

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SHORTCOMINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter concludes this research study by synthesizing findings, recommendations and shortcomings of the thesis. It summarizes first the overall findings and recommendations of the entire study and secondly the specific findings and recommendations of the research objectives per chapter. Shortcomings and further areas for future research are also highlighted.

7.1 RESOLUTION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

7.1.1 Terms of reference

The research problem, which served as the terms of reference for the study, was based on the premise that the KNP lacks an integrated tourism policy statement (management plan) constructed from scientific data to guide and balance tourism service delivery with conservation and community involvement objectives. The lack of an integrated tourism management plan created different meanings and interpretations of tourism recreational values, poor understanding of tourists' needs, inconsistent norms and standards of service levels, financial under-performance, poor maintenance of infrastructure, exclusion of communities from active participation and lack of performance indicators to measure tourism service quality and human use impacts on the environment.

7.1.2 Overall findings

Tourism and recreational values are not adequately recognized and managed in the Park's current management plan that, in the first place, should incorporate strategies for their conservation. The knowledge base for tourism and recreational values and tourist needs is fragmented, uncoordinated, rigid and overtaken by market trends. The KNP's tourism staff, from housekeeping to management, is largely under-prepared and untrained for their operational responsibilities. There are no clear human resource plans or financial performance plans to drive tourism. The pressure on the Park's ecosystems and ecological processes, as a result of the increase of tourist use and intensification of regional developments on its southern and western boundaries, threatens the natural attractiveness of the KNP as a nature-based holiday destination. The reality of minimal financial returns on the

tourism business caused by the lack of professional capabilities to manage tourism contributes to the Park's inability to adequately maintain tourism facilities leading to inability to meet growing demand. This inability to maintain tourism facilities erodes the quality of the product and debilitates the tourism value of the Park. The lack of service quality standards, indicators and measurement instruments to assess profound tourism impacts on the Park's values is cause for concern. Although the survey on community participation revealed the existence of positive relationships between the adjacent communities and the KNP, the significant social values and dimensions are largely unknown at this stage. Such values must be recognized as distinct from, but potentially arising from other values including recreation, aesthetics, personal and community identity, educational, spiritual, ideological, cultural and historic imperatives. The slight improvement in relationships with adjacent communities is to be welcomed and serves as a stepping stone for future improvement.

7.1.3 Overall recommendations

The tourism and recreational values of the KNP should be given special recognition in the Park's main Management Plan (Masterplan) as suggested in the framework in Chapter 6. A structured programme of tourism research and knowledge management should be used in continually updating the knowledge base of the Park's conservation and tourism values. This will require a multi-disciplinary leadership (consisting of trained strategic managers, financial experts, tourism practitioners, marketing professionals, public relations practitioners and social scientists in addition to ecologists and rangers).

The Park should be managed conservatively and sustainably to ensure that its values are not degraded and that the pressures that might contribute to the degradation of values are identified and managed through an integrated management plan before degradation occurs. Adaptive management, as suggested in the framework, is needed to provide a management philosophy to ensure that management strategies can be changed if they prove to be ineffective in protecting the system or improving results.

New approaches to tourism and recreation management now include sustainable use management, limits of use management, environmental performance management and business, community and authority accountability for environmental performance outcomes. The framework provided in Chapter 6 addresses these imperatives. The specific findings and recommendations of the objectives stated in each chapter of the study are presented in Table 7.1.

