

COVID-19 and African tourism research agendas

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Abstract COVID-19 has triggered a burst of international scholarship concerning the reshaping of tourism and the resetting of tourism research agendas. The aim of this paper is to tease out some implications for re-orienting the African tourism research agenda from 2020 and beyond. Arguably, an appropriate African research response to COVID-19 in the context of tourism must embrace a genuine transdisciplinary approach and draw in researchers who would not, historically, have operated in the tourism space. Seven key themes are discussed namely, market confidence; dependence on international long-haul tourists; supporting regional and domestic tourism especially VFR travel; redefining community-based tourism; informal sector resilience; climate change; and, addressing present-mindedness in African tourism scholarship.

Keywords COVID-19; African tourism; research agenda

1. Introduction

As a crisis event in tourism, the “novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is challenging the world” (Gössling et al., 2020: 1) and viewed by tourism scholars “as a watershed moment” (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020a: 611). Within only a relatively short historical span the outbreak of COVID-19 has exacted a massive international impact on the tourism sector by suddenly reducing and drastically curbing global mobilities creating the worst crisis in the history of commercial aviation (Jamal & Budke, 2020). The human right to travel and to enjoy the services of the tourism and hospitality sector has been curtailed in a manner that is unprecedented in peacetime (Baum & Nguyen, 2020). Gössling et al. (2020: 2) record that “international, regional and local travel restrictions immediately affected national economies, including tourism systems, i.e. international travel, domestic tourism, day visits and segments as diverse as air transport, cruises, public transport, accommodation, cafes and restaurants, conventions, festivals, meetings or sports events”. According to Dolnicar & Zare (2020) the virus is projected to even ‘disrupt the disruptor’ in terms of potentially constraining the operations and long-term growth

of Airbnb. As compared to previous crises that have impacted the tourism sector the COVID-19 pandemic is of a much higher magnitude because of its global scale and the widespread shutdown of travel, businesses as well as ordinary social activities (Zenker & Kock, 2020).

The Marxist geographer David Harvey (2020: 7) asserts COVID-19 is “nature’s revenge for over forty years of nature’s gross and abusive treatment at the hands of a violent and unregulated neoliberal extractivism”. This is a sentiment strongly endorsed by Cave & Dredge (2020) in their call for regenerative forms of post-COVID-19 tourism that are not uncritically wedded to exploitative capitalist economic models. COVID-19 certainly is an “unnatural disaster” (Mostafanezhad, 2020). Beyond the sector of public health, tourism and hospitality emerges as among the most visible faces of COVID-19 in the gaze of international media (Chen et al., 2020) as well as social media (Yu et al., 2020). Baum & Nguyen (2020: 2397) observe that in a matter of weeks COVID-19 engulfed the world “threatening the health and lives of millions of people and with particular early concentrations among mobile relatively affluent populations in East Asia, Europe and North America although the poor and disadvantaged in those countries have been disproportionately affected”. Latterly, the spread of the virus witnessed major threats for excluded communities in the global South, including Africa. The first reported case of the virus in Africa was recorded on 17 March 2020; by 28 July 2020 Africa had 873 342 COVID-19 cases (with 18 177 deaths) with infection recorded in every country but with the largest outbreak in South Africa (459 761 cases) followed by Egypt (92 947 cases), Nigeria (41 804 cases) and Ghana (33 620 cases). As early as early April 2020 COVID-19 effectively had shut down most of Africa’s iconic tourism attractions. Deserted pyramids of Egypt lit up at night messaging people to ‘stay home, stay safe’, motionless cable cars at Cape Town’s Table Mountain, the cessation of tours along Ghana’s forts and castles as well as empty safari lodges across several countries in Eastern and Southern Africa are powerful symbols of COVID-19 ravages on Africa’s tourism economy. Recovery, in Africa, will be particularly challenging because, as Ataguba (2020) notes, the continent already faces a high disease burden and has poorly developed health and social infrastructure and systems which make combating the pandemic difficult.

