

**A M Tsotetsi<sup>1</sup>, G M Steenkamp<sup>2</sup>, W F van Zyl<sup>3</sup> & W J v H Botha<sup>4</sup>**

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## **The contribution of tourism planning to local development at Harrismith, Phuthaditjhaba and Clarens**

### **Abstract**

This article emphasises the major principles underlying tourism development. The case study highlights the most important factors that impact on tourism development and the critical role of town and regional planners in the process of enhancing social and economic development in rural districts. Current theoretical perspectives in the field are applied to three towns, Harrismith, Phuthaditjhaba and Clarens in the Eastern Free State, and recommendations to strengthen their position as tourism destinations are also included.

**Keywords:** tourism development, town planners, urban planners.

### **DIE BYDRAE VAN TOERISMEBEPLANNING TOT DIE ONTWIKKELING VAN HARRISMITH, PHUTHADITJHABA EN CLARENS**

Toerisme is 'n wye begrip. In dié artikel word gekyk na toerisme vanuit 'n teoretiese agtergrond en aandag word gegee aan die faktore wat 'n invloed daarop uitoefen asook op verdere ontwikkeling. Die kritiese rol van stad- en streekbeplanners in die uitbou van die sosiale en ekonomiese ontwikkeling in landelike distrikte kry veral aandag. Die studiegebied betrek drie dorpe in die Oos-Vrystaat: Harrismith, Phuthaditjhaba en Clarens. Aanbevelings word gedoen om die gebied as toerismebestemming te ontwikkel en te bemerk.

**Stelutewoorde:** toerisme, ontwikkeling, beplanners.

- 1 A M Tsotetsi, M U R P student at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, SA.
- 2 G M Steenkamp, M S S (M U R P), Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, SA.
- 3 W F van Zyl, lecturer at the University of the North, Qwaqwa Branch, Phuthaditjhaba.
- 4 W J v H Botha, Professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, SA.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is internationally regarded as one of the world's fastest growing industries. The tourist industry contributed 11,7% to the world's gross domestic product in 1998. Moreover, from our perspective, South Africa remains a highly attractive tourist destination, full of promise and potential, and is striving to position itself as a world-class contender within this high-growth global industry (GCIS, 2000/01: 321).

This study examines tourism in general, as well as the Eastern Free State as a tourist destination, with specific reference to Harrismith, Phuthaditjhaba and Clarens. The role of the planner is highlighted in the development of tourism in the region.

## 2. Concepts

### 2.1 A tourist: defined

A tourist may be defined as a person who temporarily has some free time and who wishes to experience a change and decides to visit an area away from his/her usual place of residence. A tourist may also be described as someone who has traveled to a destination from some other location and does not plan to stay permanently. Tourists may enter an area when they visit friends or relatives, attend a convention, or special event (e.g. music event), embark on sightseeing, participate in sports events (e.g. skiing, canoeing, sailing), pass through en route to another location or engage in recreational activities. Regardless of their reasons for traveling, tourists spend money that may have a positive impact on the destination area (Van Harssel, 1994: 149-150). Hudman and Hawkins (1989: 5) divide tourists into two categories, namely, tourists who visit an area for longer than 24 hours, and excursionists who spend a period of less than 24 hours in a particular area. This categorisation is of particular interest to tourism providers, as tourists' primary need is suitable accommodation, while excursionists require transport and shopping facilities.

Four basic kinds of tourists have been identified as favouring tourism destinations that feature natural attractions (Lindberg, 1991: 8):

- *Hard core*. Scientific researchers or members of tours specifically arranged for education, removal of litter, or similar purposes

- *Dedicated*. People who take trips specifically to see protected areas and who want to understand local natural and cultural history
- *Mainstream*. People who visit popular well-known destinations primarily to take trips outside their normal day-to-day experience.
- *Casual*. People who incidentally partake in nature experiences as part of a more comprehensive trip.