TABLE 7.1: Specific findings and recommendations on the research objectives

CHAPTER	OBJECTIVES	FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
Chapter 1	Construct the background to the research problem	Tourism in protected areas is not managed in an integrated and professional manner with existing park management framework. A conflict exists that creates a gulf between tourism and conservation objectives. In many parks no tourism management framework exist.	Protected areas must develop tourism management plans as part of their broad policy statements in order to manage tourism in an integrated, coordinated and professional manner to avoid degradation of the natural resource base and to meet tourist expectations.
Chapter 2	Define the type of tourism practiced in protected areas, draw comparative international benchmarks to be used in developing a theoretical management framework for the KNP	Lack of common understanding in defining the types of tourism practiced by the KNP. Lack of a management philosophy, monitoring and evaluation plans to guide the development of tourism management plans. Different management models exist for different countries and parks. Overall, tourism does not constitute a serious area of management. Protected area managers are not qualified or experienced in tourism management, finance and marketing.	Protected areas should adopt the principles of ecotourism and sustainable tourism as guidelines for their tourism products and service delivery. A Management framework should be based on a legal framework and the adaptive management philosophy to accommodate changing circumstances. The changing management paradigms from the classic to the modern era should be reflected in the management framework. Management frameworks should be practical with measurable outcomes. The IUCN evaluation framework could be adapted to suit local conditions.
Chapter 3	Derive lessons from the KNP's historical background of tourism development to influence proposed management framework	The KNP wildlife product is well developed and indicators (ROZ Plan) exist to manage the wilderness qualities of the product. However, tourism has evolved without business acumen, with non-involvement of adjacent communities, poor infrastructure maintenance, inability to raise sufficient revenue, ignorance to tourist needs and lack of marketing.	It is imperative to create a tourism and recreational value system that will balance business and environmental imperatives for the survival of the KNP. The proposed management framework should include aspects of community participation, environmental impact management, proper maintenance of facilities, marketing and efficient management of finances to achieve financial viability. There is a need to explore innovative business options to maximize tourism revenue e.g. commercialization.
Chapter 4	Measure the demographic profiles of tourists, consumer personal motivation, tourist satisfaction levels and tourists' views on commercialization	KNP tourists come from across the globe and are predominantly highly educated. The KNP's natural attraction is the main draw-card for tourists. Tourists manifest mixed feelings about the quality of the product and are generally divided on the effect of commercialization on the Park in general and accommodation in particular.	The KNP needs a tourism management system that will protect tourism and recreational values that attract tourists. Tourists come to the Park in the main for peace of mind, tranquility, self-esteem, relaxation, confidence in the KNP brand and unspoilt wildness. These values must be protected in the management framework. There are clear reasons to be concerned about the manner in which the commercialization programme is being implemented. Further research and comprehensive planning need to take place before the programme can be expanded.

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TABLE 7.1: Specific findings and recommendations on the research objectives (continued)

CHAPTER	OBJECTIVES	FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
Chapter 5	Determine levels of community awareness attitudes and perceptions about the KNP and nature conservation	Contrary to earlier findings by Els (1994), communities are positive about nature conservation and the value of wild animals. They are concerned though that there are no mechanisms that channel benefits to them directly.	Although the social dimensions of Park management have been determined on the utilitarian spheres of tourism, recreation and public education, little is known about the spiritual, ideological and community identity elements of the Park experience. It is important to know how people perceive or value the Park experience or what that experience really means to them.
Chapter 6	Suggest an integrated tourism management framework which identifies tourism and recreational values	A framework is presented with a mission statement, management aspects, standards, indicators for assessing service quality and impacts.	The framework constitutes a template that will guide the development of an integrated tourism management plan with clear implementation phases or stages and time frames.
Additional finding	Ecotourism and sustainable tourism principles	In general the KNP products lack emphasis on ecotourism and sustainable use principles	The new framework should put emphasis on Community-based Natural Resource Management activities along the lines of Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE programme or UNESCO's Biosphere reserves (2.5.9 and 2.5.9.1). Biosphere reserves are areas of protected ecosystems where solutions to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use are promoted.
Additional finding	Utilization of State subsidy grant	Currently the government partly subsidizes SANParks to the tune of 18 % of its total operational budget. Plans are in the pipeline to eventually cut this subsidy grant and make SANParks financially independent from Treasury.	The whole world over there is no conservation agency that is not supported financially by the state. The conservation of a nation's natural and cultural heritage is a primary function of the government of the day. Given the enormity of the facilities' backlog in the KNP, SANParks alone will never succeed to address the shortfall. Revenue raised from tourism should rather be used to meet operating costs such as salaries, refurbishment of tourism facilities, interior décor, production of information brochures, marketing, meeting linen and cutlery and other operational needs. The state subsidy should cover both capital and maintenance of land acquisition for Park expansion, physical buildings, roads infrastructure and purchasing aircrafts. The grant should be inflation-linked and increased proportionally annually. It is unrealistic to expect SANParks to cover these costs from a system that is partly profitable because some parks have no tourism value at present.
Additional finding	Demands motivated by commercial pressure to expand tourism facilities	Uncontrollable expansion of the Park's facilities as a result of tourism demand affects the Park's values.	Management of all development needs to give priority to conservation of the core values of the Park, on which sustainable tourism and high quality tourist experience depends. A monitoring and evaluation plan with assessed indicators is suggested.

