreneurship Development Ecotourism. Each Head of Department reports to the Chief Executive Officer, which in turn reports to the Board on a monthly basis during management meetings. The Board reports to the responsible MEC once a year, but also on an ad hoc basis if needed.

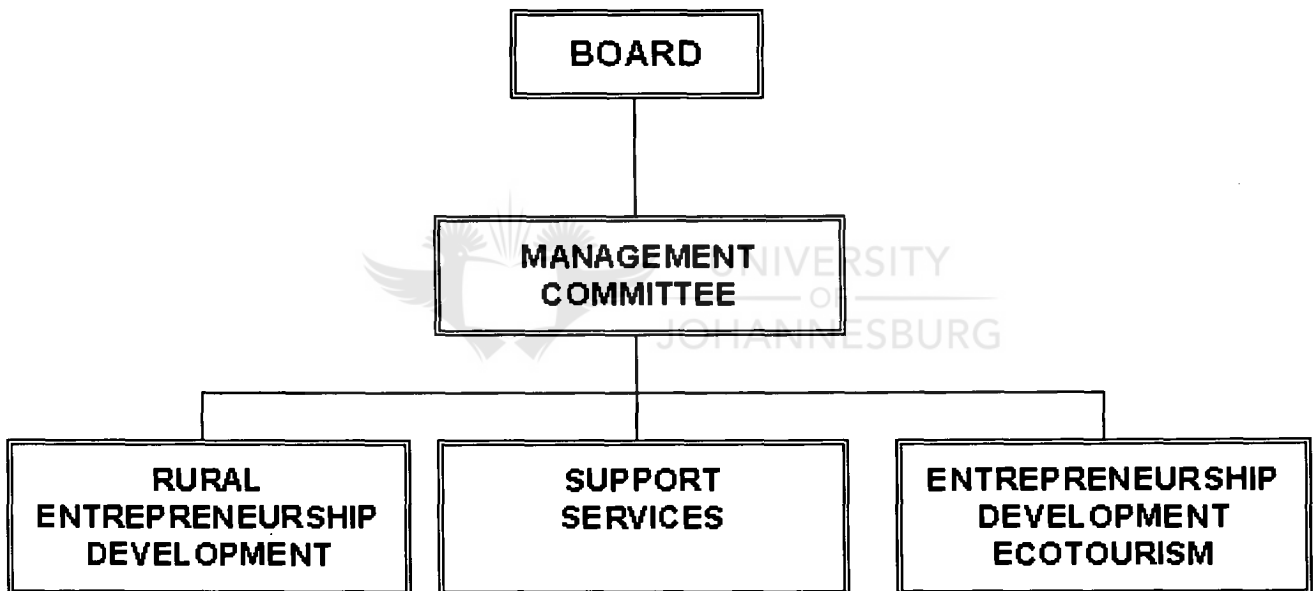


Figure 5: Agri-Eco organization chart

As this study focuses on the spatial aspects of political and social problems involved in establishing ecotourism in the Qwa-Qwa National Park, only Entrepreneurship Development Ecotourism and the role of the Qwa-Qwa National Park is discussed. The mission and functions of this Department, as outlined in Agric-Eco's public marketing literature, is as follows :

"The company will strive for substantive opportunities in ecotourism through entrepreneurial development, to involve rural communities in the Free state to reap social returns through long-term investments and to promote sustainable living. The company will be responsible for the creation and promotion of entrepreneurship opportunities within ecotourism. The focus will be on development operation in rural areas, where communities and other role players work together for mutual benefit and support.

Furthermore, recognizing the link between rural poverty and environmental degradation, the company will support and encourage environmentally appropriate socio-economic development. Where, to the benefit of the company, its staff, local communities and the environment, the private sector will be encouraged to become involved in the entrepreneurial activities, whether as operators, suppliers of services, developers of financiers. This involvement will be subject to a code of conduct."

One of Agri-Eco's ultimate goals is to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the Free State's people. At the same time it is to ensure that entrepreneurial development has a direct and positive impact on the well-being of its host communities. Due to the political climate at the of end 1993, beginning of 1994, not much was done to solve the problems concerning the development of ecotourism in Qwa-Qwa National Park (QNP). Agri-Eco inherited all of the socio-political issues mentioned earlier. In addition, further stumbling blocks in Agri-Eco's path to achieving its goals became apparent. These are detailed in the following subsection.