This typology, however, provides a simple description of market segments for planning purposes. For example, hard-core and dedicated nature tourists are more likely to be tolerant of limited amenities than casual tourists (Theobald, 1994: 265). Theobald (1994), and Lickorish & Jenkins (1997) identified the following forms of tourism:

- *Domestic tourism*. Comprising residents visiting their own country
- *Inbound tourism*. Comprising non-residents travelling in a given country
- *Outbound tourism*. Comprising residents travelling in another country.

A tourist is thus a person who travels away from home, visiting other places for some or other purpose. Tourism is a business and an industry where the resources — natural or man-made — are offered to the client (the tourist) for temporary use. The tourist pays for services that generate an income for the local community.

## **2.2 Tourism and economic development**

Tourism is South Africa's third largest earner of foreign exchange and job creator. In 1998, its direct contribution to South Africa's gross domestic product was 6%, while its indirect contribution was estimated at 2%. One in every nine jobs in the country is linked to tourism, and some 740 000 jobs in South Africa are created by the tourism economy. It is projected that in 2010 the South African tourism economy will employ more than 1.2 million people (directly and indirectly) (GCIS, 2000/01: 321).

According to Van Harsseel (1994: 170), tourism, compared to other economic activities, may be seen as a flexible and stable industry with excellent long-term growth prospects. It is adaptable to new markets and may be exploited as an alternative to market cost. In addition, empirical data indicate that tourism has grown steadily over the past three decades,

particularly when compared to other industries. Lastly, nearly all the causative factors, including income, leisure time and mobility, are continuing to rise, at least in the major tourist-generating regions of the world, making the long-term prospects of tourism development favourable.

In comparison with other forms of economic development, tourists and tourist expenditure may relatively quickly generate an improvement in living standards. No sophisticated technology is required to establish the basic facilities. Since much of the industry is labour intensive, tourism can absorb unemployed labour resources, which is particularly valuable in an area with surplus unskilled labour. Many of the operational skills are relatively simple and may be developed rapidly by the citizens; higher skills, if required, can usually be imported (Tsotetsi, 1998: 13).

In some locations, tourism may provide basic infrastructure, which in turn forms the basis and the stimulus for the diversification of the economy and for the development of other industries. An established tourism infrastructure often serves as an attraction to new and less directly related economic activities. Tourist expenditure may therefore be said to stimulate the economy beyond the sector directly concerned with the industry. Lastly, to a developing country tourism offers the prospect of early and substantial foreign currency earnings (Burkart & Medlik, 1981: 65-66).

John Ward *et al* (1996: 80) state that "the net economic value of leisure and tourism to a region or country depends on a range of factors. These include:

- Whether it derives income from other industrial sources
- Whether demand for the specific attractions and facilities it offers is constant
- Whether the majority of leisure and tourism facilities and developments are locally owned
- The systems of taxation and public spending in operation
- In the case of international tourism, the strength of the local economy and its currency compared with those of overseas
- The ability of the standards found in developments and infrastructure to keep pace with the growing demands and sophistication of the market
- The ability to persuade local residents not to counteract increasing earnings by going out of the region or country to spend them" (outbound tourism).

The community is assumed to be part of a larger economic system, and interdependent on the rest of the system through trade. Tourism is classified as a basic industry because its focus is to sell the product to non-residents so that earnings from outside the region come into the community. This is true even though the non-resident must be physically present in the community to consume its tourism services.

Tourism complements other export products, and adds diversity to the export base of a country, thus, it assists in stabilising a country's foreign exchange earnings. In theory, tourism offers developing regions considerable potential for economic growth. The extent to which tourism is an agent of development depends on the characteristics of the region, the identification of realistic goals that are in line with these characteristics, and the ability to achieve these goals.

Tourism may foster development in underdeveloped regions. The industry is labour intensive and unskilled workers may be used. Tourism makes a useful contribution towards creating an infrastructure. Outside money promotes the local economy, while tourism enhances the diversification of the region's economy.

