

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

4.1 Research Methodology

4.1.1 Introduction

The main aim of this study was to critically analyse the Tourism Development Strategy in South Africa from a Rural Tourism perspective and compare it with international renewed tourism development strategies such as the National Rural Tourism Strategy of the Commonwealth of Australia. Once these strategies have been analysed and compared, and after having considered the empirical research findings, a guideline for the Rural Tourism Development Strategy will be formulated, taking into account aspects and issues relevant to the situation and conditions in the Limpopo Province. The strategy will then be tested against the situation in the Limpopo Province to determine its relevancy, appropriateness and effectiveness in the region.

4.1.2 Data collection methods

The primary method used to collect data was the unstructured interview technique. Participant-observation and literature review yielded background and more complementary data. The researcher collected data himself. He used several techniques of data collection ranging from orientation in the setting, participant-observation and finally, the unstructured interview. The only means the researcher used to record what he heard, observed, experienced and thought of throughout the application of the interviews was note taking. It should be noted that, the above-mentioned methods somehow overlap, and are alike in many ways.

4.1.3 The unstructured interview method

The assumption underlying the unstructured interview is that detailed information about individuals' constructions and perceptions of a given reality, phenomenon or object are best expressed by individuals in their own language, form and context (i.e. rather than being expressed in imposed terms and selected fragments). However, there is, as Jones (1985, p. 47) argues, "no such thing as presuppositionless research". The proceedings are inevitably directed by the preordained (however generally articulated) focus of the study and the lines of conversation deemed interesting or relevant by the researcher.

It is not the absence of direction, then, but the careful and restrained use of direction, which is to be desired in an unstructured interview situation. It is for this reason that a guided unstructured interview method was selected; interviews took the form of informal and open conversations, but the interviewer's participation was directed by the interview guide, which itemised important themes to be addressed in the exchange. Included in the guide were the following themes:

- Perceptions of the tourism industry in the province;
- The tourism industry strategic drivers/focus (e.g. nature-based, cultural, beach, sport, ecotourism, rural tourism, adventure tourism);
- Tourism growth/development impediments;
- The core business and years of service;
- Tourism products branding in the province (uniqueness, appeal, quality and range);
and
- Perceptions about past, current and future relationships among tourism stakeholders/partners in the province (including relationships of conflict and tension).

A number of characteristics of the unstructured interview methods render it particularly appropriate in this research. Such characteristics include: adaptability to local and situational

contingencies, allowing for the clarification of information and the establishment of trust; the depth, extent and subtlety of data yielded; the minimisation of ambiguity in responses through the provision for elaboration on, and qualification of, what is said; and the explicitness of researcher intent and relative position. The logic behind conducting unstructured interviews was that interview methods are one of the most practical means people use to try to understand their fellow human beings.

4.1.4 Strategies and techniques employed to maximise the scientific validity of the research and its findings

The emphasis in this study falls on the 'internal validity', which is the production of accurate findings that agree with the subject's life world. Two paramount issues associated with internal validity are reliability and validity. Reliability concerns more consistency in collecting, analysing and interpreting data, while validity refers to the fact that a method used yielded accurate and true-to-life results about the phenomenon under question. It is also true that there is a close link between reliability and replicability. Hence, the argument that, should the researcher use reliable methods in a study, these methods, if repeated by another researcher, the results thereof will not differ substantially from those of the previous researcher. However, one should indicate that the above argument fits well in the quantitative research and is not necessarily applicable for qualitative approach. Qualitative research is extremely variable. The researcher continually takes decisions and steps as the study progresses, and not necessarily before it commences. In this regard, the process of inquiry directs the study, and not the preplanned format.

Although some of the decisions can be noted in the report, it is rather not possible to reproduce all the steps that have been followed in a particular investigation in such a way that a blueprint could be given to another researcher who wishes to replicate the same study. This however, does not mean that the results of a qualitative study like this one cannot be tested in further research.

Analytic induction emphasises the need to search for cases that contradict the findings, and encourage the verification of results without needing to repeat the original investigation. As such, it could be argued that the scientific reliability and validity of the qualitative research like this one should be judged in terms of "the degree it stimulates further research".

Studies indicate that replicability is problematic in qualitative research. Quantitative researchers tend to pay little attention to validity in relation to reliability, while qualitative researchers place great attention on the latter. Naturally, there are a number of sources of biases that could negatively affect the validity of the research results. Such sources of biases could be related to, (a) the researcher, (b) differences between the interviewer and interviewee, (c) those aspects associated with the research context and (d) biased sample group.

In trying to increase the validity of the study, the researcher has remained conscious of the sources of biases and has tried to reduce their effects. More than one method of data collection were used, namely- literature study, participant-observation, and unstructured interviews. An assumption can reasonably be made that the limitations entailed by using a single method were minimised in this way. All participants were told that the information gathered and personal profiles would be treated as confidential. This research was a complex process and several decisions had to be taken simultaneously. It is difficult to give a complete account of a qualitative research project; hence, no claim is being made about the completeness of the foregoing exposition of the most important decisions taken in the study. It is hoped that decisions and steps taken in this study have been sufficiently and explicitly stated to enable the reader to judge the scientific credibility thereof.

4.2 Research findings

4.2.1 Introduction

These findings are the results of the interview conducted with stakeholders and respondent groups indicated in the first chapter. This report rarely followed a fixed format because of its qualitative nature. The fact that the researcher was directly involved with the subjects studied renders this report personal. The researcher's feelings, decisions and experiences were part of the research process. All the findings, regardless of their source, are simultaneously presented. It is therefore, necessary to highlight the main research question and sub-questions so that a linkage could be created between the research question and the findings.

