

## Nature and Characteristics of Wildlife Tourism in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

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**Abstract:** Southern Africa is a prominent wildlife destination in the continent. The sub-continent houses a wide range of protected areas, including national parks, game reserves and Transfrontier parks. The overall purpose of the present study was to explore the nature and characteristics of wildlife tourism in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and adjacent communities. The study adopted a qualitative approach and included two case study areas in South Africa and Botswana. In total, 26 interviews were purposively collected from tourism stakeholders within the two communities. Key findings show the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park to be a low impact Park with visitor restrictions. Additionally, the nature of wildlife tourism differed in the two communities, in which one largely focused on the integration of culture and tradition in the tourism experiences while the other was limited to being a transit site. The study recognised culture and conservation values as the two prominent wildlife tourism characteristics in the host communities of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, which thereby places restrictions to the scale of tourism development in the region but offering tourism diversification opportunities for the adjacent communities

**Keywords:** South Africa; Botswana; Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park; culture; host communities

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### 1. Introduction

Wildlife tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa is amongst the leading forms of tourism in the region (Belicia & Islam, 2018; Mbaiwa, 2017). Indeed, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) 2019 report illustrated the continent to be the second leading destination for wildlife and safari experiences in the global tourism market. An earlier report by the organization found this form of tourism predominantly occurring in the protected areas found in the region, specifically national parks, game reserves and Transfrontier Parks (UNWTO, 2015). Increasingly, the utilization of wildlife tourism in protected areas has been viewed as an effective means of transitioning local economies in developing countries,

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from unsustainable uses (such as hunting) to more sustainable and non-consumptive uses (Makindi, 2016). This transition signifies the shift in the wildlife conservation paradigm to one which is inclusive of indigenous communities thereby considering community development as an integral goal (Markwell, 2018). There are several examples of some successes in leveraging wildlife tourism in protected areas to foster support, and appreciation, for conservation initiatives while supporting community development. For instance, the World Bank Report (2018) draws attention to the Mukono community in Uganda, residing near the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park that has received socio-economic returns, largely through employment, from gorilla wildlife tourism. Conversely, there are similar cases in which wildlife tourism has not delivered the desired benefits, and instead further isolated communities from their natural resources (see Cobbinah et al.; 2017). To a large extent, these variations may be a result of the nature in which wildlife tourism occurs in these communities. Indeed, several scholars have emphasized the importance of understanding the nexus between wildlife tourism, conservation and host communities on a case by case examination (see Saarinen & Chuitsi, 2019; Black & Cobbinah, 2018; Makindi, 2016).

Owing to the significance placed upon wildlife tourism for community development, sustainable livelihoods, conservation and economic growth, a plethora of studies has emerged, focused on examining the success of wildlife tourism in achieving the aforementioned development goals. Predominantly, a large portion of these studies have focused on wildlife tourism, community participation and livelihoods (Harilal & Tichaawa, 2018; Stone & Nyaupane, 2018; Mbaiwa, 2018; Eshun & Tichaawa, 2019, 2020), wildlife tourism, job creation and local development (Snyman, 2012, 2017; Black & Cobbinah, 2018; Moswete & Thapa, 2018; Tichaawa & Mhlanga, 2015), the influence of government, policies and institutional arrangement wildlife tourism in protected areas (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2019; Harilal et al.; 2018; Mbaiwa et al.; 2011; Cobbinah et al.; 2015). Largely absent in literature is the manner in which wildlife tourism unfolds within the host communities, a component of the sector which may influence the impact on both community livelihoods and conservation, hence the need for this study. We argue in this study that further, understanding the nature and characteristics of wildlife tourism may also broaden the understanding behind the failures and successes in wildlife tourism destinations. As such, the present study intended to understand the nature and characteristics of wildlife tourism on communities residing adjacent the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in South Africa and Botswana. The nature of the Transfrontier Park (see Zhou, 2019).