### **3. Tourism in South Africa**

In 1999, approximately 5 900 000 foreign tourists visited South Africa. Africa continues to generate the bulk of international arrivals in South Africa (72%), with Europe accounting for about 62% of the overseas market. The European market experienced a 5% growth in 1998. North and South America, the Middle East, Australasia and the Indian Ocean Islands continue to be very marginal contributors. Asia has shown a 13% increase in tourist arrivals; the fastest growing market in 1999. Since 1994 there has been a 37% increase in foreign arrivals to South Africa. There is no doubt that tourism is a growing industry (Stat SA, 1999: 1).

The fastest growing segment of tourism in South Africa is ecological tourism (eco-tourism), which includes nature photography, bird watching, botanical studies, snorkeling, hiking and mountaineering (GCIS, 2001: 321). South Africa is one of the 17 Megadiversity Countries of the world, according to a list compiled by Mittermeier *et al.* Two of these countries are in Africa. It is interesting that South Africa is the only country on this list that does not have a tropical rainforest system within its borders. One of the regions of megadiversity is the alpine habitat

of the Drakensberg Mountains where the research area is situated (Ledger, 2001:21).

Village tourism is also gaining in popularity. The tourist wants to experience life in the rural community (GCIS, 2000/01: 21). In this region there are many rural communities that could exploit this niche in the market.

Domestic tourism plays a particularly important role in the South African tourism industry. This market will continue to grow as previously disadvantaged people are now tourists and travelers (White Paper 1996:3). According to Bennett (1995: 13-15), a number of writers, including Jooste, Hattingh, Reitz and De Bruin, have shown that greater emphasis should be placed on domestic tourists, for the following reasons:

- Few attractions and tourist facilities are able to survive economically solely on overseas visitors. The domestic tourist market is larger than the overseas tourist market. Domestic tourism is also an important part of economic growth as it is estimated that 7,9 million domestic tourists in South Africa undertook 17 million holidays in 1994 (Croukamp, 1996:14)
- It is easier and cheaper to launch marketing campaigns in the domestic market. Domestic tourism results in a saving of foreign exchange, and in that way contributes to a more favourable balance of payments
- Factors such as urbanisation, a higher standard of living, increased buying power and population growth could contribute to a 100% increase in local black tourism by the year 2000 compared with the 1985 figures (Strydom, 1993:10).

The biggest market for South Africa is the tourist from Africa. The next group comprises the overseas market, especially the eco-tourism category (hard core and dedicated), as well as the village tourism market. We should therefore consider catering for the domestic market.

#### **4. Tourism products, natural environment and local communities**

The environment, whether it is natural or man-made, is the fundamental ingredient of tourism products. However, as soon as tourism activity occurs, the environment is inevitably changed or modified to facilitate tourism activities and facilities (Cooper *et al.*, 1993: 102). Tourism often relies on an unspoiled natural and

cultural environment for basic attractions. In order to achieve sustainable tourism development, the following tools may be used as indicators to determine the interaction with the local community, and practicable environmentally friendly eco-tourism (Van Harssel, 1994: 198).

All tourism product owners interviewed in Harrismith, Phuthaditjhaba and Clarens stated that their products were environmentally friendly. They were, for example, conscious of the dangers of pollution and provided rubbish bags to visitors. According to Van der Merwe (1995: 8), tourists mostly experience the country at the community level. Entrepreneurs also operate at this level. Local communities will have to take greater responsibility for planning, promoting and managing their tourist resources. Thus, they would receive a much greater share of the benefits especially if they promoted village tourism. We must bear in mind that there is a threshold of tolerance among hosts, temporally and spatially. As long as the impact of the tourists on the community is within this critical level, the local community welcomes the industry and the tourists, but if this threshold is exceeded numerous problems may occur (Tsoetsi, 1998: 98).

The Development Facilitation Act (DFA) states that Local Development Objectives (LDO) must be formulated for every community. The Local Government Transition Act has led to the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process. "It was indicated clearly that the IDP Process should be based on a structural Public Participation Process with the emphasis on capacity building and the empowerment of all protagonists" (Steyn & Viviers, 2000: 273).

Within the research site, the support and interaction of local communities with tourism products vary from one area to the next. This is also influenced by the way people perceive public participation. The findings reflect that the local community at Harrismith does not often visit local tourism products. There is more significant interaction between the local community and tourism products in Phuthaditjhaba and Clarens (according to the product owners) than elsewhere.