4.2.2 Problem statement/main question

There is a lack of coherent, comprehensive, clear and co-ordinated Rural Tourism Development Strategy for Limpopo Province of South Africa.

Sub-questions are:

- Perceptions of the tourism industry in the province?
- Core business and years of service?
- Tourism strategic drivers/focus?
- Tourism growth impediments? (key issues and challenges)
- Poor tourism products branding in the province?
- Lack of policy framework for rural tourism development?
- Perceptions about past, present and future relationships among tourism partners in the province?

These questions are important if the objectives indicated in the first chapter are to be met.

3.5.3 Research findings

Findings regarding the perceptions of tourism industry in the province, indicate that respondent groups perceive tourism resources (both natural and cultural) in the province as phenomenal, but noted that the province still attracts less tourists as compared to other provinces such as the Western Cape, Kwazulu-Natal, Gauteng, North West and Mpumalanga. Policymakers, tour operators, academics and traditional leaders are of the view that the Limpopo Province has a huge tourism potential. This is supported by the fact that the provincial government has identified tourism as one of the pillars of the 1999 Growth and Development Strategy. However, tour operators, particularly young and cultural village tour operators and academics lamented the fact that there seem to be a lack of a, (or insufficient) strategic framework for tourism development in the province.

With regard to the question on the tourism strategic drivers/focus for the province, all respondent groups agreed that the tourism strength for the province lies in its natural and cultural resources. Tour operators and tourists believe integrating natural and cultural tourism activities can bring much needed African experience. Most tour operators indicated that they take their tourists through a complete cycle of all tourist attraction places. Policymakers and administrators emphasised the fact that eco-tourism is recognised as an official tourism enterprise of the province. However, tour operators and traditional leaders are of the view that cultural and traditional tourism activities are not afforded the status and importance as nature-based tourism activities. When policymakers were asked if eco-tourism distinguishes the province from others, they conceded that eco-tourism may not be exclusive and unique to the province, but also noted that ecotourism is one of the fastest growing sectors. All respondent groups agreed that other provinces could adopt eco-tourism as their own product or approach, depending on how they see it. On the other hand, most tourists view the province as unique and different from other predominately urban provinces such as Gauteng and the Western Cape. All respondents

ultimately indicated that if given a chance, rural tourism, as defined in terms of the tourism product that combines nature-based tourism activities and cultural tourism activities, could make the province distinguishable from the rest. Perhaps the South African tourism economic and environmental benefits may spread even to the most rural areas of the country.

Regarding tourism growth impediments, respondent groups mentioned a number of issues that need to be addressed for tourism in rural areas to prosper. Issues which were mentioned by all respondent group are: poor transport and infrastructure, poor product and enterprise development, accreditation and industry standards, low levels of education and training, poor marketing skills, lack of industry and community leadership and poor or absence of conducive environment for tourism development (policy framework). Cultural and nature-based tour operators particularly mentioned that lack of funding is an impediment for their business to grow. Interestingly, issues that were raised by the research respondents confirm what literature review had highlighted as key issues and challenges in rural tourism enterprises.

On the question of tourism product branding, Policymakers and administrators argue that eco-tourism is the tourism brand of the province, whereas traditional leaders and cultural tour operators indicated that people have been left out of the equation. All respondents admitted that the province has highly developed nature-based tourism facilities, but cultural tourism is still at its infancy. Tourists indicated that they like to interact with people and experience their cultures and traditions. While eco-tourism is the official tourism brand for the province, except for policymakers, the rest of the respondent groups expressed dissatisfaction with eco-tourism as the provincial tourism brand. Cultural tour operators mentioned that the word "eco" is generally, associated with nature, and as such, cultural aspects of tourism are normally left out. Eco-tourism does not necessarily distinguish the Limpopo Province from the rest.

Regarding the question on tourism policies and strategies: policymakers felt that government has done enough to provide policy directives for the tourism industry to perform to its best. However, tour operators, particularly new cultural village operators, are of the view that not enough direction is being provided. While the provincial government has chosen eco-tourism as the main focus, there is no Tourism Development Strategy in the province. This constitutes a gap, and therefore renders studies of this nature necessary.

Regarding the perceptions about the past, current and future relationships among tourism partners: The perception of respondent groups differs. Policymakers and administrator argued that there is a healthy relationship amongst various role players in the industry. That relationship is explained by the presence of the Provincial Tourism Board and regional tourism associations, hence most of the tour operators have affiliated to these associations. Tour operators and traditional leaders however, describe the relationship as of a conflicting nature with no clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of each participant. They also lament lack of leadership and funding from the government. Traditional leaders argued that nature-based tourism facilities view local people as threat to tourists and their business. However, the recent years saw a shift towards a cooperative willingness between various stakeholder groups and between tour operators themselves. All respondent groups agreed that the relationship is improving and once the roles and responsibilities of each participant are speltout, things can only get better. The research findings are in line with the literature review in terms of important issues that need attention in rural tourism development.

3.6 Conclusion

This study adopted a qualitative approach to research. An unstructured interview method was mainly used to collect data. The research findings confirm that the province is indeed rich in both

the natural and cultural tourism resources; however, the two do not complement one other for the benefits of the tourism industry and the province as a whole. Research findings show that the province has a potential for Rural Tourism Development, given its rural tourism resources, and also noted the importance of partnerships between various stakeholders. It can be argued that the competitive advantage of the province lies in its "second to none" rural character.