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THE IDEA OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

"Poor people are by definition asset-poor, and are therefore highly dependent on public or common resources" (Egger & Majeres, 1992:320)

1.1 MOTIVATION

Local rural community participation is a multifaceted concept with a number of complex and unclear issues. It has numerous meanings and connotations which depend on "... *the ideology, motivation and orientation of the users. A person's perception of it depends on their social status, responsibilities, whether they are in or out of power, their goals, whether they are part of a private group or public agency, etc.*" (Drake, 1991b:252). This concept of participation was developed by the early Greek philosophers and today has its roots in countries that practise democracy (Drake, 1991b). This entails that through their participation, communities show that they have a right to voice their concerns about an action taken by the government or any other group or individual.

The idea of community participation in ecotourism entails involving the people who will be affected by it in the planning and decision-making processes so that they can benefit from the project (Drake, 1991a; Drake, 1991b; Cowling & Oliver, 1992; Wilson, 1994). The local community's concerns over and influence on the project are important because "...*failure to emphasize participation dramatically increases the chance of rejection for proposed development efforts*" (Drake, 1991b:252). Furthermore, ecotourism practised in conserved areas cannot be "...*sustained without acceptance and support of the rural communities which surround them*" (Cowling & Oliver, 1992:224).

Community participation in ecotourism has been implemented in many Latin American and African countries. These countries lack "sun, sand and sea" and

have not benefited from either the Industrial Revolution or the Space Age. They left their flora and fauna intact, unlike the industrialised countries (Cater, 1993; Cater, 1994; Weaver, 1994). Most of the rich natural vegetation that is found in these countries occurs in privately owned areas or areas which are communally owned by rural communities. While some of these countries benefit from the ecological wave preserved in game parks and reserves (Lindeberg & Hawkins, 1993), the majority of the rural communities where those facilities are located are not deriving any benefit except earning a wage. Parks Boards are treating these communities as passive beneficiaries of project activities, which means that the communities are not involved in the process of change or their own development (Wells et al. 1992).

Nevertheless, there are exceptions, cases where the local rural communities are empowered and have the capacity to influence the outcome of projects. These communities are equal stakeholders and have succeeded in achieving their objectives with regard to ecotourism. Such projects include, among others, the Kafue Flats and Luangwa Integrated Rural Development Project in Zambia, the Nazinga Wildlife Utilization Project in Burkina Faso, the CAMPFIRE Project in Zimbabwe, the Talamanca and Boscosa National Parks in Costa Rica and Culebra Wildlife and Mindo Ecotourism in Ecuador (Drake, 1991a; Drake, 1991b; Orido, 1991; Wells et al. 1992).

In South Africa, the idea of local rural community participation is relatively new. The country has a history of forced removals and proclaiming game parks on areas communally owned by rural communities. As a result, most of the national parks, game reserves and nature reserves are fenced and border a settled rural African community (Coppen, 1990; Poulthey & Ngubane, 1990; Thompson, 1990; Els, 1994) and are a means of both protecting the fragile environment and providing a base for sustainable ecotourism (Sayer, 1981; Place, 1991).

Not only are rural communities not involved in decision-making with regard to the parks, but the parks themselves are "... *not created in a social and economic vacuum or unpopulated areas. Park creation frequently entails an abrupt change in local economies*" (Place, 1991:186), based on the exploitation of numerous natural

resources (Gorio, 1978; Sayer, 1981; Place, 1991; Sherman & Dixon, 1991; Whelan, 1991; Andersen, 1992; Els, 1994). Thus park development should be in such a way that "... *rural people are able to replace the direct exploitation of dwindling biological resources with adequate economic opportunities from tourism attracted by the continuing presence of these resources, park-based conservation programs may then be successful*" (Place, 1995:171).

The Natal Parks Board was the first among such institutions to initiate the participation of surrounding communities and help these communities to develop nature conservancies (Financial Mail, 1991; Cowling & Oliver, 1992). This move has been followed by other national parks boards, including the North-West Parks Board, which has jurisdiction over Madikwe Game Park. But the meaning of community participation, the level of participation and the participation itself vary greatly, and follow the ideas of Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation and Pine's (1984) participation ladder (discussed in 2.10.1).

On the other hand, local rural community participation should not be seen as a panacea for all the socio-economic costs of ecotourism projects (Drake, 1991a; Drake, 1991b). It, too, has its disadvantages, such as an increase in the number of managerial and administrative staff, benefits not always reaching intended target groups, furthermore value is confused with facts; it is time consuming, costly and stressful (Drake, 1991b).