As this study focuses mainly on tourism products and owners, a geographical or spatial analysis approach was followed in combination with a SWOT-analysis, which was used systematically to identify strong and weak points, opportunities and threats in pinpointing potential future business opportunities in the area

studied. Questionnaires and personal interviews were used to obtain information from 26 product owners.

## **5. Tourism products at Harrismith, Phuthaditjhaba and Clarens (HPC)**

A tourism product is defined as an amalgamation of many components, the attractions of destination, the facilities at the destination and their accessibility (Bennett, 1995: 251). The components of tourism products vary from one setting to the next. The research area, which shows how tourism planning has contributed to local development in Harrismith, Phuthaditjhaba and Clarens, is situated in the eastern Free State (Figure 1). Harrismith is situated in the northeast, adjacent to the N3 national road, while Phuthaditjhaba is located at the junction of the borders of the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Lesotho. Clarens is 37 km southeast of Bethlehem. This region is dominated by rural settlements, namely, villages, small towns and townships.

The R712 route, connecting Harrismith, Phuthaditjhaba and Clarens, is an alternative route from Harrismith to Ficksburg, along the border of Lesotho, also known as the Highlands route. This route includes two nature reserves, namely, the Sterkfonteindam Nature Reserve and the Golden Gate Highlands National Park.

This region has unique natural and cultural resources. The Drakensberg Mountains are basalt formations, which are fascinating to those interested in geological formations. For the bird-watchers, this is the region where one finds the bearded vulture, the orange-breasted rockjumper, the Drakensberg siskin, the yellow-breasted pipit and many other unique bird species. The zoologist again might like to see the ouvok (*Cordilles gigantius*), a kind of iguana. The botanist would look for indigenous aloe species (e.g. *Aloe polyphylla*). Many of these are threatened species according to the *Red Data Book* (Highlands Development, s.a.: 3, 5). You will also encounter San paintings in many of the caves in the region and numerous Sesotho villages.

The research was intended to evaluate the tourism products in terms of their location, accessibility and infrastructure. More particularly, the study deals with the road networks linking Harrismith, Phuthaditjhaba and Clarens with major national cities. It further investigates the interaction of the tourism product with the natural environment and local community, economic viability of products and job creation.



### 5.1 Attractions of the HPC

Attractions, whether natural or man-made, are the core elements from which tourism products are created. These may include the natural, scenic, architectural, historic, adventurous, educational, culinary, festive or cultural phenomena (Van Harssel, 1994: 222). They are regarded as anything interesting or unusual to see or to do (Cooper *et al.*, 1993: 20).

Attractions may be nodal or linear in character. A nodal character of a destination is one where the attractions of the region are geographically closely grouped, e.g. the Golden Gate National Park with all its attractions and amenities is confined to a small area. The notion of a "linear character of tourist destinations" refers to attractions that are spread over a wide geographic area, with no obvious centres of interest (Heath 1987:85), e.g. the tourist products on various farms along the road between Golden Gate and Clarens would be a case in point (Table 1).

Table 1: Identified unique tourism attractions in the HPC study area

Harrismith	Phuthaditjhaba	Clarens
Sterkfontein Dam	Mount-Aux-Sources	Golden Gate National Park
Game Reserve	Basotho Cultural Village	Sandstone Mountains
Platberg Mountain	Qwaqwa National Park	Historic war sites
Battlefields	Metsi Matsho & Fika-Patso	Motouleng Cave
Diverse types of accommodation	Diverse types of accommodation	Diverse types of accommodation

Source: Tsoetsi (1998: 106-144)

A SWOT-analysis was performed to evaluate the potential of tourism products and attractions in the research area. Weak points in Harrismith and Clarens are, among others, the absence of regulations for the establishment of bed-and-breakfast accommodation, as well as poor utilisation of tourism products by local township residents. In these two areas, opportunities exist for eco-tourism, while Harrismith has opportunities for conference-based tourism. The large number of Government-led tourism products and poor coordination between private and public tourism products have an adverse effect on Phuthaditjhaba's tourist industry. Opportunities include the following: establishing eco-tourism ventures and guesthouses. Threats include, among others, snow during winter, urban sprawl and environmental deterioration. Crime is a threat in all these areas.