7.2 SHORTCOMINGS OF THE STUDY

7.2.1 Sample sizes

Although the sample size of the main survey was reasonably big, $N=836$, the sizes of the other three surveys were relatively small ($N=317$, $N=60$ and $N=130$) due to time and logistic constraints. The minimum sample size for a credible study differs from discipline to discipline and from one research topic to another. Most opinion surveys cannot get away with less than 1000 respondents, and most sociological and epidemiological studies require many hundreds of subjects. However, in some social research studies sample sizes of 30 to 100 subjects are a common occurrence. In some disciplines, where there is little variance in measurements, even single subject research may be found. The advantage of a large sample, on the other hand, is that the effect of missing data, as explained (see 4.1.3.4), does not influence the findings in a significant way.

It may be advisable to expand the sample sizes on the effect of commercialization on the Park's experience, community attitudes, value-laddering interviews and tourist satisfaction levels in a post-study research exercise as part of the continuous research endeavour to establish a social research base line for decision-making and strengthening of management effectiveness.

7.2.2 Knowledge gaps in social science research

Throughout this research study it has been necessary to emphasize the extent of inadequate social research information upon which the social dimension of planning and management could be better grounded. Whilst there are literally thousands of papers of pre-eminent quality in the natural science discipline in the KNP, only a handful were published in the social sciences (not commissioned by the Park), and most of them are of very superficial quality. There is no basic comparability over time and any comments on trends can only be impressional and based on professional judgement rather than hard scientific data.

7.2.3 Time constraints

The duration of this research study prevented the researcher from covering trends associated with the development process of the tourism management plan over time. In terms of the projected process the envisaged management plan will only be completed in March 2005 to allow the public participation process as prescribed by new legislation (see implementation plan 6.13).

7.2.4 Broad scope of tourism management

It was not humanly possible to cover the wide range of aspects associated with tourism management in a protected area in a single study. The fact that there were no scientific tourism studies conducted by the KNP research section prior to this one made it impossible to draw parallels from previous relevant research experience. Some aspects of this thesis, such as community participation in tourism activities, transfrontier parks, marketing, social research, the role of tour operators and the economic value of tourism, are only superficially covered in this study and would each constitute a distinct study in their own right. Tourism is a broad and complex field, composed of a number of sectors (see 2.9).

7.2.5 Combination of social and natural science methodology

The triangulation of natural and social science methodologies, although a widely acceptable approach in academic research, is very difficult to harmonize and to produce a coherent set of results. It requires advanced research skills, time and extraordinary abilities to refine the technique in order to arrive at compatible results each time the approach is applied. However, the researcher made an attempt that can be refined in further studies.

7.2.6 Tourism and recreational values

The fourteen (14) tourism and recreational values identified in this study (see 6.6.2.2) are by no means comprehensive. This is what the study could unravel within the time and scope constraints associated with this study. Further research could produce more tourism and recreational values that might add enormous value to the successful management of tourism in the KNP.

7.2.7 Tourist awareness and satisfaction

It is imperative to conduct regular surveys to determine values that underpin visitation. It was not possible to conduct repeated surveys to establish trends in this regard. Important aspects or variables include rating tourist satisfaction levels on availability and cleanliness of toilet facilities, walking trails, picnic spots, car parking, scenic driving, tourist information centres, information display boards, direction and information signs, availability of water and understaffing.