However, community participation has numerous advantages. Among others, it is an early warning system for those in authority to avoid decisions that could result in animosity between themselves and local communities. In order to get the last-mentioned to listen, those in authority should enlist the confidence, trust and support of these communities. Furthermore, participation fosters better planning and decision-making which, in turn, legitimises the decision-making process.

The idea of participation is endorsed in the South African government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which argues for "... *active involvement and growing empowerment...*" (ANC, 1994:5) as opposed to no participation and manipulation of rural communities.

"People's participation is perceived today as an important dimension of an environmentally sustainable pattern of development" (Egger & Majeres, 1992). By employing the principle of community participation, ecotourism can provide tangible benefits for disadvantaged communities, particularly in rural areas where these benefits are most needed (Drake, 1991b; Ryel & Grasse, 1991; Wells et al. 1992; **Weekly Mail**, 1994b). The local community and entrepreneurs should be involved as equal partners and ensure that both benefit from ecotourism. Management should be a continuous participative process and the cornerstone of effective involvement of all stakeholders, namely conservation, the local community and the tourist industry, throughout the life span of any ecotourism project (Poulthey & Ngubane, 1990; Thompson, 1990; Wells et al. 1992; Cater, 1993; Gurung & De Coursey, 1994; **Weekly Mail**, 1994a).

Boo (1990) comes to the conclusion that even though ecotourism is a tool which can be used for conservation and rural development, it can only work if it involves local communities who, in many instances, are not involved. She maintains that "...nature tourism will not contribute to rural development unless rural people are brought into the planning and development of the industry" (Boo, 1990:49). Thus ecotourism development should be on a small scale and for the benefit of locally owned activities (Ryel & Grasse, 1991; Weaver, 1991; Weaver, 1994). The latter include viable options for which funds are not available, and also those operations that have a much higher input of local products, material and labour (which has a multiple effect throughout the local economy as it reduces import leakages) (Jacobson & Robles, 1992; Singh, 1993; Hawkins, 1994; & Place, 1995).

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Until now, conservation strategies in South Africa have followed a Eurocentric approach. This approach is characterised by "... a paternalism, elitism and an attitude of supremacy" (Fourie, 1994:124) of Parks Boards towards local communities. The Parks Boards (both national and provincial) were (and are still to a large extent) not catering for the uniqueness of Africa (Fourie, 1994). The entire conservation practice has no room for the ideas, opinions and involvement of rural people in decision-making (Fourie, 1994).

Consequently, the ecotourism practised in Madikwe Game Reserve cannot provide tangible benefits for the disadvantaged surrounding rural areas, where it is most needed, without local community participation. Ways should be found to involve local communities and entrepreneurs as equal stakeholders in a continuous process. Through this process, the historical antagonism of black communities towards conservation that resulted from forced removals and apartheid-style policies, will be overcome (**Weekly Mail**, 1993).

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 AIMS

The primary aims of the study are:

- * to investigate ways in which local communities around Madikwe Game Park can benefit from ecotourism; and
- * to formulate a congruent public policy that will benefit all stakeholders.

1.3.2 OBJECTIVES

To realise the above aims, the following objectives have been set:

- * to determine trends of community participation in ecotourism (arguments and models) worldwide and in South Africa (chapter 2);
- * to determine the needs, aspirations and problems of the communities surrounding Madikwe Game Park (chapter 3);
- * to determine how these needs and problems could be addressed by ecotourism in Madikwe (chapter 4);
- * to formulate a model of rural community participation in ecotourism (chapter 4); and
- * to suggest and recommend ways in which the local communities can be changed into host communities (chapter 5).

1.4 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The majority of the people living around to Madikwe Game Park cannot read or write, and therefore the participatory approach¹ was used. This involves using qualitative consultation techniques to assess community sentiments. These techniques include: group open-ended interviews; focus groups (male, female, youth, illiterate, literate, etc); public forums; minutes of Community Development Organisations; Park Management, field studies, observations and literature on different aspects related to the research aims. For a detailed schedule of question asked and a list of interviews, see Appendices 1 and 2.

