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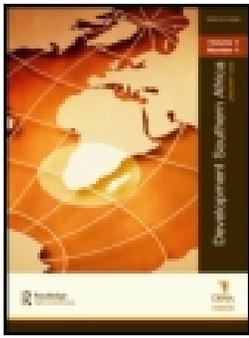
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Published online: 28 Oct 2020.

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Doing tourism in Southern Africa amid the coronavirus pandemic: Navigating political, socio-economic and environmental inequalities

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to ignite a conversation on the challenges of the ongoing 'novel' surrounding the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic in the Southern Africa region. The global COVID-19 pandemic started with the outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. It is understood that different countries, regions and territories will have different, context-specific challenges in fighting the pandemic. These will differ from country to country and therefore necessitates contextual research. By sharing African perspectives on swift action against this coronavirus, this paper is intended to appraise the nexus between the coronavirus and tourism in order to prepare tourism practitioners for the recovery strategies that will be needed to address the damages caused by the pandemic. This paper points to tourism researchers focusing on the Southern African region and possible key areas for further research as the coronavirus situation unfolds. It draws from published material and document analysis, including from academic research, media reports and social media platforms.

1. Introduction

Tourism is the backbone and/or enabler of socio-economic growth and development for most Southern African countries (Christie et al., 2013). It provides decent livelihoods to many people in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, including the peripherals in the regions (United Nations, 2013). Notably, tourism offers employment and is a source of income for most people, serves as a key vehicle in conserving the environment and nature (Leonard, 2016), connects businesses (Rinne, 2015; Woyo & Slabbert, 2019) and integrates communities (Nsukwini & Bob, 2019), and is a source of foreign currency (Sharpely, 2009). Despite decades of accruing tourism benefits (OECD, 2018), the sector has experienced diverse shocks of varied magnitude. Because these differ between the developed and developing world, and from country to country, contextual research on

challenges is required. This is especially pertinent to Southern Africa, where resources are limited and securing livelihoods is a necessity for most people. A considerable amount of literature has been published on community resilience (Musavengane et al., 2020) and disaster or crisis management strategies have been implemented to rejuvenate the sector and organisations (Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020). However, the recent emergence of the novel coronavirus (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 – SARS-CoV-2) that caused the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) posed 'unique' but seemingly 'common' challenges across the tourism sector in the region and globally (Africa Outlook, 2020). Nevertheless, the sector has the capacity to rejuvenate. It 'will provide the jobs people need to bounce back and will drive economic growth that will help whole communities and countries to recover' – (UNWTO, 2020a). Hence, the need to discuss challenges for the Southern African tourism sector and possible areas for further research to reopen the sector. This is supported by growing global calls to respond to the challenges to reopen the sector (see Ndenze, 2020; UNWTO, 2020b).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020, months after it was first reported in Wuhan (China) on 31 December 2019 (WHO, 2020a). In an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19, most countries imposed restrictive travelling measures to protect their citizens by flattening the curve of the spread of the disease (UNWTO, 2020c). This ultimately affected the tourism industry negatively (UNWTO, 2020a). In their advisories, international organisations such as the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) urged travellers to stay home to save lives and advised them to travel in future (UNWTO, 2020c). Where there is no travelling, there is no tourism – and no income for people and communities who depend on tourism for their livelihoods. Due to the restrictions, the sector is characterised by grounded planes (Black, 2020), empty hotels (Feuer, 2020), closed restaurants (Dube et al., 2020), deserted recreational facilities and parks (Dolesh & Colman, 2020), and high unemployment (UNWTO, 2020a). To cement this, fear to travel seems to have taken hold of many people for an indeterminate period (Jamal & Budke, 2020). Several studies have documented that customer perceptions on destinations have a direct influence on their travelling ability (Musavengane, 2019).

