

TOURISTS ARRIVALS AT CHIREMBA BALANCING ROCKS IN EPWORTH, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The increasing popularity of monuments and heritage sites has greatly raised the need for their sustainable management. Thus, to explore the value national monuments and heritage sites have in Zimbabwe, a case study of Chiremba Balancing Rocks in Epworth was conducted in 2005. Primary data were collected through in-depth key informant interviews, a questionnaire, focus group discussions, field observations, and meetings. This was triangulated with secondary data collected from the National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ). Domestic and international tourist arrivals at the monument sharply declined over the period under review. The reasons for the decline of tourists to the Chiremba Balancing Rocks monument included the lack of public knowledge, poor marketing strategies, security concerns, and the quality of infrastructure. The paper recommends that the authorities establish a properly managed perception management program with a view to improve the arrival of tourists.

Keywords: Heritage; Monument; Tourist Visits; Balancing Rocks

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has grown in stature to encompass the large numbers of tourist visits to places of interest, marked increase in revenue generation, and the complexity of the quality and quantity of infrastructure, people, and sectors feeding off the booming industry and the variety of products and services associated with the industry (Archer and Cooper, 1998 as cited in Theobald, 1998; Wanhill and Cooper, 1997). It has grown to become a sophisticated complex that requires balancing between quantity and quality, while keeping with the basic principles of resource conservation and preservation (Lickorish, Jefferson, Bodlender, and Jenkins, 1991). According to Gunn (1998), the perceived economic gains have often led to uncoordinated growth of the industry and the resultant increasing pressure and demands placed upon the natural resources. National monuments are among the popular destinations for both international and domestic tourists in Zimbabwe. However, they seem to have experienced a slump in arrivals in the past 10 years. This paper discusses some of the factors determining tourist visits to Chiremba Balancing Rocks in the informal, but highly populated, settlement of Epworth.

Tourist arrivals in Zimbabwe, as noted by the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (2002), steadily rose from about 250,000 visitors per year at Independence to about two million in 1999. Since the year 2000, the number of arrivals, especially from the western market, significantly dropped to below one million in 2001 due to the negative perception of the land reform by the

west and increasing economic hardships on the local market. According to Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) (2002), the country experienced a drop of 11% from 1999 to 2000. There has been a general declining trend in tourist arrivals, although the ZTA, the Zimbabwe Council of Tourism (ZCT), and the Department of Immigration cite different figures on the magnitude of decline. Visits to monuments form a sub-branch of tourism that has become popular in recent years and is referred to as heritage tourism. For purposes of clarity, the definition is discussed in this paper in order to give a more contextual meaning.

Due to diversity in type and form, heritage tourism has been defined in many ways. Leask and Yeoman (1999) broadly defined heritage tourism as the natural, cultural, and built environment of an area. It encompasses ideas, images, stories, plays, traditions, buildings, artifacts, or landscapes of the past, which are used for the benefit of the present and future. The National Trust for Historic preservation of United States of America, as noted by Hargrove (2002), on the other hand, defines heritage tourism as “traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present.” This definition can be analyzed in two ways:

- a. Defined by its customers and users that is demand side. An activity in which people enjoy the discovery of a place’s unique identity derived from its history. It involves exposure to authentic, high quality experience rooted in unique, indigenous culture heritage, landscapes, sense of place of a given local area, travel to historic and cultural attractions and sites to learn about the past in an enjoyable way.
- b. Definition of heritage resources that is supply side. A form of tourism based upon the enhancement and protection of cultural resources as an element of tourism resources. Heritage resources include natural beauty, architecture and urban forms, performing and fine arts, museums, regional speech, traditional crafts, religion, and festivals, as well as the appreciation of unique sense of place.

The preceding discussion points out the critical nature of preserving national monuments as destinations for tourists. The cultural values associated with them have to be maintained if these monuments are to continue attracting tourists and realize the required income to the country and the tourism sector, in general. However, due to lack of planning and the increased traffic to some of these monuments, the world over there is a noticeable deterioration of the value of monuments.