1.5 STUDY AREA

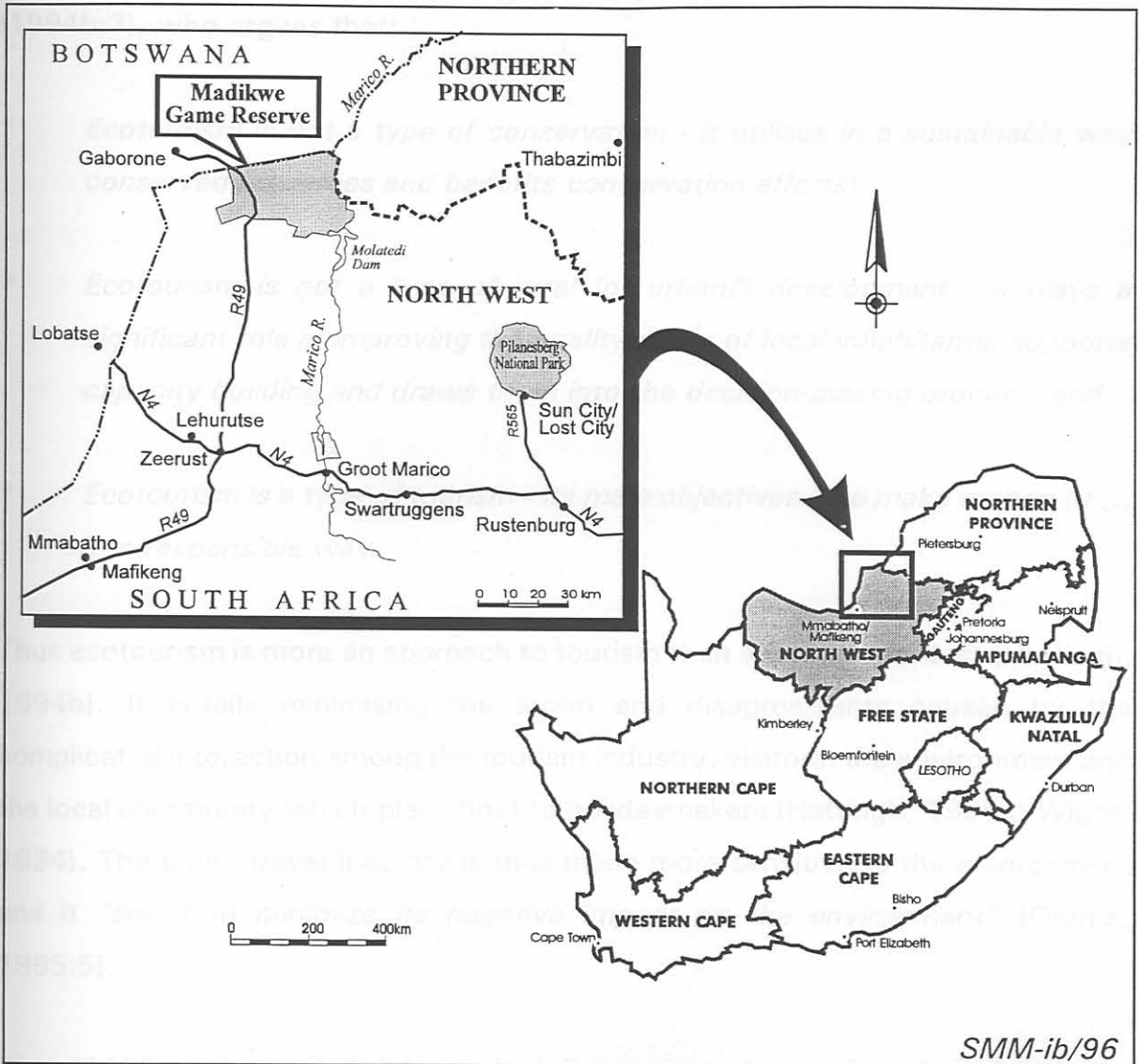
The area studied is situated in the North-West Province of South Africa. It comprises the Madikwe Game Park of 75 000 ha, which borders on the Republic of Botswana in the north (for 30 km), the Marico River in the east, the Gaborone-Zeerust road in the west and Dwarsberg in the south as indicated in Fig. 1.1. The community of Supingstad situated in the north-western corner and Molatedi in the south-eastern corner. The rest of the area consists of white-owned farms. Since these farms did not form part of Bophuthatswana when the park was proclaimed in 1992, they are not covered in this study.

1.6 TOWARDS A MEANING OF ECOTOURISM

There has been a shift in demand from "sun-lust" to "sun-plus" vacations and many tourists want to learn while travelling (Ayala, 1995). The number of visitors to natural areas has increased dramatically during the past decade. Ecotourism is the fastest growing subsector of tourism and one of the world's largest industry sectors, but still it remains poorly defined (Gilbert, 1993; Buckley, 1994; Russell, 1994; Ayala, 1995; Orams, 1995). Ecotourism has become a buzz word (Hall, 1993; Hall, 1994; Hattingh, 1994b; Holomisa, 1994; Wight, 1994), but few people actually understand its full meaning. It is associated with terms such as soft, green, sustained, responsible, farm, alternative, and agri-tourism (Boo, 1990;

1. *The participatory approach utilises public-based techniques, such as community participation, community development, consultation and advocacy planning. It involves mainly qualitative consultation techniques to assess community sentiments (Wilson, 1994:55).*

FIGURE 1.1: ORIENTATION MAP: MADIKWE GAME PARK AND ENVIRONS



Weaver, 1991; Keane, 1992; Marajh & Meadows, 1992; Gilbert, 1993; Hall, 1993; Valentine, 1993; Weaver, 1993; Wight, 1993; Buckley, 1994; Cater, 1994; Gilbert, et al. 1994; Hall, 1994; Hall & Kinnaird, 1994; Hattingh, 1994b; Khan, 1994; Schlüter, 1994; Wight, 1994; Ayala, 1995; Orams, 1995).