Generally, tourism thrives on the ability of people to travel from one point to another (UNWTO, 2020c). Without this ability to travel, the future of tourism is uncertain. Travel remains the focal point of epidemiology and disease control units globally (Hon, 2013). Thus, travel and tourism are key enablers in the spread of pandemic diseases such as Ebola and COVID-19 (Gössling et al., 2020). Therefore, the pertinent question is: What does the future hold for the tourism sector? This highlights the need to urgently develop destination recovery strategies to resuscitate the tourism sector when economies start to open, as is happening now. However, the recovery strategies may not be relevant to the entire world as the impacts differ from country to country and from region to region. For example, the economic, social and environmental recovery strategies in Southern Africa will be dependent on financial and technological resources, which are limited.

In light of the above, this paper is intended to ignite a conversation on recovering the tourism sector in the Southern Africa region based on the existing product mix by taking into account the challenges of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It shares insights on the COVID-19 and tourism discourse, and provides pointers for further research in an

endeavour to develop sector-related recovery strategies. Due to the ever-evolving nature of the pandemic, the paper seeks to provoke critical thinking among tourism researchers and policy makers on how to tackle COVID-19-related challenges in the tourism sector.

2. Methodology

A critical commentary approach is used to systematically discuss the emerging themes of the nexus between COVID-19 and tourism development. As mentioned, it is understood that the pandemic poses different challenges to different countries, regions and territories will are context specific. The paper draws from published material, including academic research, media reports and social media platforms. In addition, the multidisciplinary knowledge of the three authors enables them to provide key insights (the 1st author is involved in tourism geographies, the 2nd author is an environmental sociologist, and the 3rd author is a public health physician and district medical officer).

Examples are drawn from some of the 15 member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which include Angola, Botswana, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (SADC, 2020). Nevertheless, examples in Africa and beyond are used sparsely to stress essential points where necessary. The discussion is thematically organised on the basis of literature/publications, social and traditional media, and news reports. Pointers for further research are provided, as it is too early to make conclusive recommendations, based on the nature of this paper.

3. Why tourism matters at the hype of the pandemic in Southern Africa?

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) reported a 5.6% boom in travel and tourism in Africa in 2018, compared to the global average of 3.9% and the broader African economy of 3.2% (WTTC, 2019). The travel and tourism industry contributed US$194.2 billion to the region's economy, representing 8.5% of the continent's gross domestic product (GDP). In terms of employment, it contributed 24.3 million jobs (6.7%) in Africa. In 2018, 71% of tourism spending across Africa was leisure driven and 29% was business development. Domestic spending contributed 56% to the tourism economy and a 44% contribution came from international travellers. International tourism spending comprised 9.6% of the region's total exports worth US$58.5 billion (WTTC, 2019). The WTTC projects that sub-Saharan Africa's direct travel and tourism GDP will grow by 60% from 2018 to 2029. As such, the industry is pivotal in the development of the region. COVID-19 is thus a drawback to the efforts accumulated over a long period of time by African and international tourism players. In light of the travel restrictions across the world, the UNWTO (2020a) projected that globally, international tourist arrivals will be down by 20% to 30% in 2020 compared to 2019 figures. However, these numbers are based on the latest unprecedented social and economic challenges posed by COVID-19 and can be reviewed upwards or downwards as the situation unfolds.

Gössling et al. (2020, 2) argue that

there is much evidence that COVID-19 will be different and transformative for the tourism sector. Governments only begin to understand that, unlike other business sectors, tourism revenue is permanently lost because unsold capacity – for instance in accommodation – cannot be marketed in subsequent years, with corresponding implications for employment in the sector.

Other industries can lock up stock and sell it later but for travel and tourism, it is losses all the way because tourism is seen as a value chain that connects all service industries. Thus, it is essential to draw destination-specific recovery strategies in light of COVID-19 to revive the distressed travel and tourism industry.