## **5.2 Facilities at HPC**

Tourist facilities refer to those elements, which on their own do not generate tourism flows, while the absence of such facilities discourages tourists from visiting a destination (Bennett, 1995: 12). Facilities at destinations comprise accommodation, catering, entertainment, as well as internal transport and communications, which enable the tourist to move around during his/her stay. Due attention must be paid to accommodation.

In the study area, accommodation was considered a critical component in tourism support facilities. The type, scale and nature of accommodation available at the destinations determine the type and scale of tourism that can be accommodated at such a destination. The type and nature of accommodation will also be partly determined by what competitors in neighbouring regions have to offer, and by the type of transportation visitors use to reach the destination (Bennett, 1995: 52).

A distinct feature of accommodation is the wide range required to match the needs of different income groups of visitors. The range includes hotels, motels, inns and bed-and-breakfast operations, guesthouses, etc. Today, tourists are looking for greater freedom, more adventure and less formality. Hence there is a need for informality (no regulated arrival and departure times or dinner and breakfast times), as well as a need for greater self-sufficiency (self-catering facilities). This creates a new demand for diversity in accommodation facilities. The owners of a tourism product provide diverse types of accommodation (Cooper *et al* 1993:85). Harrismith and Clarens offer a large number of bed-and-breakfast facilities, while Phuthaditjhaba has none (Tsotetsi, 1998: 113).

## **5.3 Accessibility of tourism products**

A tourist attraction would be of little value if it were difficult to reach by means of normal transport. The lack of good infrastructure in the form of road and communication links may result in tourists rather visiting alternative, more accessible tourist attractions (Strydom, 1993: 19).

The accessibility of a tourist destination refers to all those elements that affect the cost, speed, and convenience with which a tourist destination may be reached (Bennett, 1995: 12). A region will not attract tourists on a large scale unless it is accessible, regardless of its amenities. Infrastructure is one of the

pillars of accessibility. Generally, infrastructure includes all forms of construction, on and below surface level, required by any area where its inhabitants communicate on a large scale with the outside world, as well as high levels of human activity within such a region. The notion also refers to roads and parking areas, railway lines, harbours and airport runways, as well as utility services such as water supplies, drainage and sewage disposal and power supply.

### **5.3.1 Harrismith**

Harrismith is situated halfway between Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Durban. A railway line and airstrip back road infrastructure. Tarred roads with good road signs are in place, and tourist accommodation is clustered in and around the town. Disadvantages identified in terms of accessibility in the area include the deteriorating condition of secondary roads in the countryside, for example, the road to Qwantani resort and the gravel road to the Mount Everest Holiday Game Lodge. A major advantage of this area is the intersection of the N3 and N5 national roads. These roads connect these towns by means of secondary roads to the interior parts of the eastern Free State (R711 and R712) (Figure 1).

### **5.3.2 Phuthaditjhaba**

Phuthaditjhaba is easily accessible via Harrismith, Clarens and Bethlehem (Figure 1). Major tourism products such as the Basotho Cultural Village, Qwaqwa National Park and Qwaqwa Hotel are located along main roads. The following inadequacies were identified: a poor gravel road to Witsieshoek Mountain Resort and Mount-Aux-Sources, and no public transport to cater for local tourists. This almost complete lack of access roads into the villages surrounding Phuthaditjhaba is presently a major stumbling block to improving the participation of local communities in the tourism industry.

### **5.3.3 Clarens**

Clarens is a three-hour drive away from Johannesburg, while travel by car to Bloemfontein and Durban takes two and four hours respectively. Tourism products, clustered in the town and its environs, form a linear pattern in the countryside adjacent to the highlands tourist route. Two disadvantages are the absence of tarred roads in the town and the lack of public transport for local tourists. In general, external road signs indicating directions to towns are clear. Internal directions to guide tourists to the major attractions are either inadequate or non-existent.