The importance of monuments is reflected in the signing of the United Nations, Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), World Heritage Convention in 1972. The main goal of the convention was to identify and protect monuments of great cultural and natural heritage throughout the world. In signing the convention, a country pledges to conserve the World Heritage Sites located in its own territory. The application for a site to be accepted, as pointed out by Farrell (2002), must come from the country itself and submitting a detailed plan of how the site is to be managed and the measures assuring its continued protection. UNESCO, in some cases, identifies conditions to a country before accepting a site as a world heritage monument. In the case of Giza Pyramids in Egypt (Farrell 2002) UNESCO asked for remediation of potential threats after the pyramids were threatened by a highway project. Successful negotiations with the Egyptian government resulted in a number of alternative solutions, which replaced the disputed project. It is important to note that the

treaty is not binding, but left to the discretion of governments. However, it has a crucial role of raising awareness about the importance of monuments and the need to preserve them.

In a similar vein, the World Monument Fund (WMF) was established in 1995. It is a non-profit, New York-based, international organization dedicated to preserving the world's cultural and architectural heritage. Every two years it produces 'the endangered species list' of historical sites worldwide to draw attention to irreplaceable cultural heritage sites in immediate peril. The endangered species list, in 2004, included the Great Wall of China; Benin City Earth Works in Nigeria; Toro Port in Japan; and Kampala Historic buildings in Uganda. The ministries of culture, United States embassies, international, national, and local preservation groups, and American Express offices, worldwide, nominate the sites. An independent panel of international experts in architecture, travel, conservation, and related fields, then, select the sites. In June 2004, as noted by WMF (2005), Khami National Monument in Zimbabwe received US \$50,000 in donations for the preservation of the site. The World Monument Watch, thus, raises awareness of the importance of the need to conserve and preserve monuments, while at the same time, generating much needed income from tourism.

The increasing popularity of monuments and heritage sites has greatly raised the need for their sustainable management as they provide the tangible links between the past, present, and the future and are at the centre of the struggle between the potentially conflicting aspirations of conservation and tourism (Millar, 1995). The relationship between the two enables a critical balance to be maintained between the needs of the resource and those of the visitor. Conflicts linked to access and utilization of some of these monuments has often resulted in the loss of valued national heritage sites. In Iraq, the Iraq Museum's, which is located in Baghdad, most important objects in the collection was looted. These included the famous monumental Unik vase of 3300 BC, the beautifully carved marble female head, perhaps representing the great Sumerian goddess Inanna, and thousands of works of Mesopotamian and Islamic artifacts (Bahrani, 2003). This was a great tragedy as it was theft and destruction of history that will never be replaced. Iraq is home to Mesopotamia, which is one of the world's oldest civilizations. It has many important sites in the history of human development, such as Babylon, Nineveh, and Abraham's city of Ur. Thus, Cultural heritage and monuments, despite their significance to the world, are a powerful basis of local histories and identities, which demands that strict control measures be put in place with a view to preserve the original conditions of the sites. Most countries, including Zimbabwe, have often found this difficult to achieve.

On another level, conflict over the importance and value of resources with disastrous consequences was reflected when the Taliban destroyed the world's tallest standing Buddha, a 53-meter statue carved into a cliff face in the central Town of Barmiyān in Afghanistan in 2001 (The British Broadcasting Corporation, 2003). This prompted a worldwide outcry. The sad reality, which remains, is that some irreplaceable monuments, which dated more than 3000 years, were lost forever. Although there are attempts to refurbish the monuments, the original authenticity and uniqueness will never be restored. Thus, it is important to highlight that development of tourism in partnership with conservation and preservation policy is not easy, hence the need for proper planning. If not planned, the glamour of destinations will be easily lost, which will be followed by a decline in visitation. In Zimbabwe, management of the heritage sites has to put in the ideas of the local people and to give them a central role in decision-making. The conflict is also reflected through vandalism of rock paintings at Domboshawa

Caves (A national Monument), 35 kilometers northeast of Harare. According to Taruvinga (2001), the area encloses rock paintings, late Stone Age deposits, geological tunnels, sacred forests, spectacular granite geological formations, and a buffer zone for management purposes. The site has more than 146 identifiable individual rock paintings, executed in red and brown pigments.

