

Work In Progress: The Role Of Higher Education In Post-Conflict Tourism Development, A Case Study From Rwanda

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Abstract

■ Tourism and hospitality have been recognized as a major economic factor worldwide and competition between destinations for present and future tourist has only become fiercer. Within such established markets as the East African safari & beach market it will not be easy for new destinations to discern themselves and offer a complimentary or new product. Especially in the case of Rwanda, that was plagued by a violent recent history and still suffers from an unclear image, this objective might not be easy to realize. However with the support from international partners and the dedication and ambitions of the national government in collaboration with local stakeholders, Rwanda is moving forward. Although this case study is related to an African example there might be suggestions and lessons learned that could inspire other destinations to proceed along a similar track.

Key Words:

International cooperation, empowerment, Rwanda Tourism, capacity building, stakeholders' involvement

Resumen

■ El turismo y la hospitalidad han sido reconocidos como un factor económico importante en todo el mundo, y la competencia entre los destinos por el turista actual y futuro sólo ha vuelto más feroz. Dentro de estos mercados establecidos, como es el caso de los mercados de safari y playa de África del Este, no será fácil para los nuevos destinos diferenciarse y ofrecer un producto complementario o nuevo. Especialmente en el caso de Ruanda, plagado por una historia reciente de violencia y cuya imagen todavía se ve afectada, este objetivo no puede ser fácil de realizar. Sin embargo, con el apoyo de socios internacionales y la dedicación y ambiciones del gobierno nacional, en colaboración con los actores locales, Ruanda está avanzando. Aunque este caso de estudio se refiere a un ejemplo de África puede haber sugerencias y lecciones aprendidas que podrían inspirar a otros destinos a continuar por un camino similar.

Palabras clave:

Cooperación internacional, empoderamiento, turismo de Ruanda, fomento de la capacidad, participación de los interesados

Introduction

■ The position of tourism as an economic contribution to the financial and socio-economic welfare of destinations has been acknowledged by many governments worldwide, as it has by non-governmental institutions and last but not least by commercial organizations. According to the UNWTO tourism has become one of the largest economic sectors of the world and is not just providing income, but also jobs to a large percentage of the world's population. Furthermore it is expected by that same UNWTO that tourism continues to grow and that by the year 2020 more than 1.6 billion people will travel as tourists (UNWTO, 2010). Therefore it comes as no surprise that many governments see the development of their tourism sector as an important source to enlarge the GDP and even as a factor that can contribute to the distribution of wealth, reduce poverty, stimulate entrepreneurship, fortify the position of women and the re-evaluation of its culture. Sometimes tourism is also regarded as a means to present a destination positively on the world stage, eventually leading to a position where non-tourism related enterprises might consider the strengthening of market-ties or even the establishment of a business.

The overall share of the African continent in international tourism is around 5 % but the division of arrivals and receipts is not equally distributed over the region. Looking at Sub-Saharan Africa it becomes clear that South Africa receives the larger share of all arrivals and income and that the East African market is the second destination. Within this region Kenya and Tanzania are the top earners followed by Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi at a last position.

Rwanda's economic ambitions

■ Rwanda and Burundi are the two other countries that belong to this region, but their role as an international destination cannot be compared that easily with the other nations. Although the low level of tourism development is also due to the violence that occurred in the recent past, and the subsequent image of the destination, there are other reasons as well why Rwanda in particular did not become a top-of-mind destination in this part of the world for most of the last decade. However since 2002 the new government of the country realized that Rwanda's balance of trade is characterized by a persistent deficit of exports compared to imports and that this deficit can be explained by a number of factors including energy dependence, food dependence, the low level of industrialization, and the lack of significant export diversification. Rwanda's trade deficit can therefore be interpreted as the incapacity of the economy to produce what it needs, or as the lack of producing export receipts sufficient to cover imports needs. The level of Rwandan

export remains low, covering only 23 per cent of imports in 2008.