Ecotourism is a combination of interests driven by environmental, economic and social concerns which incorporate both a strong commitment to nature and a sense of social responsibility (Western, 1993; Wieman, 1995). Thus, Ceballos-Lascurain (1993:12) defines ecotourism as "... tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring or enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing aspects (both past and present) found in these areas". This definition

places nature tourism at the fore front (Orams, 1995), a view rejected by Hattingh (1994b:3), who argues that:

- * *Ecotourism is not a type of conservation - it utilises in a sustainable way conserved resources and benefits conservation efforts;*
- * *Ecotourism is not a type of rural (or urban?) development - it plays a significant role in improving the quality of life of local inhabitants, supports capacity building and draws them into the decision-making process; and*
- * *Ecotourism is a type of tourism - its main objectives is to make money (!) ... in a responsible way.*

Thus ecotourism is more an approach to tourism than a tourism product (Hattingh, 1994b). It entails minimising the strain and disagreements caused by the complicated interaction among the tourism industry, visitors, the environment and the local community which plays host to holidaymakers (Hattingh, 1994a; Wight, 1994). The entire travel industry is thus made more sensitive to the environment and it "*seeks to minimize its negative impact on the environment*" (Orams, 1995:5).

Koch (1993:1) clearly and elaborately defines ecotourism as "*... purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to the local people*". Thus, unlike conventional mass tourism (CTM), ecotourism should aim at achieving the following three goals:

- * to meet the needs of the host community in terms of improving living standards in both the short and the long term;
- * to satisfy the demands of a growing number of tourists and continue to attract them in order to meet the above mentioned aim; and

* to safeguard the natural environment in order to achieve the first two goals (Cater, 1992).

All of the above mentioned aims should be given equal importance. For example, environmental degradation could result from encouraging an influx of tourists to a certain area. This will destroy the main attraction and lead to a decline in the number of visitors to that locality.

The following definition seems to encompass several accepted norms of ecotourism as indicated by Cater (1992); Koch (1993); Valentine (1993); Chalker, 1994; Hattingh (1994a); Hattingh (1994c); Orams, 1995; and Wieman (1995): "... *an enlightening, participatory travel experience to environments, both natural and cultural, that ensures the sustainability of these environments and, whilst respecting the integrity of the host communities, produces economic opportunities that make the conservation of the resource base beneficial to them*" (Hattingh, 1994b:4).

In the end, ecotourism should be able to fulfil the needs of the present without jeopardising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs (Wight, 1993; Valentine, 1993; Hawkins, 1994). D'Amore (1992;258) views ecotourism as a process of change in which the "... *exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional changes are made consistent with future as well as present needs*". It should therefore concentrate on the natural environment and the indigenous culture, creating a sense of place and cognitive experience accompanied by a broadening of perceptions and awareness (Mulder, 1993).

CHAPTER 5: In this chapter, recommendations are made with a view of changing
 Based on the above discussion, ecotourism could be defined as an enhanced travel experience to historical, cultural and natural environments, with the aim of enjoying and learning, and in so doing **promoting the financial development of the local host communities**, whilst sustaining the natural and cultural environment and developing the tourist industry.

Although tourism to a destination such as a game park might be classified as

ecotourism, it need not of necessity be such. If the tourist destination does not benefit the local community it fails to meet one of the critical elements of ecotourism. The essence of this study thus emerges: is the Madikwe Game Park indeed an ecodestination?

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study will be presented in the following chapters:

CHAPTER 1: This is an introductory chapter which explains the needs and meaning of ecotourism, the research problem, the study's objectives and aims, the research procedures used, the study area and the structure of the study.

CHAPTER 2: This chapter looks at different trends in community participation, the constraints of community tourism planning and local and global models of community participation.

CHAPTER 3: The needs and problems of communities surrounding Madikwe Game Park are examined in this chapter. Furthermore, the available background information on the park and its infrastructure are dealt with.

CHAPTER 4: The chapter examines ways in which the needs and problems of the communities surrounding Madikwe Game Park could be addressed. It also proposes a model of community participation in ecotourism.

CHAPTER 5: In this chapter, recommendations are made with a view of changing local communities into host communities.