Reflecting on the state of tourism research post-COVID-19 the editor of the *Journal of Travel Research*, Geoffrey Crouch, stresses its seismic impact will fundamentally affect the nature of travel and tourism research from 2020 and beyond (Crouch, 2020). It is apparent that one era is passing albeit it is too early to identify what will emerge with any degree of certainty in the new era (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020a). Nevertheless, it is contended the ramifications of COVID-19 are so extensive that one can go so far as to regard tourism research as belonging either to the pre- or post-COVID-19 eras. Crouch (2020) maintains that the “relevance and usefulness of research conducted pre-COVID-19 will, in general, have declined and in some cases now be obsolete”. It is arguable that the global pandemic can be a transformational opportunity for tourism research and researchers through consideration of the myriad of questions that COVID-19 poses for the academy (Sigala, 2020). Both Crouch and Sigala agree that a re-thinking of research priorities and topics in tourism is required. At the close of 2019 much international academic debate focused prominently on the dangers of ‘overtourism’, namely that the presence of large numbers of tourists in particular destinations was leading to conflict and complaints from residents (Koens et al., 2018; Dodds & Butler, 2019; Amore et al., 2020). Months later everything was transformed as with global tourism ground to a halt the narrative moved to how undertourism threatens the future of economies and societies on a worldwide basis (Russo, 2020).

It is against a background of the recent blizzard of international writings debating tourism and COVID-19 that the aim in this article is to interrogate its implications for re-setting the African tourism research agenda from 2020 and beyond. Such a perspective is both timely and valid particularly as African voices applying methodologies that are in tune with culture at a local and community level, have been, to a large extent, muted in the burst of international tourism scholarship around COVID-19. In addressing this knowledge gap in tourism scholarship the paper provides an overview of key directions in unfolding international debates and followed by a suggested agenda of significant African research issues.

2. International debates

The unprecedented situation caused by COVID-19 resulted in calls for a re-framing of debates about the global tourism system (Gössling et al., 2020). Among others Rowen (2020) considers COVID-19 as a spatio-temporal threshold for transformation of the global travel sector. In common with many tourism scholars Prideaux et al. (2020: 668) assert that “for the tourism industry to thrive in a future world it must look beyond the temptation of adopting strategies based on a return to the normal of the past and instead seek to understand how it should respond to the future transformation of the global economy”. A process of re-setting and re-envisioning the future of tourism – of what has to change – is a major theme for discussion in contemporary tourism writings (Ateljevic, 2020; Baum & Nguyen, 2020; Bianchi, 2020; Carr, 2020a; Everingham & Chassagne, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020b; Huijbens, 2020; Ioannides & Gyamóthi, 2020; Tremblay-Huet, 2020). Galvani et al. (2020) are optimistic that COVID-19 is forcing an expansion of ‘global consciousness’ and that in future the pandemic will catalyse growing numbers of people, businesses and governments to evolve new ways of thinking and operating that harmonise more closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Geography will matter in terms of the impacts of COVID-19. The initial analyses of the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism economies of China, Italy, USA and Australia document its devastation most especially for those destinations within these countries that are unable to pivot quickly from international to domestic markets (Felinas & Metaxa, 2020). Tourism-dependent localities, spaces and communities will be hardest hit. Certain observers suggest that the post-virus charted map of tourism will be impacted by the factor of time and ultimately dependent upon how long lasting is the current 2020 crisis situation. It is conjectured that if the pandemic lasts up to six months there is a strong likelihood of geographies of travel returning to the pre-virus tourism development scenario; if more prolonged, however, the scenario will be radically different as it is unlikely that global travel and tourism would revert to its previous trajectory. Prideaux et al. (2020) acknowledge that that recovery of tourism will be tied in the short-term to global economic recovery. Similarly, Hall et al. (2020) aver that the capacity of tourism to recover will be contingent upon level of consumer confidence which is impacted by the extent of media coverage, government economic interventions and the intensity of the imposition of restrictions relating to domestic and international travel, social distancing, curbs on crowding and quarantine requirements. This said, with the difficulties of projections it is evident that “all estimates of eventual consequences for tourism must be interpreted with extreme caution, and are at best indicative at present” (Gössling et al., 2020).