9.2.3 Problems experienced by Agri-Eco and its QNP staff

Within 4 years, the corporation or company responsible for ecotourism development in Qwa-Qwa National Park has changed three times. This, together with the wide range of socio-political and other problems negatively influence the development of ecotourism in the Qwa-Qwa National Park. The problems as experienced specifically by the QNP contingent of Agri-Eco staff are discussed in the following subsections :

Problems in developing ecotourism infrastructure

As mentioned in section 8, current ecotourism activities are distributed disproportionately through the Park and include overnight accommodation, hiking trails, pony trekking, 4x4 trials, game viewing, bird watching and hunting, the Basotho Cultural Village, as well as trophy hunting.

Ecotourism in the QNP was supposed to take place in three phases. The first phase was the development of the administration and service components, as well as putting the necessary systems in place. The second phase was the fencing off and introduction of game into the Park. These two phases were completed but the third phase, the development of ecotourism in the Park, is being affected by severe funding cuts by the Provincial Government. The only ecotourism development that has fully materialised, is the Basotho Cultural Village.

The provincial road running through the Park has not yet been deproclaimed by the Provincial Government. This means that the road is considered to be public as opposed to being under control of the Park. As a result, access to the Park cannot be controlled, and the general public can move freely through the park. Park Management views this uncontrolled movement of both tourists and passers-by through the Park as a problem. In the first instance, revenue is lost by not being able to charge admission fees. In addition, vehicles driving through the Park, seldom observe the speed limit of 80 km/h, thereby posing a safety risk to both visitors and game. Further, the ability of commercial trucking to pass through the park at all hours hardly reinforces the desirable image of a quiet ecotourism driven nature reserve.

The large herds of livestock in the Park result in two problems. The first problem is that of overgrazing. In particular, grazing by the 500-600 cattle in the Park is currently at a level where the carrying capacity of the veld is being exceeded. This affects grazing availability for game and accelerates soil erosion. In addition, the large cattle population and its resultant demand on grazing is impeding the introduction of more game into the Park. The presence of livestock and cultivated fields also reduce the aesthetic value of the Park. Tourists are invited to 'get away from it all' and enjoy the unspoilt beauty of the area. This marketing approach is being nullified when tourists discover livestock and farmlands in the game reserve. The cultivation issue also affects investment by private companies in that a large proportion of these have been known not to invest in game reserves where conservation is run in parallel to farming.

The development of ecotourism is further hampered by the fact that no comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has ever been completed in the Park. The issue is of serious consequence since the QNP forms part of the sensitive catchment area that provides water to the interior of South Africa. Current legislation requires that the development of such areas be subject to the findings of a comprehensive EIA. The lack of such an assessment is casting doubt over the legality of the development plans. It is ironic that this legislation is affecting the development process, but not the greater problem of environmentally damaging farming practices. Environmental Impact Assessments for some parts of the Park have been hinted at by studies of Landplan & Associates (1991) and Gouws *et al* (1988). The studies themselves can however hardly be considered as Environmental Impact Assessments, as it did not cover all environmental aspects that need to be taken into account when developing tourism facilities in the area.

Although not a tourism activity as such, the Environmental Education Centre, which catered mainly for pupils from disadvantaged communities, had to close at the end of July 1997. The failure of the centre to obtain the necessary funding and state subsidies led to the closure. With the centre closed, QNP has lost yet another conservation oriented facility, thereby weakening its position as a player in nature conservation.

Problems experienced with the Community

In addition to the issues discussed in section 9.1.4, Agric-Eco's QNP management has identified a shortage of conservational manpower in the Park. The ratio of worker per hectare is of the lowest in South Africa when compared with other game reserves (Hugo, 1996/97). This in itself is an indication that time is a limited resource for Park employees.

Very often Park Management is called upon in to assist in transporting sick residents to hospital or to transport water to a village inside the Park. Concerns were expressed by Park Management about this and whether it forms part of their mandate. It takes up a lot time and also incurs costs and the feeling was that somewhere ' a line should be drawn'.

The various community and entrepreneurial projects running in the Park also demand time from Agri-Eco employees. It is estimated that the services of two park employees are effectively lost due to project coordination undertaken by them. Park Management tries to carry the project workers beyond subsistence as one of the Agri-Eco founding goals, but as this entitles a full-time job, it cannot always be performed to the extent envisaged.