Despite this, Rwanda has recently experienced strong trade performance with exports growing at an average of 12.5 per cent a year since 2001. Besides private sector mobilization, an important driver of export growth has been the restructuring of front agencies such as RIEPA (Rwanda Investment and Export Promotion Agency) and subsequently the Rwanda Development Board (RDB). While performance is still short of desired targets, it provides evidence that Rwanda can reduce imbalances in the trade account when informed choices and timely actions are made on specific export industries. Furthermore, the Government of Rwanda has initiated a broad economic reform agenda from which ambitious targets have been set for growth and poverty reduction. The government, as part of its long-term strategy, has set the targets of reaching the status of a middle income country, growing to a per capita income of \$900 by 2020 from \$250 in 2002, based on a rapid transition from subsistence farming to higher value added agriculture and non-farming activities, that will require an annual growth rate of at least 7 per cent. Achieving this target will also require growth in a variety of sectors. In this context, it is expected that the sector of services should record an annual growth rate of at least 10 per cent from 2006 to 2020. In order to address the trade deficit as well as Rwanda's growth targets, a clear development strategy for the tourism sector is required, one of the service sectors with greatest potential for growth in Rwanda. The tourism sector has seen good performance during the past few years, with its contribution in the national economy growth increasing over time. In 2008, the number of foreign visitors to Rwanda reached just under one million from about 826,000 in 2007, an increase of 30 per cent. Estimates indicate that tourism revenues significantly increased between 2007 and 2011, from \$138 million to \$252 million. A well-focused tourism policy with expected arrivals of 1.199.000 in 2012 and up to 2.219.000 in 2020 could increase these figures even further, contributing greater public revenues, boosting the current account of the balance of payments and contributing to the economic growth of Rwanda. However, workforce shortages are considerable with a 96% gap at technician level and a 55% gap at professional/management level at present and a disproportionately large proportion of the workforce coming from neighboring countries such as Kenya (MIFOTRA, Audit report 2009). Based on this and on the expected number of tourists in the future, the Hospitality and Tourism sector would need a substantial increase in infrastructure and personnel in the coming years.

Vision 2020

■ In its Vision 2020 document the Rwanda government sees a significant role for the tourism industry to con-

tribute to increasing the service share of GDP and names specific aspirations that are directly linked to tourism, such as: the development of a culture of entrepreneurship, the development of a broad, dynamic and competitive private sector and last but not least the growth of investments driven by the private sector, together contributing to a sustainable reduction of poverty. The Rwanda Tourism Policy will also focus on integrating its tourism sector both regionally and internationally and on the creation of synergies between its tourism sector and other complementing industries. Job creation, strengthening professional competencies, local communities participation in the development of the sector, improved use of information and communication technology, rational use of existing physical infrastructures, strengthening public-private sector partnership, and development of agro-tourism amongst others are some of the objectives highlighted in the five years national export strategy plan (2012-2017) that should contribute to the attainment of vision 2020.

The Vision 2020 document was preceded by several other policy documents and the result of the efforts undertaken by the Tourism Working Group (TWG) that met for the first time in 2001. This TWG, which included public and private sector stakeholders, was created to begin the challenging process of rebuilding Rwanda's tourism sector. At that time the situation of Rwanda's tourism was not healthy, with international leisure arrivals estimated at less than 3,000 a year compared with nearly 40,000 in 1984. At that time the tourism industry was fragmented, lacking the resources and leadership needed to recover and to become both internationally competitive and a force for achieving the socio-economic development goals. The strategic vision for tourism in Rwanda that resulted from the Tourism Working Group's efforts was stated in the Rwanda Tourism Strategy 2002. The country faced the daunting task of rebuilding its tourism industry after a devastating war and a damaged reputation internationally as a tourist destination. Using the gorillas as its flagship product Rwanda tourism set out to promote its other primate products, cultural tourism products and to become the leading eco-tourism destination in East and Central Africa. The industry has achieved its goal of attracting a high-end leisure market. The numbers tracking the gorillas (Rwanda's iconic product) in 2008 reached near capacity. This has emphasized the need for the diversification of products as well as the increased participation of the private sector in investments and product development. In reviewing the succession of tourism policies and strategies it became evident that most, if not all, the central issues have been stated and restated. What was needed next was a more concise situational analysis, confirmation of the key issues and the setting of specific tourism development objectives and targets. This would then lead on to a comprehensive set of implementable action plans to achieve those stated aims in order to advance the tourism development agenda to where it could make a decisive difference to