Tourism reborn or reconstructed in the post-COVID era is likely to exhibit different forms and geographies to the pre-2019 years. Globally COVID-19 will accelerate the adoption of robotics in the tourism and hospitality industry (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020; Zeng et al., 2020). The geography of recovery will be impacted by how destinations and industry respond to the disaster. Hall et al. (2020) point to the possibility that certain destinations may deliberately position themselves in low-cost terms and seek to expand visitor numbers and job creation as soon as possible but with little concern for externalities such as unleashing another wave(s) of infection for residents. By contrast, others might continue to restrain tourism in order to reduce the potential of another cycle of COVID-19 infections. Suggestions for recovery strategies put forward by the international Tourism Research Network include focused marketing initially for domestic and regional markets as well as giving attention to the local MICE sector (Tourism Research Network, 2020). In addition, it suggests the need to encourage visiting friends and relatives (VFR) travel in order to build traffic and link with resident needs to visit family following lockdowns (Hall et al., 2020). It is argued local residents should be encouraged to visit local attractions because of their awareness of the local epidemic situation and so might be more confident to have some tourism-related activities with family in local areas (Tourism Research Network, 2020). Localism and the development of a more localised form of travel is likely to be a significant theme within successful tourism recovery strategies (Higgins-Desboilles, 2020a; Peters et al., 2020). Encouragement of VFR travel is viewed as an early recovery post-disaster tourism strategy for destinations (Backer & Ritchie, 2017). In a strong endorsement of this stance Peters et al. (2020: 13) stress that an early focus on this segment is warranted as “the Visiting Friends and Relatives market is ideally placed to address the social disconnect and tourism challenges resulting from COVID-19”.

The value of pursuing inter-disciplinary research collaboration to address the challenges posed by the pandemic has been highlighted (Wen et al., 2020). A think tank related to the Switzerland-based International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AIEST) identified an array of different innovative actions that might be pursued by the accommodation services sector as a business response to COVID-19 (Thomas & Laesser, 2020). Such actions are delineated from their domains of potential functionality or represent an extension or modification of core services. Accommodation service providers in several European countries are discovering their businesses and lodging properties can have additional functionalities. These include as temporary living quarters for health workers, as quarantine locations with associated services, ‘sick’ stations for patients with infection but only mild illness, as hospital extensions for low risk patient outplacements or even as workplaces for people who must work remotely but cannot do so from their home environment (Thomas & Laesser, 2020). Also in some countries there are hotels that provide overnight service accommodation for “must travellers” albeit without additional services (such as food or beverage services) (Thomas & Laesser, 2020). The overall trend is to acknowledge accommodation businesses incorporate both an infrastructure and service component. These can be adapted and applied innovatively in different contexts such as the physical infrastructure of hotel being used with different functionality and value as health stations.

Overall, in their rich rapid assessment of initial evidence about COVID-19 impacts Gössling et al. (2020: 13) maintain that the “COVID-19 pandemic should lead to a critical reconsideration of the global volume growth model for tourism, for interrelated reasons of risks

incurred in global travel as well as the sector's contribution to climate change". Challenging the pre-COVID-19 view that more arrivals automatically equates to greater benefits for destinations Gössling et al. (2020) call for the global tourism system to be re-oriented towards addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) instead of towards "growth as an abstract notion benefiting the few" (Gössling et al., 2020: 14). It is contended that as a result of "the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an urgent need not to return to business-as-usual when the crisis is over, rather than an opportunity to reconsider a transformation of the global tourism system more aligned to the SDGs" (Gössling et al., 2020: 15). Other scholars offer similar messages. Niewiadomski (2020) states that despite the huge price the world is paying for COVID-19 the temporary de-globalisation that is under way offers the tourism industry an opportunity to 're-boot' in line with the requirements for sustainability and at the same time shed its darker side in terms of economic exploitation, environmental degradation and exacerbating global climate change. Prideaux et al. (2020) maintain lessons that are emerging from the pandemic can be applied to strategies for dealing with climate change, in particular the concept of 'flattening the curve'.