Problems pertaining to law enforcement

Law enforcement in National Parks has always been an issue. The Qwa-Qwa National Park is no exception in this regard, as it needs to deal with poaching, wilful destruction of endangered species and other abuses of the land under its control. In the case of the QNP, the issues of law enforcement are complicated by the recent developments in the area.

After the 1994 general elections, the former homelands of Qwa-Qwa and Thaba Nchu (Bophuthatswana) were incorporated into the 'old' Free State Province. Each of the former homelands had its own laws pertaining to nature conservation. To solve this problem, the provincial government gazetted a ruling that the laws of all three former territories were binding. Attempting to enforce law subject to three different statutes in the Qwa-Qwa National Park is proving to be most challenging. It is extremely difficult to assess the applicability of the three sets of laws in any one specific case, especially since the enforcers of these laws are normally not experts in the finer interpretation of three sets of different laws, a daunting task even to trained legal practitioners. At present, it is attempted to prosecute transgressors in the Park under criminal law rather than the nature conservation statutes.

Problems resulting from internal restructuring within Agri-Eco

At the moment Agri-Eco is restructuring the company. This is leading to changes in management staff, their management spheres and the allocation of responsibilities. The restructuring process has also cut staff numbers by up to 50%, resulting in a capacity problem. Since many experienced members of staff have accepted severance packages, the required skills and knowledge are largely absent in the newly appointed management, a situation that a large number of interviewed Agri-Eco employees confirmed.

Problems related to the Agri-Eco Board of Directors

The initial Agri-Eco Board of Directors consisted of five members appointed by the Provincial Government in 1994. The individual members were :

- the chairperson of the Rural Strategy Unit, a Free State based organization active in the development of rural communities,
- a lecturer of the Department of Geography (Free State University),
- a farmer/businessman of Qwa-Qwa,
- the chairperson of the Free State Development Corporation, and
- a community representative with political affiliation.

At the start of 1997, two additional members were appointed by the Provincial Government, increasing the board from five to seven members. These two new members originated from the government Department of Nature Conservation and Tourism, where they were employed in a temporary capacity. After just seven months of service, the two board members were replaced by another duo of government officials. As with the previous two board members, the appointments were temporary since their employment has not yet been sanctioned by the Free State legislature. In addition, one of the original five board members (the community representative) had passed away and at the time of writing, this post is still vacant.

The reshuffling and high turnover of Board Members has had a profound effect on the capability of the board to perform its functions. Since new board members have not been fully familiar with the prevailing state of affairs or the issues affecting the QNP, large portions of the liaison time between the board and Park Management is being spent on orientating the new members and explaining the issues to them. Understandably, each new Board member tries to make his own contribution in these discussions, which often results in the re-negotiation of the vision for ecotourism development, the consultation process, how to solve the problems, etc.

Compounding the problems caused by the large turnover in board membership was the uncovering of irregularities within the establishment and running of Agri-Eco itself. The subsequent Commission of enquiry, which is discussed later, resulted in the suspension of new appointments to the board, as well as a feeling of uncertainty as to the future existence and role of the board.

The change for the Qwa-Qwa National Park in its upper management structure from a localised corporation to part of the province-wide Agri-Eco was accepted with mixed attitudes. Used to being left to 'get on with the job', the QNP was now exposed not only to the Agri-Eco Board's directives and policy formulation, but also to direct management approaches from the Board.

Conflicting views were expressed by Agri-Eco employees about the Board getting directly involved in management. Some felt that the entities of Provincial Government, the Board and Agri-Eco employees were brought closer together in the 'new order' and that within the dynamic relationship, they have no problem with the Board managing as well. Others felt that the Board was interfering with their jobs. Another view expressed was that the Board was incompetent. Very few Board members actually lived in the vicinity of the Qwa-Qwa National Park. It was felt by the proponents of the latter view that this lack of participation in the community largely marginalized the role that the Board can play in the Qwa-Qwa area.

Problems resulting from Government interaction with Agri-Eco

From April up to September 1995, the Ecotourism Division of Agri-Eco functioned under the Free State Government Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism. A moratorium was placed on all new projects, blocking their continuation until such time as they had been fully investigated by the Department. Good co-operation with the MEC resulted in the abolition of the moratorium with the understanding that any ecotourism projects should be resubmitted to the Board for approval. As a result, Agri-Eco could continue operating efficiently with regards to its plans for ecotourism.