Monuments, which are part of Heritage Tourism, form an integral sector of tourism destinations and, if properly managed, they can generate substantial revenue (Lickorish et al, 1991). However, there is great disparity in destination development in Zimbabwe with Hwange National Park and Victoria Falls forming the core attractions. Destinations in other parts of the country, such as Matopos and Kariba, have been attracting sizeable numbers, but some, like the Chiremba Balancing Rocks of Epworth, have been declining even before the onset of the land reform. The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) consist of four national museums, 13 site museums, and 170 proclaimed historical monuments and sites. It falls under the ministry of Home affairs and was formed through an act of parliament, the National Museums and Monuments Act number 17 of 1972, Chapter 25/11. A board of trustees governs the organization and activities are integrated and administered through Head office staff, based in Harare under the control of an Executive Director.

The country, for administration purposes, is divided into five museological regions, which are the northern, eastern, southern, western and central. Each region has its own director who reports to the Executive Director. The monuments are divided into three classes. Class one have developed infrastructure that includes running water, toilets, and electricity. They are maintained regularly, open to the public, have tour guides, and people pay to gain access. There are about 40 class one museums. Some of the large and more prominent ones are Great Zimbabwe, Heroes Acre, Khami Ruins, Domboshawa, and Chiremba Balancing Rocks. Class two monuments are semi-developed, closed for some time and people have free access. There are no tour guides. Examples include Murehwa Caves, Chironga, and Tsindi Ruins. Class three monuments are not open to the public since they are considered to be fragile, but are closely monitored by NMMZ. The Chiremba Balancing Rocks in the Northern region qualified to be a national monument, due to the distinctive geological formation of the balancing rocks and the rock paintings. Despite this and the national importance the site was accorded, tourist flows have dwindled, and no meaningful development has occurred. It is this gap, in knowledge, that this paper examines some of the trends in tourist arrivals and the factors determining the present scenario.

THE STUDY AREA

The Chiremba Balancing Rocks are located 12 kilometres southeast of the city of Harare and covers 50 acres of land. They are part of Epworth, which is Harare's largest recognized informal settlement (Butcher, 1986). The main attractions are the balancing rocks, which comprise clusters of granite boulders piled on top of each other. They constitute an impressive and prominent feature in the Zimbabwe granite topography. Other granite features include those found in Matopos in Matebeleland and Domboshawa and Murehwa in Mashonaland East Province. The rocks have assumed a symbolic importance as a seal of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe and, in this context; the natural stability represents financial, banking stability, and strength. There are some occasional rock paintings on some rock formations, including the balancing rocks. The

national monument provides for spiritual inspiration to both individuals, as well as the modern Pentecostal Church Groups, which frequently book for prayer meetings. There are a number of granite features of which three are most popular.

Domboremari consist of three sets of rock, which are featured on all Zimbabwean paper currency notes. This feature makes the Zimbabwe currency unique because most currencies in the world carry heads of kings, queens, and presidents. Domboremari rocks are located on the western side of the site. The Flying boat formation is spectacularly balanced boulders resembling a boat, located in the southwestern corner. Epworth primary and secondary schools in the area also use them as logos. The Amphitheatre is a combination of boulders and balancing rocks located in the northern part. The most notable rock paintings, although affected by ravages of natural decay and vandalism, are found on Devil's Rock. They show some peculiar animal headed figures with long spindly legs and arms, as well as ordinary human figures. The paintings are not as spectacular as those found in northern Zimbabwe; however, the figures with elongated limbs may symbolize hallucinations in a trance-like state. Other paintings are found north of the Amphitheatre and depict the standing figures with the upper part of their bodies elongated and their legs very short and fat (Plate1).