## 2. Literature Review

In the international literature, protected areas are praised for being the cornerstones of conservation efforts and have found to be instrumental basis for much success in conservation achievements (Zafra-Calvo & Moreno-Penaranda, 2018). In fact, many countries have committed to the Convention of Biological Diversity, an international agreement adopted in the 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro and is one of the most important documents guiding global environmental issues (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010; Baghai et al.; 2018). Globally, protected areas encompass of 15.4% of world's land and, under the Convention, is set to grow to 17% terrestrial areas and 10% marine environment (Baghai et al.; 2018). The authors add that the protected areas networks in Sub-Saharan Africa supports the world's highest biodiversity and, therefore, are of global value. Unfortunately, the region is characterized by poor management, lack of capacity and funding (Baghai et al.; 2018). Indeed, Whitlaw et al. (2014) enunciate protected areas are increasingly under pressure to being self-funded and inclusive of host communities and sustainable development goals. As such, wildlife tourism becomes a crucial economic sector in this regard owing to their abilities to attract tourists, and therefore funds, as well as contribute to economic development in surrounding communities.

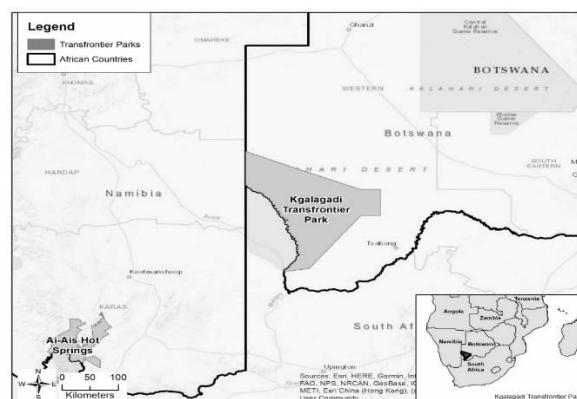
UNWTO (2015) reported a majority of international travel to Sub-Saharan Africa to be related to wildlife experiences. Globally, the sector was found to have directly contributed to \$343.6 billion to the global tourism GDP (UNWTO, 2019). Carvanche-Franco et al. (2019) underscored the global wildlife tourism sector to be growing at an annual rate of 5%. In 2019, the sector represented a third of the total revenue gained from the tourism industry and sustained 8.8 million jobs in the region (UNWTO, 2019). The growth in wildlife tourism has been attributed to several factors, including increased media coverage, internet connection, awareness on the increasing rate on animal extinction, conservation issues, the desire to connect with nature and escape from the normal routine (UNWTO, 2015). Largely, it is East and Southern Africa holding a large share of the wildlife tourism market and is known for their 'Big Five' watching experiences (UNWTO, 2015). Evidently, wildlife tourism is the unique selling proposition for Southern African, which is evident by the dominance of wilderness experiences in the tourism marketing of countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Angola and Zambia (Christie et al.; 2013; World Bank Report, 2018). To a large extent, while the sector is utilized to improve the national economy, many of the countries in the region have focused on leveraging wildlife tourism for sustainable development (Stone & Nyaupane, 2018). In particular, these countries have drawn attention to host communities residing near or adjacent to protected areas.

Much literature on wildlife tourism in Sub-Saharan Africa posits the sector to be complementary to conservation as the two sectors have been embedded with similar principles regarding development amongst communities residing near or in protected areas (Muboko, 2017; Mutunga et al.; 2017; Harilal et al.; 2018; Stone et al.; 2020). Specifically, the two sectors are conceptualized to: improve the local livelihood of communities through the sustainable utilization of nature; reconnect nature to culture; include communities within the management of natural resources, and; foster positive attitudes, and therefore support, towards conservation in protected areas (Chiutsi & Saarinen, 2017; Black & Cobbinah, 2017; Muboko, 2017). The aforementioned principles are a result of governments' attempt to correct the past exclusionary and ineffective conservation practices where host communities were forcibly removed from protected areas and thereby improvised from their separation from the natural resources which were the basis of their livelihoods (Bello et al.; 2017). Wildlife tourism has proven to be an effective tool for both local development and conservation, however, this postulated to be a result of the sector being community-led and well supported by the institutional structures in place, such as governing authorities (Cobbinah et al.; 2015). The other side of the coin is wildlife tourism further augmenting the marginalization of communities near protected areas, often through lack of engagement, collaborative management and conservation need overpowering the needs of the host community (Moswete et al.; 2012). Further, Larm et al. (2018) highlight the potential of wildlife tourism to disrupt conservation in protected areas, particularly towards the natural environment and animal behavior. Therefore, it becomes important to understand the manner in which conservation and local development goals are complementary, which can be highlighted in the local occurrences of wildlife tourism in specific case studies, in which this study draws attention to two communities residing on both sides of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