Shortly afterwards, a dispute developed concerning the placement of Agri-Eco's Ecotourism Division within the structure of Government Departments. Since ecotourism is closely linked to Nature Conservation, it was felt that the two should both be facilitated by the same Government Department. Nature Conservation formed part of the portfolio of the MEC for Agriculture and Environmental Affairs. After consultations between the MEC for Agriculture and Environmental Affairs and the MEC for Economic Affairs and Tourism, it was decided to place the Ecotourism Division of Agri-Eco under the control of the MEC for Agriculture and Environmental Affairs. The change involved the re-allocation of reporting structures and revision of policies former earlier.

During June/July 1996 the ruling ANC (African National Congress) government in the Free State experienced severe friction amongst its own ranks. This friction was covered extensively in the

media which amongst others reported allegations of widespread mismanagement and nepotism. The causes and validity of these allegations are not of relevance to this study - what is however relevant is that this event led to intervention from the National Government and that an extensive reshuffling of the entire Free State Government and its departments resulted.

The reshuffling exercise directly affected the departments that had until then exercised control over Agri-Eco and in particular its ecotourism division. The most serious effect on Agri-Eco was that the controlling body was changed once again (from the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs back to the Department of Economic Affairs and Tourism). This largely “back to square one” issue once again caused the changing of reporting structures and the inevitable re-scrutiny of policy.

As can be expected after three changes of responsible Government Structures in two years and another three changes within four years of the company or corporation responsible for developing ecotourism, Agri-Eco employees and specifically QNP staff were negatively affected. There was much uncertainty about their job security, whether the ‘new’ MEC would still favour the continuation of the Park or whether the country-wide National Parks Administration would be called in to take control of the Qwa-Qwa National Park. The lack of any clear direction from Government resulted in the situation where the development of ecotourism stagnated and the associated projects ground to a halt.

The seeming lack of any one body empowered to approve or cancel any of the developing ecotourism projects effectively dismisses any work done on ecotourism projects as of little consequence. A good example of this issue is the response Park Management encountered on attempting to obtain permission to build a new guest house. Different government officials provided different responses, one being affirmative, the other negative. Neither of the two officials was prepared to put his directive in writing. Effectively, Park Management’s administrative powers have been entirely nullified.

Problems with Government funding

At the time of writing, the three divisions of Agri-Eco were being funded by two different Government departments. The divisions of Rural Entrepreneurship Development and Support Services were funded by the Department of Agriculture, while the remaining division of Entrepreneurship, Development and Ecotourism was funded by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. This created management problems within Agri-Eco, as the two government departments have different policies and methods of operations.

The “commuting” of Agri-Eco’s divisions between various government departments as mentioned earlier, has also been a factor in the procurement of funding for Agri-Eco. In the case of the Entrepreneurship, Development and Ecotourism division’s case, the change in overseeing

government department from the Department of Agriculture back to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in July 1996 caused a serious dilemma. At the time of the reinstatement of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism as department responsible for the division, the latter had already received its funding from its former department (the Department of Agriculture). This funding had to be returned, but, since this change could probably not have been foreseen at the time of budget allocation, no replacement funding was forthcoming. It is interesting to note that at no time the required funding was officially refused or any notification of cuts provided. The expected funding from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism just simply did not materialise. At the time that research for this study was completed (October 1997), no trace of the "missing" funding has come to light. The "disowned" division has been using funds from its reserves as well as funds from its sister divisions within Agri-Eco to survive. Needless to say, this survival has been achieved by particularly frugal spending.

In similar style, the subsidy for the Agri-Eco division of Entrepreneurship Development and Ecotourism has not increased in the last three years. In fact, a general directive given by Provincial Government has demanded a cut in expenditures by 15%. When considering the presiding rate of inflation, the current budget deficit is approaching 30%. This is of course somewhat inconsequential since the funding itself, whether cut by 15% or not, was at the time of writing simply not forthcoming.

The effects of this lack of funding have been predictable. Park Management has scaled down operations and cut back on normal expenditures. The Environmental Training Centre was closed at the end of July 1997, uniforms for personnel were not replaced and necessary maintenance on buildings shelved. Although the day to day running of the Park continues, funding for ecotourism and infrastructure development has effectively been terminated. With ecotourism having been considered a valuable source of income in the future, this having been proven by the success of the Basotho Cultural Village and the QNP guest houses, the original Agri-Eco goal of self reliance within four years now seems unlikely to materialise.