4. Dialogue on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism in Southern Africa and development potentials

Dialogue on the impact of the pandemic is presented under five main themes: (1) market potential, (2) health-related considerations, (3) social impacts, (4) environmental impacts and (5) political-related issues that may have an impact on regional integration.

4.1. Market potential

The 2019 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report highlighted that sub-Saharan Africa has massive growth potential interwoven with multiple structural, institutional, economic and socio-economic challenges (Calderwood & Soshkin, 2019). These development potentials are produced in interaction with risks and losses from disaster events (Fraser et al., 2017). The region houses a number of heritage sites. However, in 2017, with all the sub-Saharan African countries signing the World Heritage Convention, only 9% of World Heritage sites on the list were African (UNESCO, 2018). Furthermore, on average, sub-Saharan African countries have nearly 15% more known species than others in the ranking (Calderwood & Soshkin, 2019). Regardless of this, the region is the least competitive in terms of travel and tourism, with the exception of South Africa and the Seychelles ranking among the top scorers on the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) (Calderwood & Soshkin, 2019). The large gap between sub-Saharan Africa's natural resources score rankings and the overall TTCI scores tend to emanate from a number of risks in the region, including deep-rooted inequality, environmental deterioration, exponential urbanisation (Fraser et al., 2017), poor governance (Siakwah et al, 2019), health and hygiene concerns, and underdeveloped infrastructure (Musavengane et al., 2020). Combined, these pose a huge challenge to the region in light of the insurgence of pandemics such as COVID-19, Ebola and SARS. There is an urgent for resilient strategies to sustain sub-Saharan African destinations.

4.2. Health-related considerations

Pandemics have caused untold suffering and chaos worldwide. The enormous impact of these crises has far-reaching effects on the tourism sector in developing countries due to an over-reliance on tourism receipts. A drop in tourist numbers, increase in unemployment, weakened profits, reduced investment and less government revenue often exacerbate socio-economic conditions and may propel countries into a worsened state of

fragility (Novelli et al., 2018). UNWTO (2020a) notes that in 2009, on the back of the global economic crisis, international tourist arrivals declined by 4%; while the SARS outbreak led to a decline of just 0.4% in 2003. Furthermore, pandemic diseases such as Ebola and SARS have also resulted in discrimination and misinformation on the countries central to the outbreaks and the current pandemic shows a similar trajectory.

Jamal & Budke (2020) point out that addressing a pandemic must be part of every crisis. Preparation, planning and response strategies are critical for addressing pandemic effects to ensure that less harm is done to the society, environment and economy. Key lessons learned from past pandemics show, first, that responsibility and care are needed for residents and local communities along the entire spectrum of a pandemic, from the start to the end stage. Second, service providers and workers within the tourism industry must have an adequate knowledge base and must be prepared to deal with guests without turning them away due to fear that they may be carrying diseases. Third, intersectoral communication needs to remain activated between key tourism and hospitality stakeholders and the local and regional public health authorities as part of a proactive strategic response plan. Fourth, global institutional structures beyond those like the UNWTO and WTTC are needed to help the tourism industry prepare and respond to global health emergencies. Additional research is needed on the indirect effects of health-related crises on vulnerable destinations, especially in developing countries.

Infection prevention and control are key components of the WHO's eight pillars of the response to COVID-19 (WHO, 2020b). These pillars are as follows.

- Pillar 1: Country-level coordination, planning and monitoring;
- Pillar 2: Risk communication and community engagement;
- Pillar 3: Surveillance, rapid response teams and case investigation;
- Pillar 4: Points of entry;
- Pillar 5: National laboratories;
- Pillar 6: Infection prevention and control;
- Pillar 7: Case management;
- Pillar 8: Operational support and logistics.

For the tourism industry, it is like an attempt to solve a mysterious puzzle, as most change managers are not accustomed to this type of response. It requires that medical experts and public health specialist guide firms, hotels and recreational resorts in ensuring that a business is opened or a plan for re-entry is addressed. Further study using collaborative and social network theories need to be undertaken.