Plate 1 Chiremba Balancing Rocks in Zimbabwe

The population rose from 20,000 in 1980 to 113,884 in the 2002 (Central Statistical Office, 2003). Epworth Mission forms the northern boundary; the Chiremba Road marks the southern and western limit, while the flying boat is the eastern boundary. The housing standards are unregulated and there are no sewer facilities. This has created a multitude of problems that have negatively impacted on the destination. Epworth Mission acquired the land in the 1890's and, in 1974; the area was leased to the, then, National Trust of Rhodesia to be maintained as a protected area. It was managed and developed by the, then, City Marketing Department of the Harare City Council. The early stages of development included the erection of entryway, gates, ablution block, an office, gravel roads, and information signs. In 1981, the National Trust of Zimbabwe

fenced the area with an additional diamond fence around the flying boat formation. However, this fence was completely vandalized. The area was re-fenced by Zimbabwe Phosphates (ZIMPHOS), but the fence was, again, completely pulled down. The area is now completely fenced with iron rods painted green to reflect the natural environment.

In 1988, the area was taken over by the Epworth Local Board (ELB), which failed to manage the site as no significant development occurred. After several consultations by the government, NMMZ, and interested stakeholders, it was agreed to upgrade the status of the area. On October 28, 1994, the site was declared a national monument in terms of the National Museum Act Number 17 of 1972, Chapter 313, “to preserve and protect the natural features therein for the enjoyment, benefit, and recreation of the public.” The declaration made Chiremba Balancing Rocks the second largest area, after Victoria Falls, to be declared a national monument. At present, the site is wholly owned by NMMZ. In late 2002, the offices were electrified and proper ablution facilities were installed, but these have since been vandalized and water is hardly available on most occasions. The environment is dominated by musasa (*Brachystegia speciformis*), which combines well with the natural aloes. Before the fencing, there has been deforestation, especially on the eastern side where some settlements are very close to the boundary.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

This was a descriptive survey of tourist arrivals at the Chiremba Balancing Rocks Monument in Epworth. To thoroughly explore the questions surrounding the decline in tourist arrivals at the monument, it was critical to solicit detailed data at an extremely fine resolution. This necessitated the use of primary data as support to the existing secondary data. In depth key informant interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions, field observations, and meetings were organized with the locals between February and early April 2005. Two sets of pre-tested questionnaires with open and closed questions were used to collect data. Interviews were held with a wide range of people from top management to the ordinary person in the community of Epworth, as well as the Epworth local board and the National Museums and Monuments officials. A stratified sample of 111 respondents were selected from Epworth Community in Makomo Ward and a randomly selection 40 tourists were used for the study. The data was first coded and variables defined for calculations of percentages, frequencies, and cross tabulations

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Tourist Visits to Chiremba Balancing Rocks

Within the reference period, 90% of visits to the monument were domestic tourists (Figure 1). The remaining 10% were international tourists, mainly from Africa. This trend confirms the figures supplied by the NMMZ statistics (94%), fall of 94% (Table 1) in foreign tourist arrivals at the same monument between the year 1998 and 2003.

Table 1: Tourists arrivals at Chiremba Balancing Rocks in Epworth

Year	Local Adults	%	Children	%	Foreign Adults	%	Children	%	School Groups	%	Total	% Change
1998	5885	50	758	7	4778	40	394	3	0	0	11 815	100
1999	3996	53	592	8	2713	36	273	3	0	0	7 574	36
2000	2348	60	401	10	1074	27	113	3	0	0	3 936	48
2001	2171	63	534	15	676	20	80	2	0	0	3 461	12
2002	1686	63	172	7	463	17	26	1	329	12	2 676	23
2003	1491	69	262	12	300	14	8	0.4	99	5	2 160	19

Source: NMMZ accounts department (2005)

Traditionally the western market contributed the largest tourist arrivals in terms of monetary value. However, in recent years, there has been an upsurge of arrivals from other parts of Zimbabwe, rather than from the vicinity of the monument in Epworth. Probably the locals tend to shun the monuments because they were out priced and the failure to accord the monument the value that it has. Another dimension could be the increasing urban poverty, which forced residents to think more about basic daily requirements rather than luxuries. The locals, officials, and the tourists linked the decline in arrivals to lack of public knowledge, poor marketing strategies, uncoordinated development, security, and the quality of infrastructure. The local community members, themselves, acknowledged that they did not know that the attraction was declared a national monument and that it was of significant international value. To disseminate information to the general public and visitors, a number of methods were used, including the radio, television, newspapers, and brochures (Figure 1).