The only hope of resuscitating ecotourism development appears to be development on a joint venture basis with the private sector. This seems to be backed by the Free State Government, although no clear directive to this effect appears to exist. It is certainly not apparent in the government's actions with regards to the privatization of other projects such as the Qwa-Qwa Hotel, Witsieshoek Berg Resort and Fiko Patso Resort which were put on hold by the 'new' MEC. Despite this, initial investigations into the feasibility of private sector involvement has provided promising results. Several parties, amongst them a large corporate, have expressed interest in such ventures and have conditionally committed themselves to investments. (It is considered prudent not to mention the names of the potential investment since the details are confidential).

There remains one major obstacle though - the private sector has by and large indicated that it is not prepared to invest in the development of ecotourism unless the land for the proposed

projects is owned by Agri-Eco. When the Qwa-Qwa National Park became the responsibility of the then MEC for Agriculture and Environmental Affairs through the parastatal Agri-Eco, the idea was that Agri-Eco would eventually become the owners of the Park. Although the possible future ownership of the QNP by Agri-Eco appears to have been assured, it is not at present the case and its realization cannot be taken for granted. A major obstacle in the way is the issue of land claims as discussed in the following section.

Problems related to land claims

Land claims are at the centre of a heated debate throughout South Africa as well as countries which were formerly subjected to European colonization. It is beyond the scope of this study to address the history of and reasons behind the issue of Land Claims. It will suffice to say that land claims by the previously disadvantaged communities of South Africa is proving to be a major factor in the Qwa-Qwa National Park.

Both individuals from inside and outside the Park have lodged claims to parts of the land currently constituting the QNP. The National Department of Land Affairs has appointed a person to investigate these claims and to make recommendations. This report is expected to be concluded in the second quarter of 1998. Since the report is not likely to be released before the conclusion of this study, its recommendation cannot be included here.

9.2.4 Summary and discussion - Agri-Eco

The establishment of Agri-Eco to develop and manage tourism in the Free State must be commended as a good idea. Not only was the idea to provide a means of helping previously disadvantaged communities establish entrepreneurial businesses in line with the National Government's policy of economically empowering the nation, but its focus on protecting the environment through the development of ecotourism as opposed to mass tourism, visionary. To further accomplish these goals with a strong possibility of eventual self-sufficiency and hence no burden on the tax-payer, has the characteristics of a winning combination.

What followed is a prime example of how things should not be done. Of all the Agri-Eco problems discussed, there are essentially just two major issues. The first of these concerns government. It is simply impossible for any person or corporation to perform a task if one is not given the authority to make decisions. The almost endless restructuring and re-organization of departments and reporting structures is simply not conducive to getting the job done. It is true that consideration should be given to the difficulties that the new Free State Government faces, it is after all the very first time that it has got the opportunity to govern and it is far-fetched to assume that it has all the experience to perform this task faultlessly. It also faces the tremendous expectations of the population that voted it into power. Nevertheless, its inability to provide clear policies and direction, the appalling inefficiency in the manner that it has been perceived to

conduct its funding operations and its inability to make firm decisions, may have destroyed the opportunities that ecotourism development can offer.

The second major factor once again deals with the land issue. Ecotourism can only be conducted in areas where the environment is of an attractive and unique nature. It is largely pointless to attempt ecotourism development in the featureless flats of the western Free State for example. This means that the scenic areas as exemplified by the Qwa-Qwa National Park are scarce resources. For ecotourism development to still have a chance, land claims in this area should be settled in another manner, whether it be by cash settlement, eviction or the granting of alternative land.

9.3 The Provincial Government

The Free State Provincial Government is the third role-player involved in ecotourism development in the Qwa-Qwa National Park. As mentioned in 2.1, no information had been forthcoming from the MEC's offices or government officials. Although information about the Provincial Government and the problems experienced in the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism had been received from other role-players, it would be presumptuous of the author to use this information. Therefore, not much can be said about the third role-player and the problems experienced by the Provincial Government with regard to ecotourism development.

It is a great pity that the Provincial Government was not prepared to discuss its point of view on ecotourism with the author. It is felt that participation would not only have highlighted issues that they may not be aware of, but also illustrate the danger they face in sidelining a potential industry that could offer them achievement of some of their primary goals.

10. SOLUTIONS

Up to this point, this study has concentrated on highlighting all the factors surrounding the development of ecotourism in the Qwa-Qwa National Park. Even though opinions were provided in the summary paragraphs, it would be incomplete without presenting some recommendations for solving the problems pertaining to ecotourism development in the area of the QNP. It is attempted to provide three possible solutions here.