4.2.1. Medical tourism in Southern Africa

Medical tourism has not been spared the threat of COVID 19. People cannot travel for medical reasons to countries with well-developed health systems. Will this be an opportunity for African leaders to focus on rebuilding medical facilities to save their citizens? Most African countries' medical sector is strained due to lack of development of facilities, as most leaders rely on foreign hospitals (Gordine, 2020).

South Africa has been leading the medical tourism fraternity in the region (International Medical Travel Journal, 2020). It attracts most patients, especially from

neighbouring countries with challenged medical facilities. South Africa's medical leadership is further shown by it being the first on the continent to launch a clinical trial for a Covid-19 vaccine (Ox1Cov-19 Vaccine VIDA-Trial) (Witwatersrand University, 2020). Regardless of the outcome, it is a positive sign that the once despised continent – and region (Southern Africa) – has the capacity to solve global medical challenges.

Furthermore, since Africa is blessed with natural abundance, reliance on traditional or nature-based medication is normal for some people. Madagascar announced a breakthrough organic-based medication for COVID-19 (Africanews, 2020). Despite global criticism (Baker, 2020) and lack of international support, Madagascar plans to provide the Covid-Organics capsules to its hospitals and has exported them to countries in West Africa and other countries (Africanews, 2020).

4.3. Social impacts

4.3.1. Race, class and equity issues amid COVID-19

Disasters, if not managed well, can lead to chaotic environments filled with injustice that give rise to negative emotions such as anger. Ritchie (2004) notes that understanding and subsequent management of chaos, crises and disasters can be vastly improved through the extension and application of crisis and disaster management theory and concepts from other disciplines, coupled with the development of specific tourism crisis management research and frameworks. Researchers are therefore encouraged to be multi-disciplinary when developing best recovery strategies in view of the COVID-19 impacts on guest–host relations and the sector at large.

The COVID-19 discourse and social inequalities specifically ignited discrimination and xenophobic behaviour among citizens and visitors in China and outside China (Jamal & Budke, 2020; Li, 2020; Vincent C, 2020; Vincent D, 2020). It was reported that African nationals were mistreated by Chinese residents and companies for importing the virus to China (Al Jazeera, 2020a). Videos showing the mistreatment of Africans living in the Chinese city of Guangzhou circulated on social media and angered Africans globally (Al Jazeera, 2020a). Headlines on these incidents included 'Mistreatment of Africans in Guangzhou threatens China's coronavirus diplomacy' (Li, 2020), 'Africans in China: We face coronavirus discrimination' (Vincent D, 2020), and 'Viral racist treatment of Africans in China sparks Twitter outrage' (Alfa Shaban, 2020). Similarly, in the USA, reports about the mistreatment of black people by health professionals were rife. One the headings in the *New York Times* read 'Questions of bias in Covid-19 treatment add to the mourning for black families' (Eligon & Burch, 2020). However, some Africans in the Sub-Saharan region feared to associate with Chinese nationals. Presence (2020) reported that since the first report of COVID-19 in South Africa, people of Chinese descent living in South Africa faced xenophobic violence. This was echoed on social media by a number of Chinese across the continent, including China's ambassador to Zimbabwe on his Twitter handle.

Globally, there has been growing interest among tourism researchers on race and social equity issues (Musavengane, 2019; Musavengane & Leonard, 2019; Benjamin et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2020; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020). In Southern Africa, in particular South Africa, the issue of xenophobia is of concern and has been of interest among researchers (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2012). Xenophobic and racial tensions negatively affect

tourism. There is need for black Africans to accept and value one another if domestic and regional tourism are to be successful strategies for reopening the sector. For example, Twitter reveals how some black Africans hate one another: #Nigeriansmustfall, #ZimbabweansMustFall, #Ghanamustfall, #Togomustfall. Despite the political-induced economic conditions of these nationalities, a call for the fall of a fellow black African is not in the interest of regionalism and deter regional tourism.