Perhaps one of the most striking areas of impact of COVID-19 on tourism operations, going forward, relates to how businesses, across all sub-sectors of the industry, will be able to maintain the confidence and physical security of both customers and employees. Technological and medical solutions have started to emerge as a pathway to enabling tourism to re-start, even in a tentative manner (Ivanov et al., 2020). Already accelerating moves to automate service delivery in sectors that range from airlines to hotels and restaurants (Berezina et al., 2019) are likely to become even more widespread in response to biosecurity and medical concerns in tourism. Medical 'solutions' to the pandemic, such as vaccines are seen as probably the most likely way in which international tourism can begin to function on any large scale once again (Hall et al., 2020). The big challenges for developing countries in both technological and medical responses to COVID-19 in re-starting their tourism sectors are likely to combine social, infrastructure and, above all, cost concerns, all of which could put poorer countries at a major competitive disadvantage.

Reflecting on the need to reconsider global mobility Renaud (2020) proposes alternative tourism development pathways which are aligned to the principles of deglobalisation and degrowth of the industry. For tourism transformation to occur Benjamin et al. (2020) call for an actionable commitment to equity, Gretzel et al. (2020) for transformative e-Tourism research, Stankov et al. (2020) for more 'mindful' consumers, and Carr (2020b) for the incorporation of diverse cultural values, including from indigenous peoples, in order to ensure more equitable tourism futures. Everingham & Chassagne (2020) advocate a shift away from capitalist growth models for tourism and instead redirecting priorities away from simply economic growth and instead towards enhanced environmental and social well-being. Brouder (2020) considers that the key concepts of evolutionary economic geography, such as path dependence/creation, can shed insight about variations in pathways for tourism in a post-COVID world. It is suggested that a path leading to the transformation of tourism is realizable if sufficient institutional innovation occurs on both the demand and supply sides of tourism (Brouder, 2020). Cheer (2020) proposes the concept of 'human flourishing' as an alternative touchstone for evaluating tourism's impact on host communities. The potential transformative opportunities associated with COVID-19 are debated further by Higgins-Desbiolles (2020b) and by Hall et al. (2020). Key players in the tourism industry are keen for a rapid return to business-as-usual and appealing for support through government stimulus packages. For critical tourism scholars, however, the crisis offers a "transformational moment" and an

opportunity to ‘re-set’ tourism away from a growth at all cost model and rather to shape the sector in order to better address the objectives of inclusivity, sustainability and responsibility (Hall et al., 2020). This shift is echoed in the work of Ioannides & Gyamóthi (2020) who view the crisis as an opportunity to escape the pre-COVID unsustainable trajectory of global tourism. Rather more pessimistic voices about the likelihood of meaningful change can be seen in consideration of the employment consequences of COVID-19 in tourism where both [Sönmez et al. \(2020\)](#) and Baum et al. (2020) argue that widespread retrenchment and the absence of rights to financial redress for many workers amplifies issues from the pre-COVID-era rather than representing anything new. In the context of this paper that considers the situation in Africa, [Sönmez et al.’s \(2020\) focus on migrant hospitality workers offers clear parallels.](#)

Higgins-Desbiolles (2020a) offers the perspective of a community-centred framework as a potential mechanism for de-growing tourism. Such an approach incorporates a pathway for remaking a ‘socialised’ form of tourism focused on the public good. However, Hall et al. (2020) are less confident and instead point to the strength of business and political voices that are urging that tourism be restarted and opened as soon as possible with the catalyst of substantial government financial support, albeit significantly without any stakeholder commitments to sustainable climate change mitigation requirements. These authors argue that transformative possibilities are questionable as under conditions of escalating unemployment government priorities will relate to generate employment opportunities of any kind even lower-paid, casual or part-time work. In addition, they aver when the pandemic wanes “the world will be poorer and more divided, which is not a recipe for strong rebound in the tourism economy let alone a coordinated strategic effort to transform it toward sustainability” (Hall et al., 2020: 590).