the Rwandan economy. The Sustainable Tourism Development Master Plan addresses these issues. New objectives and strategies are required that are compatible with and reflect the direction outlined in the Master Plan. This policy document was drafted within the context of the Master Plan and concentrated on elaborating policy, objectives and strategies. The overall objective of the Tourism Policy is to increase tourism revenues, profits for reinvestment and jobs through developing new distinctive, market-led products clearly positioned and promoted in the marketplace, bringing spatial and social balance to the distribution of tourism benefits. More specific it aims to: implement planned and coordinated marketing and communications strategies; position and maintain tourism as a national priority; project a clear, distinctive, image of Rwanda as a wildlife, eco-tourism, cultural and conference destination that is attractive to a high-value market and sensitive to the natural, cultural and social environment; develop quality tourism products, services and supporting infrastructure capable of attracting and meeting the needs of international, regional and domestic visitors; raise the awareness and understanding of the benefits of tourism across all strands of Rwandan society and within the tourism industry itself; channel tourism development into the identified Destination Management Areas (DMAs) and linking corridors. These DMA's will be developed as tourism intensive zones, which will include visitor attractions, activities and services, accommodation, and supporting infrastructure. Finally it aims to: establish and maintain highly effective, streamlined and focused organizational structures with the necessary skills and resources, so as to implement good tourism governance and management and, through systematic high quality training create a skilled workforce in value jobs at every level of the tourism and hospitality industry.

International cooperation

■ To accomplish these last two goals cooperation was sought with several NGO's from the Netherlands, resulting in a fact-finding mission to Kigali by SNV, the Netherlands primary NGO focusing on development. Their initial report led to another contact, this time with Nuffic, an independent, non-profit organization based in The Hague, the Netherlands that supports international cooperation in higher education, research and professional education in the Netherlands and abroad and aims to improve access to higher education worldwide. Their most important contract partners are the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture & Science and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They offer several different programs for capacity building such as StuNed (focusing on Indonesia), NFP (Fellowships for short courses), NPT (focused on institutional strengthening) and NICHE which supports capacity development in higher education in Dutch partner countries. The overall aim of

NICHE is to help alleviate qualitative and quantitative shortages in skilled manpower, and to do so within the framework of sustainable capacity-building directed towards reducing poverty in 23 developing countries. Support is provided in sectors which are supported by the Dutch bilateral cooperation program, in the higher education sector in general or in cross-cutting themes. In all cases, the relationship with the post-secondary education sector is taken into account. NICHE pays special attention to gender issues and to the link between capacity development and the needs of the labour market at all levels of the program.

Organizations from selected sectors in the NICHE countries are asked to apply for a project by submitting a project outline. The projects are expected to contribute to the realization of objectives formulated at the sector level, guaranteeing the embedding of projects in national priorities and the interrelationship between the contributions of the individual projects. A project has a maximum duration of four years.

Expertise of Dutch organizations, coupled with local or regional expertise, is used to assist the requesting organizations. Support can be given to a variety of organizations in NICHE countries, including institutions for post-secondary education, government ministries, national commissions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Nuffic assesses the quality of the project outlines and is responsible for matching the demand with a suitable partner in the Netherlands. The process of matching the demand and supply depends on the size of the project budget. Projects above Euro 200.000 will require a public tender; projects with a budget below 50.000 euro receive a waiver and are exempted from this procedure.

RTUC and the Niche objectives

■ The next step was the mission in 2009 by representatives of Nuffic to Rwanda where they met with the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, the Minister of Education, the Minister of State and representatives of Office Rwandais du Tourisme et des Parcs Nationaux (ORTPN), Rwanda Development Board (RDB), Kitabi College of Conservation and Environmental Management (KCCEM) and the Rwanda Tourism University College (RTUC). It was this last institute, the only higher educational institute in the country offering hospitality and tourism that was selected to become the prime partner within the forthcoming project.