It is of great concern to the tourism sector when the host becomes hostile to visitors, as exemplified in scenarios above. It is critical that governments, government officials and residents embrace humanity and social civilisation to promote the co-existence and co-habitation of people, regardless of race, class or clan. In South Africa, the common word to describe this is 'Ubuntu'.

> Ubuntu is essentially about togetherness, and how all of our actions have an impact on others and on society. It is the common thread of the UN's Global Goals, and the motivation in the mission to end extreme poverty – so that everyone, everywhere, can live equally. (Williams, 2018)

In addition, in adopting domestic and regional approaches, it is important to address local people's perceptions on tourism as they appear to have been excluded from the tourism system (Musavengane, 2019). Furthermore, with the economic challenges induced by COVID-19, tourism may not be a priority to people who have never been involved in travelling for recreational purpose. Since the emergence of COVID-19, there has been growing calls for domestic and regional tourism by Southern African governments. To capitalise on strong social networks among African families, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) has been the most prominent form of discretionary mobility for low-income groups in the Global South (Rule et al., 2003; Cohen & Cohen, 2015; Rogerson, 2017). However, COVID-19 has affected visitation between families due to the fear of the risks it poses to communities. It would be worthwhile for researchers to probe further the impact of COVID-19 on VFR in Southern Africa.

4.3.2. Religious tourism, MICE and sport amid COVID-19

In general, Africans believe in a supreme power and are affiliated to spiritual organisations aligned with their beliefs (Henama & Sifolo, 2018). Following the death of many people around the world, some national leaders had to publicly profess that their only hope lies in a supreme power. For example, Tanzanian President John Magufuli called on citizens to turn to God and to keep the economy turning (Materu, 2020). In Africa, the Christian religion (in particular the prophetic ministry) has been vocal on the coronavirus. Some of the voices in the prophetic ministry has been received with mixed feelings by the audience. The religious voice has the capability to influence the behaviour of many people in the Southern African region and beyond, hence there is an urgent need to research the role of religious tourism in dealing with the pandemic. Besides the normal festivals such as Easter and Christmas gatherings that have been captured in depth in religious tourism literature, there has been significant growth in travelling to prophetic ministries to hear the voice of God. However, the prophetic ministry has been widely resisted by some sects in society. Nevertheless, in the interest of inclusive tourism and dealing with the common problem of COVID-19, the prophets seem to be key actors. The key question is whether religious leaders can inform the government and medical practitioners in addressing pandemics.

It is believed that prophets in sub-Saharan Africa have foretold a number of events, including COVID-19. If that is the case, should the governments and global community continue to ignore them? Why do millions of people travel to these prophets frequently? Interrogation of these questions is critical in shaping the 'new' discourse on religious tourism and COVID-19. Notable prophets speaking on COVID-19 include Emmanuel Makandiwa (the leader of the United Family International Church in Zimbabwe) and Prophet TB Joshua (the leader of the Synagogue Church of All Nations in West Africa). Makandiwa, in a series of prophecies to tens of thousands of people, foretold the emergence of the coronavirus. An expose on YouTube shows a prophecy given on three separate occasions as three distinct parts (Christ TV, 2020). Furthermore, spiritual programmes across all faith beliefs also suffered due to the regulations instituted by governments to minimise the spread of the virus. The Afrobarometer survey conducted in late 2019 showed relatively high levels of popular trust in religious and traditional leaders (Nyamkeye-Sunny & Asiamah, 2020). Musavengane & Simatele (2016) note that through participation, trust and social capital are developed. Further study on the nexus between social capital, religion and COVID-19 in the region will be interesting.