3. African tourism research agendas

In the global and fast-paced coverage of the spread and impact of COVID-19, the world watched helplessly as the deadly virus transited from China through other Asian countries to Iran, Europe, the USA and Latin America. Africa, by contrast, has been a latecomer to facing the consequences of COVID-19 but the early sense of optimism that this raised has subsequently been dispelled by a majority of those addressing the issue (Gaub & Faleg, 2020; OECD, 2020). The warnings from the science community were there (Nkengasong & Mankoula, 2020), calling early for decisive action across the continent and resulting in the relatively early measures enacted in, for example, a number of countries in North Africa as well as Botswana and South Africa in the south and the island communities of the Seychelles and Mauritius. In general, the responses by African governments has mirrored those of countries worldwide. Given the structure of both rural and urban communities in Africa the ‘Northern-informed’ response has been and remains problematic (Ezeh & Fonn, 2020) as there is a need for policy responses that takes greater account of local and national realities. This is true in tourism as it is in other sectors of the economy and wider society.

As we have noted, COVID-19 hit tourism globally incredibly hard and the road to a form of recovery is likely to be slow and painful for destinations, businesses and their workforce. Africa faces particular challenges in this regard, not least in relation to revenue losses impacting

communities in or near conservation-critical areas (Fletcher et al., 2020). Dieke (1993, 2003, 2013, 2020) provides consistent messaging about Africa's under-performance from a tourism perspective but also the continent's relative development and progress, noting a 9% pre-COVID-19 growth of international arrivals in 2017. Rogerson's (2007) analysis addresses similar themes and also heightened awareness of tourism's potential for development among policy makers and other stakeholders in the context of the region's economic development. Of course, this growth hides the uneven geographical development of tourism in Africa which is patchy with some major 'honey pot' destinations including Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, South Africa and Tunisia (Baum & Ndiuini, 2020). However, there are also large swathes of the continent where few tourists were to be found and where the global industry was largely irrelevant. It is unlikely that this will change substantially in the short-term.

The agenda for future research into tourism-related themes in an African context will clearly require a major reset and recalibration in the post-COVID-19 era although what the starting point for this agenda-setting will be will not become clear for some time. To some extent it will be influenced by debates led by scholars in the global North. Arguably, the most important message is the imperative for a post-COVID 19 African tourism to become more aligned with SDGs. Nevertheless, we fully support the call by Ezeh & Fonn (2020) for far greater interaction and collaboration between governments and the African research community in framing this reset for African tourism. It is likely that some items on a future research agenda for tourism will remain similar to those of previous discussions of this nature (Rogerson & Visser, 2011) but in other respects it is fair to anticipate major changes to the scale, substance and in the geography of the tourism sector which emerges from the pandemic.

The impact of COVID-19 has already demonstrated that a single disciplinary approach to understanding of what is currently happening with regard to tourism and what might evolve over time is grossly inadequate. It is clear that the pandemic has touched every facet of contemporary living and, indeed, threatens the ancient ways of life of endangered indigenous peoples, frequently nomadic, in South America, Asia and, of course, Africa. Tourism is a relatively small cog in a wheel that encompasses biological science, medical science and a range of social and human sciences (including, *inter alia*, human geography, economics, political science, sociology, psychology and culture). Thus, any research response to COVID-19 in the context of tourism must be beyond multidisciplinary and embrace a genuine transdisciplinary approach and draw in researchers who would not, historically, have operated in the tourism space.

Our proposed agenda of key research themes for post-COVID-19 tourism in Africa is premised on the above call for *transdisciplinarity* but is by no means comprehensive. Rather, it is indicative of range of considerations and the questions that flow from these themes which policy-makers and researchers will need to address going forward. Seven key themes are discussed.