During the time of study, the marketing department was not functional and the post for the marketing officer was vacant. Thus, there was no market orientation, as is the case in other countries such as India and Egypt where heritage is conserved as well as being used to generate foreign currency through tourism. Other departments, on a part time basis, were handling the marketing of monuments in the whole northern region, such as the Chiremba Balancing Rocks, Domboshawa, the National Heroes Acre, and the Museum. This has contributed to the decline in tourist's visitation as limited attention is given to the promotion and marketing of such monuments, Chiremba Balancing Rocks included. This could have been the reason for declining the number of visits from the community and low levels of awareness. However, security played a major controlling factor in the game of numbers. Epworth is an unplanned, urban settlement, which became home to most of the poor residents that work in Harare and is notoriously known for some of the bad things, including robberies, muggings, thefts, or even murders. To worsen the situation, the monument area has been unfenced for a very long time posing high risks to visitors. The ever-increasing population of the area, coupled with high levels of poverty, also made tourists a prime target for robbery.

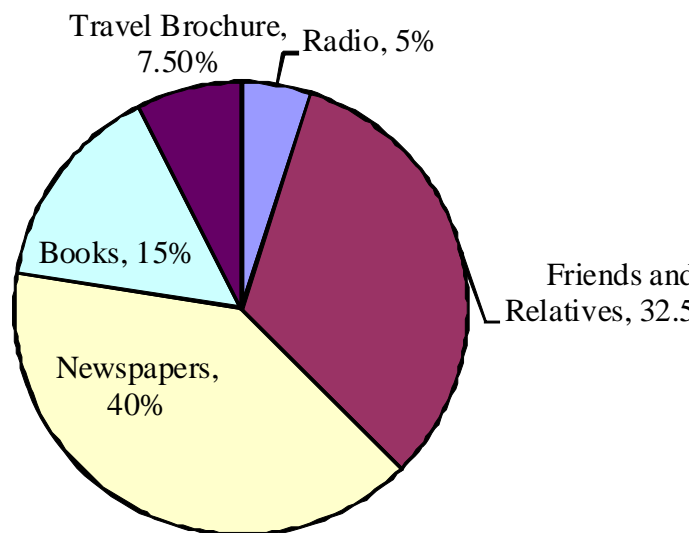


Figure 1: Percent Distribution by Source of information

Many destinations have failed to maintain high figures of tourist arrivals due to poor planning policies. Similar declining trends have been revealed in Kenya studies by Sindiga (1999). Tourist arrivals declines were noted to exhibit a continuous declining trend over a 28 year period. Many governments in Africa, as highlighted by Sindiga (1999), do not specify how the desired tourist arrivals relate to national development objectives. Kenya has not done much profitable business in tourism, although there was a phenomenal increase in the number of tourists since Independence, which was accompanied by enormous national resource investments. The country had not planned for the type of tourism it wanted, hence there was an influx of mass tourists and unable to control, the government expanded the market segment in the belief that foreign exchange will grow with numbers (Sindiga, 1999). The result was that tourism resources were stretched to the limit and the quality of the tourism product began to decline. The contribution of tourism to the total value of exports of goods and services declined from 22 percent in 1990 to 18 percent in 1996. Despite the perceived outfall with the west, the Zimbabwean tourism authorities have not done much to attract the limited traffic that is coming into the country to the Chiremba Balancing Rocks.