Likewise, sports tourism, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and events) and culture have always had a considerable impact on host destinations, including rebranding a destination positively and boosting its image, improving infrastructure and boosting local economic development. Unfortunately, sports tourism, cultural tourism and entertainment have not been spared in the COVID-19 period. Globally, and in the region, all major sporting events have been either cancelled indefinitely or postponed. The most significant was the Confederation of African Football's postponement of the two-legged semi-finals of the African Champions League that were supposed to take place in May (Al Jazeera, 2020b). Planning for the future is needed to reopen and reorganise the sport and MICE sub-sectors.

4.4. Environmental impacts

4.4.1. Linking COVID-19, environmental protection, tourism and environmental justice

The sudden emergence of COVID-19 across the globe has resulted in the proliferation of medical research to study the impacts of the virus on human health and to develop measures to try and combat its spread (see Guo et al., 2020; Pisano et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020). Whilst this has been welcome, limited attention has been paid to how COVID-19 has influenced environmental management and protection, and influenced tourism and environmental and ecological justice. Much media coverage has focused on how wildlife across much of the Third World has infiltrated urban and rural environments, being able to roam freely without the disruptions of normal human activities (Singh, 2020). Similarly, environmental air pollution and waste have decreased, allowing polluted environments to rejuvenate. However, there has been very limited studies on how COVID-19 has contributed to an increase in deforestation and poaching of wildlife, impacting biological resources and the potential for tourism development and livelihoods (especially in sub-Saharan Africa). As the United Nations (2020) highlights, due to the emergence of COVID-19, several

governments announced plans to lower environmental standards and reduce environmental enforcement. Most African countries have been affected by the pandemic to varying degrees (World Bank, 2020a) and this includes vulnerable communities that rely on tourism wildlife and natural resources for their livelihoods (Natural Selection, 2020).

Several African countries have experienced an increase in poaching activities due to the loss of jobs across the tourism and conservation sectors (Marshall, 2020; Newburger, 2020), further resulting in vulnerable communities engaging in logging activities and destroying forests and ecological systems to make money to secure livelihoods (Rulli, 2020). Considering these impacts across the African landscape, COVID-19 enables us to also reflect on the scholarship on environmental justice and ecological justice. Whilst studies on environmental justice have largely concentrated on exploring environmental inequality through the lens of race and class (Musavengane & Leonard, 2019) and how vulnerable communities have been disproportionally exposed to environmental risks and issues of industrial pollution and waste (Leonard, 2018), this has been largely a one-sided paradigm.

In light of COVID-19, a new research programme would involve exploring a broader emphasis on addressing issues of the 'more than human world' (i.e. nature) and interdisciplinary approaches and relations between human beings and nature, including the intrinsic value of the natural environment. There is, therefore, a need to reflect on COVID-19's multiple environmental impacts and how these may be addressed within an African context. Considering the impacts of COVID-19 on Africa, scholarship in this area is needed urgently.

4.4.2. Nature-based tourism and community livelihoods

Spenceley (2020) highlights the grave situation in African parks and surrounding communities whose livelihoods depend on nature-based tourism. The report shows that as most people lost their jobs and sources of income, there is dwindling conservation funds. To avert death, participants in Spenceley's survey (2020:33) noted:

> There are 2 dimensions … 1) when people lose their revenue and become hungry … they will be forced to look for food and resources … this will cause "survival poaching" … 2) probably worse … with the lack of visitors, tourism falls away both in terms of the physical presence of tourist (which does act as a deterrent) and the absence of moneys coming in to co-finance anti-poaching … most forms of protection will disappear and the door will be wide open for the big money poaching!!!

> (We need) a kind of basic income grant for the affected communities. Most Namibians do not want to poach. They rather would like to have a regular income.

Nevertheless, Southern Africa (with its vast natural spaces) should expect a boom in tourism post-COVID-19. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) notes that there is a high possibility that travellers will prefer destinations with open spaces, remoteness, air purity and water freshness. Thus, protected areas (including community-based nature-based recreational facilities) might have large volumes of visitors, especially domestic tourists. Nevertheless, there is a need to manage the challenges posed by overcrowding in a responsible manner in light of minimising the spread of COVID-19.