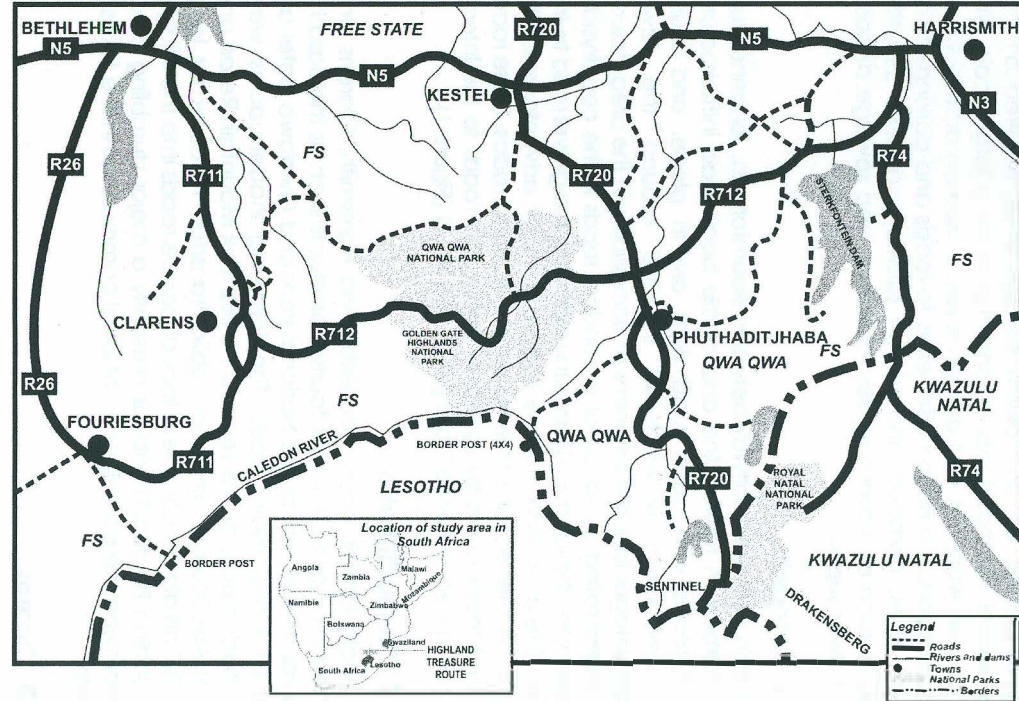


Figure 1: Location of Harrismith Phuthaditjhaba and Clarens

## 6. Economic viability of tourism products and job creation

In economic terms, tourism may, as a result of tourism development, generate many benefits, including employment, income and improvement of infrastructure (Lickorish & Jenkins, 1997: 7-4). Tourism is also acknowledged as the largest global industry, employing one in every 15 workers and generating over 3, 1 trillion dollars in indirect earnings annually (McManus, 1997: 51). However, employment in tourism is highly seasonal and contributes to fluctuations in the levels of local and regional employment, and is therefore beneficial only to those requiring seasonal employment, such as students, housewives and part-time employees (Mathieson & Wall, 1982: 81).

Table 2 reports the opinions of individual product owners on the economic viability of their operations as income-generating businesses. Subjects' responses were categorised into poor, average and high.

Table 2: Economic viability of tourism products

Economic viability	Harrismith	Phuthaditjhaba	Clarens
High	3	1	6
Average	3	2	6
Low	2	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>

Source: Tsotetsi 1998:146

According to Table 2, employment generated by the tourism product owners varies from one area to the next. In Harrismith jobs are mainly created by the establishment of accommodation facilities, specifically at hotels, resorts and guesthouses, while at Phuthaditjhaba, the local community has created informal jobs. They sell cultural products to tourism product owners at the Basotho Cultural Village, and some tourism product owners sell cultural products on behalf of hawkers at the Witsieshoek Mountain Resort and the Tourist Information Centre. At Clarens, the Golden Gate Highlands National Park, Kiara Lodge and Maluti Lodge, guesthouses and guest farms employ a significant number of people.