7.3 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to create an overview that could be used as a template with minor adjustments by protected areas, including the KNP, to develop integrated tourism management plans. Future research could possibly cover the following areas:

- tourist-use profiles for the different forms of access to and within the KNP; cost-benefit analysis of investments in the provision and maintenance of access for tourism and recreation and the environmental effects of the provision of access;
- the strategic environmental, social and economic impact of the commercialization programme;
- seasonal variations of tourism in the KNP;
- evaluation of the tourism impact on fauna, flora, geomorphology, water quality, wilderness and natural aesthetics and how it impacts on the natural attraction of the Park;
- aspects of the cultural history of the park including details of local people, history and nature and how these dynamics have influenced the cultural heritage of the Park (as part of cultural tourism);
- collaboration with the communities and the tourism industry in the management of tourism and recreational values at Park and regional level;
- implementation plans for sustainable tourism and recreation, including supply and demand management in the context of global and local criteria;
- market research into opportunities for educational use and the types of education experiences that currently attract tourists;
- modelling a fresh approach to the concept of carrying capacity along the lines suggested in 2.6.2;
- tourist feedback on existing services and facilities and unmet needs; supply and demand management; trends in tourists' expectations and experiences of services and facilities and movements in the region and the Park;
- financial modelling on the actual cost of providing services and facilities for tourism and recreation opportunities and possible funding sources;
- an integrated approach to managing tourism and recreation opportunities and activities across the region and how the KNP contributes to efforts by provincial tourism and conservation agencies, local government and the private sector; and

- determination of the socio-economic impacts of the Park's tourism on the local community, surrounding areas and the regional economy.

7.4 CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the KNP is a destination of significant importance in an international setting for biodiversity uniqueness and for international tourism. The Park is also a major scientific and tourist attraction on the domestic front. Although there are no reliable statistics available because of manual collection mechanisms, some significant correlation exists between the KNP's tourism foreign exchange earnings and the general health of the economy. The KNP is the second most visited destination in South Africa after Cape Town and therefore it is difficult to imagine any level of international destination marketing that would ignore the significance of this national icon. It makes perfect sense that tourism in the Park should be managed in the most professional and efficient manner to meet both the domestic and the international market's expectations. The condition of the Park as a tourism destination in terms of its quality of accommodation, staff, transport, accessibility, restaurants, shopping and recreation should reflect high standards for the Park to be rated higher than other destinations the world over. Failure to keep pace with reasonable and appropriate customer demands or changes in the external tourism environment may result in the KNP becoming unattractive and taking a debilitating blow from competition.

There is clearly some tension between the conservation and the tourism-use objectives of the Park, and decisions on biodiversity conservation would always have implications for tourism use. Whatever the nature and magnitude of the problem, the solution lies in a professional and scientific management approach to tourism through an integrated tourism management plan. The integrated tourism management framework suggested in this study can go a long way in helping to generate sufficient revenue, balance conservation with tourism and community needs and apply the required synergies among the various management objectives in protected area management.

It will be in the interest of present and future generations if tourism in the KNP were to be undertaken sensitively and in keeping with ecologically sustainable development and ecotourism principles to enhance the conservation status of the Park. The integrated tourism management framework suggested in this study will contribute directly to the KNP Management Plan (Master Plan) that translates the statutory basis for the management of the Park. With such an integrated tourism management framework the KNP will be able to assess the marginal costs of operating nature tourism and recreation and enhance revenue return.

Revenue will then be invested back into the maintenance of tourism facilities to achieve management effectiveness and tourist experience. This is a critical part of the ecologically sustainable tourist-use planning framework being introduced by SANParks through its commercialization programme.

On the question of community involvement the future of the KNP is bleak if it does not take advantage of the positive atmosphere that now prevails on its borders. The government of the day is sympathetic to institutions that join hands in the total transformation of the country. The KNP must play an even more visible role in reducing the frontiers of poverty by ensuring broadening of its ecosystem benefits and services to communities. Community based conservation programmes can go a long way in ensuring that communities living on its doorstep are actively involved in conservation and ecotourism projects.

The study recognizes that a balance is possible between management for long-term conservation of the KNP and tourism demand, but there are limits to use, which must be identified by detailed planning and be managed. Such planning will upgrade the level of tourism opportunities for the public's enjoyment, community involvement and will directly have an influence on the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of adjacent communities in fulfilling SANParks' mission of making national parks the "pride and joy of all South Africans".