Rwanda Tourism University College (RTUC) is a private higher education institution founded by a parents' association: Association des Parents RTI in May 2006, with Mrs Zulfat Mukarubega as the legal representative owning more than 70% shares. RTUC received its original

accreditation from the Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA) under the name of Rwanda Institute of Tourism (RTI). It operated as RTI until January 2008, only offering vocational training programs for the professional sector of Hospitality and Tourism.

Later on, RTI conducted a survey which revealed that the Hospitality and Tourism sector was a major driver of economic growth, job creation and poverty alleviation, and that there was a critical need to train managers for that sector. It is in this context that RTI decided to start its diploma and degree programs. By the end of 2007, RTI changed into RTUC after being granted a provisional operating licence. In April 2008, RTUC received its accreditation from the Ministry of Education which allows it to operate as an higher education institution after meeting the compliance conditions set by the national Higher Education Council (HEC) at the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC). RTUC offers the following programs: Diploma and Bachelor Degree levels in Hospitality and Tourism: Hotel and Restaurant Management; Travel and Tour Management; Business and Information Technology (in collaboration with *Mount Kenya University*); an international accredited air travel tariff program in collaboration with the *International Air Transport Association (IATA)*; and a cross-cutting language program. In addition, RTUC offers vocational training programs to the Hotel and Tourism industry.

After the selection of RTUC and further meetings with representatives of the government and the private sector the precise objective of the Niche project were formulated as: The strengthening of the capacity of RTUC to offer quality and relevant Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), research and services, and their contribution to an improvement of manpower within the Hospitality and Tourism sector in Rwanda.

More specific objectives were: Strengthening RTUC's organizational and management capacity; Strengthening the capacity of the academic staff to deliver quality teaching; Development of a Competence Based Curriculum and improvement of the quality and relevance of the study offer; Strengthening the research capacity and the delivery of quality services to the sector and society and finally, Establishing RTUC as a strong actor in the Hospitality and Tourism sector, through consolidated national and international partnerships.

Apart from these objectives there were two so-called cross-cutting themes to take into consideration. These were the mainstreaming of gender equality in management practices, study offers and delivery, research, consultancy and service provision, and access to the labour market and the establishment of close links between RTUC program delivery, research and services, and the needs of the labour market. Once the tender was made public several consortia sent their applications and proposals and in 2010 the project was awarded to a consortium

that consisted of MDF Training & Consultancy, CIS-VU University of Amsterdam, InHolland University of Applied Sciences, Sawadee Travel and Matchmakers Tanzania. This consortium combined educational and private (Tourism) sector expertise, North and South Experience and had a long-standing experience in international capacity development processes, including with Nuffic and its international partners. Their organizational and institutional development expertise would provide relevant and applicable support in strengthening the organizational and management capacity of RTUC. The strong international, academic and applied educational background and experience of InHolland and CIS-VU in Competency Based Learning and Curriculum Development would enable RTUC to access regional and international academic and more applied training and curriculum development. The presence of Sawadee and MMA in the consortium would add a labour-market relevant approach with active participation of private sector actors. Furthermore the consortium offered ample international research experience, applied as well as academic, which should help RTUC to strengthen its research capacity and delivery of quality research and consulting services to the tourism sector. All partners in the consortium have extended international networks amongst educational institutions, both academic and in applied sciences, and in the international private tourism sector, which would be beneficial for RTUC to establish itself as a strong actor in the hospitality & tourism sector through consolidated national & international partnerships. Furthermore all consortium members specifically mentioned that their efforts should have benefits not just for the staff of RTUC, but also for its students and the workforce in the tourism and hospitality sector in general.

Achievements after 2 years and prospects for the future

■ In 2012 the project in its 2nd year and there has been a very intense traffic of people and material between Rwanda and the Netherlands. After an initial visit of the RTUC management team to Holland late 2010 an action plan was made up and approved that included possible missions, combined with the requirements of RTUC and the objectives as described in the project. It was decided that 2 members of the management team would start working on their PhD at VU-University in Amsterdam and 1 in South Africa, that other staff members would do masters programs in India and South Africa. The first missions from the Netherlands to Rwanda were used partly as an inventory to specify the exact needs of the RTUC staff regarding the introduction of a new type of didactical approach and their ambitions regarding research. The first training during these missions were focusing on such subjects as project based learning (PBL) and competence-based learning (CBL) and where