### **3. Study Context**

Lying in the southwestern region of Southern Africa, the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park was the first formally declared Transfrontier park in the region by Botswana and South Africa in 1999 (Moswete et al.; 2020). The Park was formed from the amalgamation of the former Gemsbok National Park in Botswana and the former Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in South Africa (Thondhlana et al.; 2015). The merger of the two national parks was accompanied by conservation, tourism and socio-economic objectives. Indeed, while the primary mandate of the Park was to conserve the unique Kalahari ecosystems, subsequent objectives were to increase the tourism profile of the region and facilitate economic development in the adjacent communities (Moswete et al.; 2012). While the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is governed by two sets of policies and practices, it is managed as one

ecological area (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2019). Regarding tourism, the individual governing authorities hold their own autonomy over developments. Arguably, the South African side of the Park holds the most developed tourism infrastructure (Moswete & Thapa, 2018). Both Botswana and South Africa have aimed at leveraging wildlife tourism from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park to aid the adjacent communities. On the South African side, two of these communities, the Mier and the San, were awarded 25 000 hectares of land inside the Park (Thondhlana et al.; 2015).



**Figure 1. Map of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park**

*Source: Authors*

#### 4. Methodology

The present study employed the use of a qualitative approach, to explore the perceptions and understanding, of the research participants, on wildlife tourism in their communities. Two case study sites were considered; Tsabong in Botswana and Askham in South Africa. The choice of the two case study areas was based 1) their location, as they are within the route to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, and 2) due to the regional governing authorities of both countries had planned to leverage the Park to ensure the local development of adjacent communities. The study was informed by selected tourism and conservation stakeholders in the host communities, specifically including formal and informal tourism business owners or managers, conservation authorities, tourism authorities, government authorities, community-based organisations (CBOs), and community leaders involved in the management structure of the Park. In total, 26 interviews were held conducted.

The semi-structured interviews comprised of open-ended questions to allow for probing and explorative discussions. The questions posed to the interview pertained to understanding the tourism activity inside the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, tourists who visited the study areas, the types of attractions and experiences available within the communities. The study was conducted during the month of

May in 2019 and followed the appropriate ethical procedures, such as obtaining permission to record interviews, and assuring respondents of their anonymity. The interview recordings were then transcribed and uploaded to Atlas.ti version 8 for thematic analysis, which is discussed in the following session.

## **5. Findings and Discussion**

### **5.1. Wildlife tourism within the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park**

The present study found it important to explore the nature and characteristics of wildlife tourism inside the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. This is postulated to influence the development of wildlife tourism in the adjacent communities. The study found the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park being largely responsible for managing, guiding and leading wildlife conservation and tourism in the region, thereby bearing the responsibility of balancing the two goals. One representative of the Park explained the importance of maintaining this balance, stating:

Well, it is crucial, because are (i.e. it is) supposed to be (a) self-sufficient park, which means (that) a lot of the funding for conservation comes from the money that tourism generates. A lot of the money (that is) given to conservation comes from the money that tourism makes. We are different from parks, such as the Kruger National Park, that get grants to cope with poaching. We are fully self-sufficient. We recognize that it is a two-way street – without conservation, tourism cannot exist, and there wouldn't be a park... without tourism, so conservation can sustain itself. It should then, be a 50/50 partnership.