Market confidence

All destinations, worldwide, will confront the challenge of building market confidence in safety arrangements that are in place in order to protect visitors, tourism workers and the local community. Many African destinations faced issues with regard to perceived visitor safety prior to the onset of the pandemic (Donaldson & Ferreira, 2009; George & Booyens, 2014; Avraham, 2016); such concerns have been exacerbated by new veils of personal safety fears

relating to personal and public health. Researching the underpinning concerns for personal safety alongside those created by the current crisis on a destination-by-destination basis in Africa will be a crucial step for supporting recovery and enable destinations and operators to put in place measures that reassure and protect across all sub-sectors of the industry. This research will need to be supported by tangible evidence that safety measures are in place at all stages within the tourism cycle in Africa – travel, accommodation, attractions and services.

Dependence on long haul visitors

Most tourism destinations in sub-Saharan Africa are highly dependent on long-haul travellers for purchase of their premium and high value tourism products and services (Christie et al. 2013). It is travellers from markets in Asia, Europe and North America that initially will be unable or unwilling to travel to Africa for tourism purposes. Understanding the impediments to their travel and the measures necessary to unblock them will be a key research requirement going forward along with studies that support the growth of regional, domestic and VFR tourism in Africa (see below). At the same time, African destinations could be facing the ‘double whammy’ of underlying reductions in long-haul travel from key markets as concern for environmental issues, notably climate change, intensifies. As compared to Southern or Eastern Africa, the region of North Africa, notably the key destinations for European travellers of Red Sea Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, faces rather different challenges and will continue to operate in the highly competitive ‘Mediterranean +’ marketplace. Understanding the requirements for diversification from their core beach products and dependence on Europe will be important and research will need to focus on re-building tourism in a post-COVID environment that will require significant physical product, service and marketing investment.

Move to support regional, domestic and VFR tourism

In numerical terms, domestic and regional tourism far exceeds international visitation in Africa although the tourist spend value of the latter to most countries is far greater. Over a decade ago Scheyvens (2007) drew attention to the need for more research on domestic tourism especially in tourism destinations in the global South and Walton (2009) argued that in Africa domestic tourism was “the poor relation” in tourism studies. Timothy (2020: 67) views domestic tourism as “not a type of tourism but rather a measure of geography, determined by the inseparability of space and time”. The concept of domestic tourism is relatively recent in origin as in pre-modern times discretionary travel lacked the formal borders that function as the definitions of modern states. Indeed, the notion of domestic tourism was instituted only in a modern world with formally constituted borders to distinguish ‘local’ from ‘foreign’ travellers (Cohen & Cohen, 2015). The term is a slippery concept encompassing an often seamless mix of diverse forms of discretionary travel some associated with everyday leisure activities, much comprised of VFR travel, and other mobilities more akin to work. Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for expanded understanding of the nature of domestic and regional tourism across the continent.

Arguably, domestic and regional tourism must be critical components in recovery strategies for African tourism (Adam & Kimbu, 2020. In a webinar on the MICE market, hosted by the

Kenya Tourist Board on 22nd May 2020 the Hon Najib Balala, Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife promoted an initial recovery strategy for tourism that focuses on expanding domestic and regional travel, locations to which it is possible to drive rather than fly (https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=427&v=yMO6FeRqPPE&feature=emb_title). The evident challenge for tourism in most African countries, with the possible exception of South Africa, is that a wide gulf exists between accommodation and other services that typically have focused on the international market (5 star hotels, high end safaris) and those which cater for domestic and regional travellers. Growing this latter market will require either significant price reductions by operators or a capacity to pay international rates by the relatively small middle class of most African countries. Researching such a transition from economic and socio-cultural perspectives will be vital in helping to understand these challenges. In addition, the observed positive benefits of leveraging VFR travel in post-disaster recovery situations (Backer & Ritchie, 2017) reinforces the importance of extending African scholarship on VFR travel.