4.5. Business impacts

Southern Africa has a diverse set of trading partners in Europe and Asia, and this has a direct economic bearing in the region (UNECA, 2020). A sharp decline in tourists started to be witnessed in the region's busiest nature, sport, recreation and conferencing destinations (the Seychelles, Mauritius, South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe) as early as February 2020 (UNECA, 2020). Just before the total lockdowns, in Livingstone and Victoria Falls hotel occupancy had dwindled to as low as 30% and there were many cancellations.

A survey conducted by the World Bank in conjunction with South Africa's Department of Tourism revealed the impact of COVID-19 on tourism businesses (World Bank, 2020b). 99% of the 1610 respondents who participated in the survey reported that they were affected by COVID-19. In March 2020, 58% of firms were unable to service their debts and 54% were struggling to cover fixed costs. As a result, firms reduced staff wages and some classified their staff as redundant. Some of the mitigation measures against the impact on tourism businesses included temporary closure (69%), deferment of bookings instead of cancellation (60%), downscaling (58%) and cancellation of planned investments (51%). Other tourism firms opted for price reduction, capital borrowing, investing in upskilling staff to multi-task, temporary closure and permanent closure. The total lockdowns finally brought the sector on its knees, and business strategies to reopen the sector are needed.

The challenge facing the Southern African region in regard to countercyclical policies is the poor overall growth rate characterised by high levels of public debts (UNECA, 2020). Thus, the current central bank interventions to ease the impact of the pandemic on businesses (including tourism businesses) will be ineffective in light of the limited fiscal policy capacity.

Whilst tourism has contributed to country economies globally and has assisted in job creation and poverty alleviation for communities, the coronavirus has virtually halted tourism globally – with negative impacts for tourism supply and demand. This leads to the question: What might this mean in terms of the availability of products/experiences and what are the alternatives? One view is that the decline in tourism will lead to a rise of nationalism in the production of products domestically. Even countries that traditionally had no capability in these areas will now need to develop them (Igoe & Chadwick, 2020). Governments will no doubt need to find ways to support the most vulnerable in society and recover local economies, thereby stimulating the economy in its entirety. For example, Chinese policymakers have targeted vulnerable households by looking for new ways to reach smaller firms through credit support and waiving social security fees and utility bills (World Economic Forum, 2020).

4.6. Political impacts: Regionalism, airlift and access

The political atmosphere in the region is not even across all the countries. This pose tourism recovery challenges in the region, as politics has a direct effect on how the pandemic is managed. For example, Mozambique, Lesotho, Malawi and Zimbabwe are marred with political challenges that further cause fear of international tourists visiting if borders reopen. Corruption surrounding COVID-19 donations and funds has been

reported in the region (Nyoka, 2020). It will be interesting to establish the relationships between these political challenges, COVID-19 and tourism rejuvenation in the region.

On 23 April 2020, the International Transportation Association (IATA) reported that the region's airlines could lose US$6 billion of passenger revenue, US$2billion more than what had been expected at the beginning of the month. Employment in the aviation sub-sector and related industries could decrease by 3.1 million, which is half of the region's 6.2 million aviation-related employment. The previous estimate was 2 million. Full-year 2020 traffic is expected to plummet by 51% compared to 2019. The previous estimate was a decrease of 32%. GDP supported by aviation in the region could fall by US$28 billion, from US$56 billion. The last estimate was US$17.8 billion. Countries hardest hit include South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Ghana, Senegal and Cape Verde. Some of the measures that have been taken to recover the sector include providing relief for the tourism and air transport sectors (Senegal); waiving all landing and parking fees (Seychelles); waiving of tourism tax for transit passengers; and deferring payroll, income and carbon taxes across all industries, which will also benefit airlines domiciled in that country (South Africa). IATA is calling for more help for the sector; a mixture of approaches can be used such as direct financial support, loans, loan guarantees, support for the corporate bond market and tax relief (IATA, 2020).