Two important findings are identified from the above quote. Firstly, the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park operates as a self-sustaining entity, depending on the revenue gained from wildlife tourism to carry out conservation initiatives. This is largely in line with several studies which find wildlife tourism developed as a way to support and fund conservation in protected areas (see Cobbinah et al.; 2017; Makindi, 2016; Soe & Yeo-Chang, 2019; Tessema et al.; 2010; Thondhlana et al.; 2015). Secondly, the quote above highlights the manner in which wildlife tourism and conservation can have conflicting goals, in that the former may seek to capitalise on the natural assets in the Park while the latter seeks to protect and minimise any impact. The Park representative strongly emphasised the Park to be performing well in managing the two sectors as tourism is developed to occur on a small scale:

Although there are lodges outside of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, they are very few, as we cannot sustain a lot of traffic coming to our gates, because we are a very small park. Well, let's put it this way, we're a big park, but the human footprint is very small. For example, we are one of the few Transfrontier parks that say people must stay over two nights, and that's simply a way to prevent us from being a short highway for people coming from Namibia to South Africa, because

the Park is quite a short cut to get to South Africa. And we want to prevent that from happening. This is a nature conservation (Park), we don't want it to be spoiled by huge traffic

Considering that the primary purpose of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is to conserve biodiversity, there will be certain rules and measures put in place to ensure this mandate. Clearly, the management of Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park intends on limiting the scale of human activity inside the Park, through the restrictions of vehicles allowed on a daily basis and the rule that people crossing borders through the Park should spend two nights in. While such restrictions may have consequences on wildlife tourism development in the adjacent communities, as they rely on the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park draw in tourists, it may also allow for some diversification in the tourism experiences offered in such communities. Interestingly, the study found the nature of tourism in Tsabong to be based on its transit status and in Askham to be centred on the two traditional communities with historical ties to the Park.

## **5.2. Transit Status of Tsabong**

Interestingly, the study found the nature and characteristic of wildlife tourism in Tsabong to be embedded in the transit status of the village. The study findings support current literature positing the village as a transit site for tourists visiting the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park via the Botswana entry. Several respondents point out that the development of wildlife tourism in the region is a result of this movement. For instance:

Usually, in the movement to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, because it is such a distance from the Bokspits border, tourists find that they get lost in the middle of nowhere. And when it gets late, that is when they get to spend the night. So, I think that is how our wildlife tourism here in Tsabong started.

This was affirmed by another respondent, who stated:

The tourists that come here, it is just that they sleep in Tsabong for the night, and they pass through to the Transfrontier Park at Mabuasehube gate. Or, maybe if they are late for the border, they will also stay in Tsabong.

As evident in the above quotes, wildlife tourism in this community came as a consequence of tourists needing a place to rest during their journey to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. This occurrence led to the wildlife tourism of Tsabong largely comprising of the accommodation sector. To a large extent, this may lead to the tourism industry in Tsabong being dependent on international tourists, of which may compromise the sustainability of the sector. However, some respondents explained that dominance in the accommodation sector is also a

consequence of the scale and size of the tourism sector in Tsabong. Further, potential for growth largely lies in the natural assets of the region, of which would benefit from the tourist pull of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. For instance, one respondent explained:

But, really, what I can say (is) this: that wildlife tourism this side is still at an infant stage. It is still at a low scale. So, we still need to put more focus on it, because we have some attractions like (the) Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and the natural landscapes that (the) tourists would see going from Kimberley in South Africa to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. There is this Molopo River, it is a very nice place that we can introduce tourists to.

Evidently, natural attraction has been noted by the tourism stakeholders in the region as a key asset to growing the tourism industry in Tsabong. A substantial amount of studies on tourism development in Sub-Saharan Africa have affirmed the importance of natural attractions of rural community development, focused on wildlife tourism (see Black and Cobbinah, 2018; Christie et al.; 2013; Cobbinah et al.; 2015, 2017; Mbaiwa, 2017, 2018; Stone and Nyaupane, 2018; Winterbach et al.; 2015). Again, this stems from the rising interest for nature based experiences and wilderness landscapes and the availability of this in indigenous communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. The present study findings therefore point to that the focus of Tsabong being on leveraging the natural attractions found in the area, through utilising the pull of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