possible linked to the demands of the Rwanda industry. During this mission it was also made clear that these didactical approaches included more than lecturing and in fact demanded a completely different attitude from both staff and students. In the future staff members would also play the roles of tutor, guarding the project process and progress, be consultants dealing with the contents of the project and deliver lectures when needed and in collaboration with their colleagues. Another subject of the early missions was the relation of RTUC with the industry. When offering vocational training and education the institute should be in close contact with the industry, not just for the content of the curriculum, but also for an important curriculum element as the traineeship period. Either parties, or rather all three of them should know from the start what to expect from the others. Together with the responsible staff members a new handbook for traineeship procedures was developed. Furthermore representatives of the industry were approached to participate in a new advisory body that would help RTUC to remain informed of the latest trends and developments in the tourism and hospitality industry. A more technical mission focused on the implementation of a management information system and the hard- and software of the institute. For the implementation of PBL and CBL two projects were developed in cooperation with representatives from both the Dutch and the Rwanda Tour Operating industries and it was decided that these two projects would be introduced with the start of the new academic year in July 2012. Developing and writing these project and the instructions for students and staff was the task of the RTUC staff supported by the expertise from InHolland. However it became obvious during the start of this element of the project that such a task could only be completed when RTUC staff members would have had the opportunity to take actively part in this type of education and collect first-hand experiences. It was the decided that 5 staff members would travel to Holland and while writing on the project handbooks would participate in this type of educational approach by attending lectures, consultancy and tutoring meetings and students presentations. This mission proved to be very successful and during a final meeting later that spring in Kigali both handbooks were produced and the preparations for the start of the introduction of the projects by July 2012 finalized. Another element of the capacity strengthening was the focus on possible research for the tourism and hospitality industry and within the East African academic world. To this end several combined VU-CIS and InHolland missions introduced RTUC staff to research questions and approaches and together with them selected possible candidates and options. By joining Atlas Africa in 2011 during their Kampala conference RTUC started positioning itself as an academic partner within the East African region for tourism and hospitality related studies and research and even went some steps further by offering to host the 2013 conference at their premises in Kigali. With this action RTUC not only expressed the ambition to become an active member of

the East African academic community but also offered its staff members a future platform to present their findings.

Lessons learned and implications for other destinations

■ During the recent midterm evaluation it was observed that the Niche project between Rwanda and the Netherlands may so far be regarded as a successful cooperation between several key stakeholders. Although there will always be room for improvement and communication between all parties involved requires continuous attention, the project as such has proceeded towards the final goals as set out by the original guidelines and resulted in such hands-on products as handbooks for two new curriculum projects, a handbook for traineeship procedures and the institutionalization of a professional workfield advisory board. Furthermore, all staff members have been trained in the subjects of Project Based - and Competence Based Learning and some of those that visited the Netherlands have become true ambassadors of this tutorial approach. Staff members have also become more ambitious regarding research and their own professional development and have been offered the opportunity to take on future challenges in these fields. During the project it became obvious that there are several factors that can contribute to possible success or failure. Apart from the possible funding it is of the highest importance that local governments recognize the importance of tourism and leisure as a contribution to the national and local economy and develop a vision and strategy to accomplish these goals. However, their cooperation with national and even international businesses, the facilitation of accessibility and possible revenue-related measures such as taxation also play an important role. Apart from this cooperation should be sought with the academic and educational institutions that will be responsible for delivering the workforce and management of the present and future tourism and hospitality industry and policy departments. On a different level it should be kept in mind that the key to success for implementing new elements in a curriculum cannot be undertaken in a top-down approach, but should always be the result of mutual respect and true cooperation between colleagues and that the empowerment of people can only be achieved when they have been allowed to see and taste the results of their (professional) progress. Rwanda is not any country, nor is there a direct relation with countries in the Spanish-speaking world or the Caribbean. However this case study from the African continent might inspire other nations to look into possibilities for their own development regarding tourism and hospitality and convince all possible stakeholders that the best recipe for success is to be found in collaboration and mutual respect and trust.

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Biographical Notes

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