The decline in tourist arrivals also has to do with impact of infrastructural development on Chiremba Balancing Rocks. For a destination to be attractive, the supporting infrastructure has to be good and well maintained. The tourists lowly rated the standard of infrastructure around the monument (Table 2). During the time of the study, there were two Blair toilets (Ventilated Pit latrines) near the entrance, which were inadequate for the numbers that visited the area. Toilets with running water often remained closed for most of the time as they constantly experienced water cuts. Health and sanitation around centres of attraction should never be compromised as it puts both clients and workers at risk. As a result, a high number of the tourists indicated that they were unlikely to come back (45%). The grasses around the monuments were a deterrent factor

to tourist visits. These areas have to make visitors relaxed so that they can enjoy their money and not fear for their security. It should be also known that for every tourist that decides not to come back, the industry shrinks in revenue base. The tall grass would also contribute in creating a negative first impression. This also explains why the choices of places to eat, drink, and rest had a fair and poor rating of 32.5% and 20%, respectively (Table 2).

Table 2 Percent distribution of respondents by ranking of infrastructure

Variable	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
Adequate infrastructure	17.5	60.5	17.5	5	None
Adequate security	2.5	25	47.5	22.5	2.5
Good choices of places to eat, drink and rest	2.5	2.5	20	32.5	42.5
Easy accessibility	2.5	None	7.5	8.5	5
Spectacular scenery	2.5	None	15	7	12.5
Peaceful	2.5	None	2.5	30	65

Security fence around the monument was rated high; with 47.5% indicating it was fair and 22.5% rating it as good giving a combined positive rating of 72.5%. The whole eastern side was fenced and the monument could only be accessed from the main entrance, which made supervision easy. At the time of research, the National Fencing was working on the remaining sections. This would improve security and preserve the site. Despite all the security and other infrastructural problems, the area has great potential for development.

The lack of planning is also reflected in the breakdown of physical infrastructure, environmental degradation of natural resources, especially in protected areas, a narrow tourism product, and source market for tourists, socio-cultural change, and the uneven distribution of benefits, especially to local communities. Most countries still lack a coherent tourism policy to guide the development of the industry and appear contradictory with regard to the choice between luxury and mass tourism (Holloway, 2002). Tourist attraction centres are numerous in Zimbabwe and thus, Chiremba Balancing Rocks always found it difficult to compete for an audience, especially when the foreign visitors have other choices in the country, like the great Zimbabwe Ruins and the Victoria Falls.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND CONCLUSION

The problems of the decline in tourist arrivals to the monument were multi-faceted. They have their roots within the general economic decline and the perception management program that was seemingly not visible during the time of study. The tourism industry has to do with the perception of the visitors. These are molded into attitudes and knowledge systems that can initiate a free fall or boom in tourist arrivals. These perceptions are determined by the quality of information available to the visitors using dissemination channels that have the greatest impact on the human mind. The failure to manage these perceptions can render a wonderful, natural heritage site, useless.

Although Chiremba Balancing Rocks is located in a socially risky environment surrounded by a poor, informal, residential community, the NMMZ, as owners of the monument, should come up with a comprehensive plan to promote tourism. There have been a number of master plans for the redevelopment of Chiremba with brilliant ideas since 1990, but none has come to fruition. The situation is worsened by the lack of acknowledgement of the importance of tourism, as there is little concern about the huge drop in visitation levels. The Epworth community, on the other hand, is a melting pot of people with diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and attitudes, hence difficult to deal with. Planning tourism development in an area like Epworth has to recognize the lack of an established cultural value, as compared to other destinations. There is a high population turnover, which is the reason why most initiatives have failed in the past. Given this background, NMMZ is generally not keen to involve the community in its major projects. This can only precipitate the deterioration of the monument and the loss of revenue for the country.

The under staffing at NMMZ has created problems of maintenance as it takes a very long time for the grass to be cut and the internal roads to be repaired, especially after it rains. It is imperative that for tourism to be fully developed, the community has to be involved in tourism development as many of the problems that contributed to the decline emanate from the lack of community participation. The community, generally, does not feel to be part of Chiremba, hence the indifferent attitude. Lately, there have been great improvements in the relationship between the local community and NMMZ, with some community members being engaged on a temporary basis in doing menial work, such as cutting the long grass. The completion of the fencing of the area will be a major achievement, as many of the problems, such as muggings, which were linked to lack of adequate security, will be a thing of the past, hence a perceived tourist increase.