Redefine community-based tourism

Community-based tourism has developed as an important dimension in many African countries and had seen significant growth in the decade before the onset of the global pandemic (eg. Kibicho, 2008; Sebele, 2010; Stone & Stone, 2011; Lwoga, 2019). Community tourism, of course, takes different shapes and sizes in various African contexts and is framed by critical challenges with respect to competing use of resources and compatibility with local culture (Tumusiime & Vedeld, 2012; Kieti et al., 2020). The focus of research going forward will need to address questions as to whether the host communities should remodel their tourism offering in order to comply with changing demands of post-COVID-19 visitors, refocus their offerings to accommodate new (maybe domestic) markets or to move out of tourism altogether. Rural Africa faces challenges that extend far beyond revitalising their tourism markets as highlighted by Mukiibi's (2020) analysis of food security issues and the commercialisation of African agriculture for export. Undoubtedly, the policy-informing research agenda in this area, going forward, must adopt indigenous methodologies that give clear voice to the communities affected by tourism (Wearing & McDonald, 2002; Jackson, 2013; Keane et al, 2017).

Informal sector resilience

The informal sector in African tourism is of major importance and accounts for a substantial proportion of the overall tourism economy in most countries (Timothy & Teye, 2005; Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Tichaawa, 2017; Rogerson, 2018). The actual value of the informal tourism sector in Africa is difficult to establish partly because it provides services to a significant proportion of domestic and regional cross-border travel which is difficult to quantify (Christie et al., 2013). The informal sector in tourism has demonstrated remarkable resilience and a capacity for creative revival after crisis that appears to exceed that of the formal sector in many situations (Gurtner, 2006; Biggs et al., 2012). Therefore, policy-informing research will be required to assist in re-building African tourism through its informal sector, and to explore how to employ support schemes such as micro-finance to accelerate the process (Ngoasong & Kimbu, 2016).

The 'other big story' – debating tourism and climate change after COVID-19

Prior to the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the 'big ticket' research topic in tourism for Africa and, globally, was creating a responsible and sustainable future for tourism that meets international targets designed to reduce the impact of climate change (Rogerson, 2016; Sifolo & Henama, 2017; Mushawemhuka et al., 2018; Pandey & Rogerson, 2019, 2020). The shutdown of travel within and to Africa (alongside the halt to other areas of economic activity), caused by response to COVID-19 has demonstrated the environmental benefits of limiting the polluting effects of some forms of tourism, most visibly in cities such as Venice. At the same time, the social sustainability of many tourism-dependent communities in Africa has been threatened by the cessation of tourism. Recovery in tourism after the pandemic will lead to a reorganisation in the industry, potentially rationing supply and, therefore, constraining the environmental impacts of tourism. Researching the consequences of post-COVID-19 change on various tourism scenarios in a way that is destination-sensitive to countries and communities in Africa is likely to be a major focus of work going forward.

Address the present-mindedness of African tourism scholarship

The tourist historian John Walton (2009: 115) maintains that all tourism research “needs a sense of historical awareness and that the “the present cannot be understood without reference to what has gone before”. In surveying the evolution of tourism research Richard Butler (2015: 17) chides tourism scholars for their overwhelming ‘present-mindedness’ and argues powerfully that in order for scholars “to truly understand the present, let alone speculate realistically about the future nature of tourism, then surely it behoves us one to appreciate, if not completely understand, where tourism has come from”. The argument is therefore to extend the “application of historical perspectives in order to inform contemporary debates and practices” (Saarinen et al., 2017: 312). The value-add of pursuing historical investigations concerning African tourism is demonstrated by a recent burst of historical studies on tourism development trajectories and policy development which have been undertaken in South Africa (Rogerson, 2017, 2020; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2018, 2019, 2020; Rogerson & Visser, 2020). The unfolding COVID-19 pandemic underscores the relevance of a wider roll-out of historical investigations on African tourism in order to learn valuable policy lessons from tourism’s chequered past.

4. Conclusion

There is little doubt that Africa, along with every other region, will face major challenges in rebuilding its shattered tourism sector in a post-COVID-19 world. This rebuilding process will be slow, brick by brick, and will see major setbacks along the way. What the current pandemic has highlighted is the fragility of the globalised tourism industry and Africa, dependent on global visitation and global capital, has suffered greatly as a consequence. The future may demand greater localisation in the way in which tourism is framed, higher levels of community engagement and the capacity of policy makers and the private sector to listen and respond to

voices from these diverse African communities. This African research agenda is designed to support the recovery process in small but, we believe, important ways.

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