10.1 Solution 1 - Abandonment of ecotourism (not suggested)

This cannot truly be labelled as a real solution from the point of view of the author. Nevertheless, it is an option that needs to be considered as a solution to the issues facing the development of ecotourism. It effectively calls for the disbandment of the Qwa-Qwa National Park, the abandonment of its ecotourism initiatives and the allocation of the land to a committee for the handling of land claims. The disbandment of the Park does settle the land claims, but it does nothing to economically empower the community. In fact, it actually deprives the community of an invaluable resource towards obtaining economic empowerment and is likely to cause discontent in the community as to the exact land allocation granted. It is further likely to destroy the sensitive catchment area that the QNP currently constitutes.

10.2 Solution 2 - Full conservation and eviction of Park residents

In this solution, the QNP is declared to be an important catchment area and accordingly placed under full conservation. Park residents are evicted, perhaps with some form of compensation. The Park is put under direct state control which may or may not opt to allow low environmental impact visits such as ecotourism.

Although this is probably the best solution from an purely conservational point of view, the human impact needs to be considered. Enforced relocation is rather reminiscent of the previous government's eviction under the Apartheid Group Areas Act. In addition, the solution is not likely to provide the full economic benefits that intense ecotourism development are expected to yield.

10.3 Solution 3 - Controlled accommodation of Park residents and full ecotourism development

In this possible solution, each park resident family gets a subsidy from the Government to buy their own land, either in the Park where it is fenced off with communal grazing within this fenced-off area or with grazing situated completely outside the boundaries of the Park. Alternatively, the government grants Park residents sections of the Park and separates the Park from the current Park residents by means of fencing. The Park or what remains of it, becomes Agri-Eco property to be developed as an ecotourism destination in combination with the private sector.

This solution offers the best of both worlds. Park Residents can remain in the area and are likely to continue enjoying most of their Park benefits. The Qwa-Qwa National Park continues to preserve the sensitive catchment areas. Ecotourism development is possible due to private sector funding which generates income and provides entrepreneurial opportunities to the surrounding communities.

10.4 Final Observations

The three solutions outlined are highly simplistic. Combinations and permutations are possible and the amount of detail required to implement any of these is envisaged to be substantial. Nevertheless, they do capture the essence of the two extremes and the benefit of a compromise solution somewhere in between.

11. CONCLUSION

Qwa-Qwa National Park has tremendous potential for ecotourism development. This type of development can provide the much needed employment and economic growth in the area. The advent of the new Free State Provincial Government and in particular the establishment of Agri-Eco has provided an ideal vehicle for unlocking the wealth promised by ecotourism development. Ecotourism should be prioritised because of the rapidity with which economic growth can be generated - even in previously uncommercialised regions such as Qwa-Qwa.

At present, the development of ecotourism and its resultant benefits are under severe threat. Exploitation of the area is steadily eroding the suitability of the Park as an ideal location for ecotourism development. The pronounced absence of funding has resulted in existing development grinding to an abrupt halt. Disputes over the ownership of the Qwa-Qwa National Park land are not only threatening the destruction of the Park as a nature reserve, but also the financial investment desperately needed from the private sector. Changes in the structure of the Provincial Department and frequent replacement of the responsible MEC for Ecotourism, results in the lack of directive policy. Aggravating the situation is the Free State Government's apparent ignorance, lack of interest and appreciation of the opportunity being expended.

Unless the Provincial Department gets its house in order and starts making constructive decisions regarding the development in the Park, the future of ecotourism development is bleak. There is much at stake: the community in and around the Park can not share in the benefits associated with ecotourism development, Agri-Eco employees face the real possibility of losing their jobs and South Africa stands to lose the use of one of its important sensitive catchment areas.

The study aimed to highlight possible hurdles in the way of ecotourism development in the Qwa-Qwa National Park. It has attempted to identify these and to propose possible solutions in overcoming them. Attempts were made to gather as many different points of views from the various role players involved. It is felt that the different points of view have been accurately presented and discussed, although some dismay at the disinterest on the part of the Free State Government to participate remains.

The question remains on whether it was felt that the study had succeeded in obtaining it's objectives. In response, the study set out to find the hurdles that burdened the development of ecotourism in the Qwa-Qwa National Park. Instead, it has found more than mere hurdles - what was found would better be personified as a substantial rock positioned on the edge of a cliff, poised to fall down the abyss forever and crushing the opportunities in its path.



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