There should be change of focus from the primary objective of preserving the heritage of the country to a focus on marketing the tourist destination in conjunction with conservation and preservation. Planning must strike a balance between sustainable tourism and income generation. Given the large withdrawal of the western market focus should be on the domestic market, since location close to Harare makes the monument ideal for short trips, school tours, and camp meetings. Local awareness should be improved through newspapers, good links with local schools and colleges, and encourage community based exhibitions and projects. Producing leaflets and a brochure with comprehensive information for general publicity and educational purposes should enhance communication. These should be distributed to tourist information centers and other areas where they are easily accessible, such as museums, galleries, and shops. In other words, there should be a full use of the print and electronic media to generate publicity. The NMMZ website should be updated and include all attractions as the Internet is now one of the widely used and effective medium of communication.

Although it might be difficult, attitude and perception change with more education is a critical component in tourism development. More local people should be employed on a permanent basis, as this would help in information dissemination and maintenance of facilities. The Epworth Local Board should also be consulted, as it is directly responsible for running the affairs of Epworth Area. The Board, as former owners of the site, has more contact and control over the people than NMMZ, so it can be effective in educating the local people.

Over the years, community participation in tourism has been steadily gaining importance, as it is increasingly becoming the core of sustainable tourism development. Marien and Pizam (1997) noted that sustainable tourism cannot be successfully implemented without the direct support and involvement of those affected by it. This shows that community participation, in the decision making process of tourism development, is a key issue in ensuring the acceptability of tourism, thus contributing to its sustainability. However, it should be recognized that local communities devote minor attention to issues of tourism development and planning as they are much more troubled by lack of food, water, and suitable shelter in the short time frame. Secondly, lack of democracy in many developing countries dictates that the will of the ruling class is followed. Lastly, there is no system that would allow social outputs to be determined by the people most immediately affected by them, even in the presence of the local government, as tourism is usually looked upon as an industry of national concern. This means proper planning and extensive consultation is required for community participation to yield positive results.

Studies by Archer and Cooper (1998) and Ryan (1995) have revealed that community participation is crucial in tourism development especially in destinations located within or near settlements, such as Chiremba Balancing Rocks, since negative impacts, like open hostility and resentment, develop faster if the community is ignored. Thus, a short-sighted approach, in order to achieve maximum economic returns from tourism in the short term, may cause detrimental repercussions in the destination. This manifests itself in prices that are disproportionate with service quality and attack on tourists. This can result in tourists' dissatisfaction and a potential decrease in tourist traffic.

For sustainable tourism to occur, it is important to evaluate a community's sensitivity to tourism development. This is supported by Muller (1997), who stresses that to promote social compatibility in tourism locals must share in the development process, minimize cultural conflicts, seek dialogue, and encourage discussion about future tourism development. On the other hand, Marien and Pizam (1997) observe that communities are constantly evolving and so do tourism developments and their associated impacts, thus devising means to allow for citizens' involvement in the process of planning and encouraging citizens to participate actively in this process is of primary importance for sustainable tourism development. The citizens can participate basing on two objectives, namely administrative and citizen. With administrative objectives, citizen participation in tourism planning is a means of improving citizen trust and confidence in the government. This entails developing and greater understanding and cooperation between citizen groups and government, which is more cost-effective than conflict resolution, and repairing the damage caused by protests of angry citizens who feel that they have been negatively affected by tourism developments. On the other hand, with citizens' objectives, participation of citizens is a way for governments to respond better to the peoples' values and refrain from the erratic, insensitive, or oppressive exercise of power. In other words, the citizens take an active part in the tourism development process. It is important to highlight that the best participation method strikes a balance between the two objectives. Today, many governments, especially in developing countries, are actively involving the community in tourism development and planning since exclusion usually leads to negative impacts, which results in a decline in visitation.

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