Table 3: Employment generated by tourism products

Staff employed	Harrismith	Phuthaditjhaba	Clarens
	No of people	No of people	No of people
Management	28	16	30
Administration	18	5	14
Services	147	133	194
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>238</b>

Source: Tsotetsi, 1998: 124, 135, 145

An interesting fact revealed by the figures in Table 3 is that the size of a town does not necessarily reflect its importance as a tourism destination. A small town such as Clarens outperforms the medium-sized town of Harrismith and the larger settlement of Phuthaditjhaba. The figures also reflect that many jobs have been generated in the unskilled category, while job creation has been moderate in management, with administration falling behind.

Although tourism is generally regarded as a potentially highly viable industry in the economy, the opposite is true for the area that was the subject of this study. In many cases, tourism is regarded as a supplementary business. The reason for these phenomena derives from the importance of the Free State Province in general as a lower-ranked national destination that has not yet developed its full potential.

## 7. Suggested planning strategies

Planning refers to the idea of achieving a goal (particular ends) by following a detailed set of procedures to allocate the use of land and to improve the environment, thereby attempting to improve human lifestyles. Planning should not only eliminate the problems, but also provide the positive mechanism for land acquisition, design, development and management, to have the greatest user satisfaction. In this sense, planning is intended not only to avoid problems, but also to solve problems. From a holistic perspective the aim of tourism planning is to maximise benefits and to minimise costs (Gunn, 1994:2).

“The Integrated Development Planning (IDP) Process is a statutory strategic planning exercise. The aim of the process is to focus the limited human and capital resources available to Local Authorities, on those issues that are of greatest importance to the community at large” (Steyn & Viviers, 2000: 272). The suggested

planning strategy for the HPC area is a future-directed planning approach that deals with the following issues:

- *Accessibility.* Access is by way of roads, and the capacity of existing facilities. All tourism products in the HPC study area are located in a specific location, so that there is optimal access to streets or roads that connect the site to other destinations. Planners may be consulted to arrange for the subdivision or rezoning of tourism products, sites, areas or regions
- *Accommodation.* This is available for visitors in various forms. The HPC area offers diverse types of accommodation. Cheaper types of accommodation (rondavels and camping sites) may be promoted in order to cater for low-income tourists. At the same time, higher standards for guesthouses, hotels and motels may be maintained
- *Marketing.* This aspect refers to the impact of large numbers of seasonal visitors on the infrastructure of the region, with particular reference to roads. So far, the Eastern Free State as a whole has not reached a tourism saturation point, because it has not been marketed effectively yet
- *The need to protect the landscape.* Historical sites or natural assets that attract tourists and holidaymakers in the first place, are critical. In this regard, a joint venture involves various departments sharing responsibility, such as the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, the Department of Technology, Art and Culture, and the Department of Agriculture. Practising and enforcing integrated environmental management principles is of critical importance in the research area for planning and development purposes. Most tourism product owners have taken precautionary measures, such as practising conservation principles, teaching tourists not to litter, and providing security officers and tourist guides
- *The impact on local communities.* This aspect includes employment, income and the effect of foreign visitors on local traditions, customs and culture. The impact varies in the research site. Harrismith and particularly Clarens have generated more employment opportunities in the tourism industry than Phuthaditjhaba. Income generation has increased at Harrismith and Clarens because local residents have converted their houses into guesthouses. At Phuthaditjhaba, residents generate income by producing cultural products and selling them to tourism product owners who, in turn, sell them on their behalf. Because of improved accommodation facilities, foreign tourists visiting Harrismith

and Clarens have a greater impact on the visitor pattern than in the case of Phuthaditjhaba.

## **7.1 The role of planners**

Tate and Mulugetta (1998:80) have identified various roles for planners. Among these the most popular one is in the field of environmental and economic development. With various communities at different economic and social levels of development, it is clear, in terms of decision-making systems, that planners may assume divergent roles in this region.