Moreover, there is real tension between national sovereignty and regional cooperation due to COVID-19. For example, South Africa is the only apple producer in the region and the dominant source of citrus but cross-border passenger traffic has been suspended in these areas. Buyers from neighbouring countries like Swaziland, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe are largely absent on the markets (Jansen, 2020). What does this mean for future cooperation? Innovative ways need to be found to ensure solutions to the cross-border crisis. For example, the United Nations seeks to build transport and trade resilience in the wake of COVID-19, such as exploring contactless solutions and good practices; eliminating obstacles to cross-border trade and transport operations; and looking at collaborative solutions on transport, trade and logistics operations by strengthening regional and sectoral cooperation to facilitate joint actions and solutions (Trade Law Centre, 2020). Thus, debates to explore such options are urgently needed.

5. 'New tourism' research pointers

At the time of writing this paper, the number of COVID-19 reported cases in Africa were 430 602, with 10 632 (3% of the world infections). South Africa is the hotspot of COVID-19 in Africa with 177 124 confirmed cases and 2 952 deaths (Africa CDC, 4 July 2020). Globally, confirmed cases were 11 049 505 (WHO, 2020a). Urgent research is needed in the following areas to re-open the tourism sector:

- Can Africa develop or provide medical solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic? Madagascar is reported to have found a cure for the disease. However, the WHO has cautioned countries not to adopt medication not clinically tested. South Africa is the first on the continent to have a COVID-19 vaccine trial. Could this mean there is a possibility to develop medical tourism in Southern Africa?

- Faith-based solutions to COVID-19 and any pandemic and economic growth. Religious tourism researchers can investigate further the role of the spiritual world in addressing global and African problems.
- Is domestic tourism the best avenue to start opening up the tourism sector? With high-priced tourism facilities, are locals able to travel? Cohen et al. (2018) state that many business travellers will prefer flying less. Is it in the interest of the African tourism sector to encourage less travelling, as the region relies heavily on international tourists?
- What are Africans' perceptions of foreign tourists in light of an imported or foreign disease?
- Community-based tourism and COVID-19. Livelihoods in the rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa has been disrupted. Establishing coping mechanisms for the rural populace is critical. What strategies should be developed to protect this vulnerable group?
- Ecological justice and environmental protection have been dismantled in Southern Africa due to COVID. What is the way forward to ensure strong ecological protection which also influences sustainable tourism development?
- The ability to transform the crisis into an opportunity requires that tourism operators and policymakers gain a deep understanding of the situation and a shift towards new models and settings. What strategies can be adopted by nature-based operators to attract tourists and manage Southern African destinations responsibly?
- Conducting tourism businesses now requires strong collaboration with the 'new' actors to ensure the safety of employees and visitors. Social network analysis and collaboration theories need to be explored to establish strong relationships between tourism players and the medical fraternity. What is the way forward to promote good tourism governance in a crisis?
- The closure of tourism businesses has far-reaching effects. Value chain analysis in the tourism sector is critical to establish the extent to which COVID-19 has disrupted the value chain. What strategies should be put in place to ensure continuity of the affected sectors – destination recovery strategies?
- Technology seems to have brought people closer since the emergence of COVID-19. Is virtual tourism the way forward for the sector? Is the Southern African region ready for this?
- The global narrative on recovery is about resetting tourism to a far more responsible, inclusive, equitable form of experiential tourism where destination management is more important in destination marketing. What might this mean for the Southern African region?
- 'Sports can create hope, where there was once only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers' (Mandela, 2011). How can sport and culture be revived to promote equity and bring back hope to people in Southern Africa?
- The tourism sector has been on the right trajectory to attain the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). What is the way forward for tourism players to ensure that COVID-19 threats to the SDGs are minimal?

Disclosure statement

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