

Integrating development and conservation through tourism in southern Africa: A poisoned chalice?

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Introduction

The dominant conservation narrative or the 'modern conservation paradigm' (Phillips 2003) contends that it is only through market forces and private property rights that protected areas can fulfil their developmental and traditional, ecological roles (Hulme and Mupfhee, 1999; Brown, 2002). I refer to the above narrative hereafter, as neoliberal conservation after Buscher and Whande (2007), to signify that it is a dogma that is embedded in neoliberal development orthodoxy. Neoliberalism is a heavily contested term that generically refers to a philosophy that celebrates the power of 'free' markets and private property rights as efficient resource allocation mechanisms (Bond and Gor, 2003; Harvey, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2007). The pursuit of economic growth in a liberalised trade environment is envisaged as leading to prosperity for everyone via the 'trickle-down' effect (Dollar and Kraay 2000). Neoliberalism also casts poverty and global environmental problems as emanating from the absence of free markets and private property rights. Following the World Bank (2001), Ashley and Roe (2002) and Zhao and Ritchie (2007), I use the term poverty in this paper in its holistic sense. That is, to refer to its multi-faceted nature that includes issues of lack of opportunities, vulnerability, power and representation alongside its restricted meaning of limited incomes. As Ashley and Roe (2002: 73) notes, "poverty is not only a lack of income. The poor often suffer vulnerability, ill-health, and lack of opportunity, disrespect and limited access to public and private assets."

The "neoliberalisation of nature" (Castree 2008b: 153) in the name of biodiversity conservation and community development can be traced to several key events including the adoption of UNESCO's Biosphere Reserve concept in 1970, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) General Assembly's 1975 Kinshasa Resolution and the 1982 Bali World Park Congress (Ghimire and Pimbert 1997; Adams and Hutton 2007; Buscher and Whande 2007). These events marked the beginning of the official recognition of the human dimensions of biodiversity conservation (McNeeley, 1994; Colchester, 2004; Ramutsindela, 2004). Thus, there was a radical revision of protected areas' roles, at least on paper (Adams and Hutton, 2007) mainly because of dissatisfaction with 'fortress conservation', the dominant approach until this time (Phillips, 2003). Fortress conservation refers to the establishment and management of protected areas without due regard to local populations' needs. Several researchers regard fortress conservation as having failed to deliver on its ecological mandate primarily because of its neglect of the social dimensions of biodiversity conservation (Neumann, 1998, 2001; Hulme and Mupfhee, 2001; Murombedzi, 2003; Ramutsindela, 2004; Buscher and Whande, 2007). It is also well-documented that fortress conservation or socially exclusive protected areas impoverished locals, destroyed local cultures and led to biodiversity loss, among other unsustainable outcomes (Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997). However, it must be borne in mind that not all commentators agree with the notion of socially-