To determine the greatest potential for a region, a regional scale of planning is needed. Tourism planning is an integrated process involving Government, Provincial and Local Authorities as well as stakeholders, private initiatives and communities. The entire region must become tourism-minded. The LDO and IDP processes could be used to orientate the community to become more tourism-driven. Regional planning is important in developing infrastructure and increasing the accessibility to tourism products. The role of the planner is to help identify unique features of the community and environment, the development of these features, marketing and the sustainable use of these products for tourism. Planners will be concerned with, for instance, planning accessible and affordable tourist facilities for all communities as a means of effecting stability in society (Wilson & Van Zyl 1996:55).

## **7.2 Proposals for tourism product development planning**

### **7.2.1 Accessibility of tourism products**

Access is a prerequisite for the utilisation of any space. In fact, all tourism products visited have access to transport routes. The problems identified were the shortage and poor design of parking spaces and signage. The following recommendations are made:

- Adequate parking, closer to the product, should be provided; that is, parking that accommodates all types of vehicles. Parking for cars, coaches and buses should preferably be in separate locations. A number of smaller linked parking areas are preferable and the means of access should be adequate and clearly marked with international direction signs
- At the square in Clarens, congestion occurs at peak times, because of the lack of proper planning for adequate parking space. Parking vehicles along the street next to or in front of



local commercial outlets must be avoided, because it is inconvenient for the local inhabitants who use the street for other purposes

- Trees are essential in all parking areas, because people and vehicles need shade on hot summer days. By planting indigenous trees, shade could be provided and it could enhance the character of the town.

### **7.2.2 Infrastructure (road networks)**

Poor primary roads connect some of the tourism products in the HPC area. Primary streets in Clarens, which lead to tourism facilities, are gravel roads. At Harrismith, the two primary roads connecting Mount Everest and the Qwantani resort are in poor condition. At Phuthaditjhaba, the only entrance road to Witsieshoek Mountain Resort and Mount-Aux-Sources is in very poor condition at present.

Local government is responsible for developing and upgrading roads and streets. They could consider the use of pavement bricks for the road surface in the construction phase. These bricks are not only cost-effective, but will generate employment opportunities because their production is labour-intensive and requires the use of local materials for construction.

### **7.2.3 Accommodation**

Taking into account the number of tourists visiting the tourist attractions and the distance between the various spots, the only shortage of accommodation identified has been at the Basotho Cultural Village.

Consideration should be given to the promotion of the local cultural heritage of the area. The design of accommodation structures should reflect the art and style of the local culture. Various kinds of accommodation facilities, including pioneer and traditional architecture, can also be utilised in order to reflect the cultural heritage of all sectors of the community.

### **7.2.4 Facilities**

Because of its strategic location as a tourism destination, this area may attract other facilities, such as a casino. Harrismith presents sustainable possibilities for a casino, because it would attract tourists on their way to Durban, Johannesburg and Bloemfontein. Harrismith also has adequate shopping, banking and telecommunication facilities to support such ventures.

The research elicited significant interest from international companies interested in investing in the Eastern Free State. Taking the empowerment of rural communities into account in the development of tourism products, it is necessary to warn against leaving it solely to international investors, because of the danger of exploitation or misinterpretation of the local cultural heritage and resources. A 50/50 partnership between local and international companies is advisable.

### **7.2.5 Transport**

No public transport is available at present for local tourists who cannot afford to rent a car. There is a need for Local Government and local tourism organisations to investigate the possibility of subsidising public transport such as taxis and buses.

## **8. Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it is strongly believed that tourism may contribute substantially to local development if the planner, local communities and product owners interact continuously to achieve a collective goal for sustainable development. The proposals to improve the tourism products and environment have to address the weak points, counteract threats and capitalise on the attributes and opportunities identified for the research site. An Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process for the study area must be promoted. It should also take land development objectives into consideration in order to achieve sustainable tourism development that will be beneficial to all stakeholders. A more in-depth analysis of development opportunities in the various tourism sectors is necessary to guide future development of the area, as the research site is one of South Africa's most promising tourist destinations.

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