### **5.3. The Amalgamation of Culture and Nature in Wildlife Tourism**

The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is located approximately 230km from Upington in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa. It is undoubtedly the main reason tourists visit the Kalahari region of South Africa. While wildlife tourism in the region is centered on the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and the natural resources therein, the management objectives of the Park further point to realizing the economic potential of the region, largely through wildlife tourism. The present study found the interview respondents in agreement that is the local experiences offered by the host community that have been capturing tourists' interest. The Askham community has been steadily developing a number of activities and tourism establishments in the region, to complement the tourism experience of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, being one of wilderness. For instance, several respondents alluded to tourists seeking to '*experience the Kalahari*' which is inclusive of nature-based and cultural experiences offered by the community. Some of these experiences include wildlife safaris, 4x4 driving, sand dune surfing, hunting expeditions, and some of the attractions include the Khomani San living museum and the Khomani Cultural Landscape (UNESCO World Heritage Site). Indeed, many respondents concurred that wildlife tourism in the Kgalagadi



Transfrontier Park is not only based on the natural environment but is inclusive of the community as well. This was affirmed by one respondent stating:

Wildlife tourism is huge for the Kalahari, because the Kgalagadi (Transfrontier Park) is one huge tourism attraction. Even with the birds of the Kalahari, tourists are interested. Tourists are also interested in knowing where our mammals are situated ... what the usual way of living is in certain areas. And how we hunt them and all those (i.e. that) stuff. So, the Kalahari is a huge wildlife tourism attraction in itself. (FG1).

This is in line with several studies that have found wildlife to have captured the growing interest of tourists (UWTO, 2015, 2019; Winterbach et al., 2015; Mbaiwa, 2017). In fact, many of these tourists are visiting various destination in Southern Africa hoping to view charismatic such as the Big Five (UNWTO, 2015). The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is therefore an attractive tourist destination as it not only houses some of these species, but that it is accompanied by the unique cultural landscape that encompasses of the oldest traditional community in Southern Africa. Indeed, the statement above also illustrates that wildlife tourists visiting the region are similarly interested in the culture of the host community, particularly how the community interacts with nature. In describing the role of culture in the wilderness experience of the region, one representative of a community CBO emphasized:

I think that for people coming from overseas, culture is one of the biggest things that they want to experience in our region. Now we show them (some aspects of) our culture, (for instance) our food, how we live (and) how we interact with nature and the different wildlife. So there is an opportunity for people like us to be part of tourism

The role of culture in wildlife tourism has been brought forth by numerous studies (see Bhatasara et al.; 2013; Black & Cobbinah, 2018; Curtin & Kragh, 2014; Mbaiwa, 2017). Largely, this is to ensure the inclusion of host communities in the wildlife tourism experiences and the protected area. While in the past, host communities have been forcibly separated from protected area, the current conservation and sustainable tourism practices argue for the inclusion of communities, taking consideration that protected areas are additionally defined by their cultural values as well. This is especially prominent in South Africa as the country is placed a development objective on wildlife tourism in protected areas. Moreover, Saarinen et al. (2012) explain the establishment of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park not only for conservational purposes only, by to collaborate with near communities and their culture so as to develop a responsible tourism sector. Such principles in wildlife tourism and conservation are particularly important in the context of protected areas in the region. More often than not, the failure of protected area management is partly due to conflicts between conservation authorities and host communities (Cobbinah et al.; 2015). While much of this

conflict may emerge from the conflicting needs of conservation and local development, the role and importance of the community plays a part in defining the success or failure of conservation.

In the case of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, the study found host community culture to be positioned as an alternative means of the community to gain entry into wildlife tourism market. Indeed, research has shown increasing interest in the indigenous and wilderness experience owing to visitors seeking to experience a culture much different from their own (Saayman & Dieske, 2015). As such, culture becomes a commodity in which this community can benefit from, particularly when leveraging the tourism pull of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. One community leader explained how they have formed their tourism experiences:

Yeah because we are the only traditional community within the area, so our tourism product always centers with the traditional experience tourists can have with the community, and it is always related to the community's knowledge on nature and wildlife. Most of the community tourism projects done here are the traditional walking safaris and cultural safaris in the area within the community, within the land owned by the community.

Furthermore, discussions with community representatives further revealed:

Because going out with a traditional tracker, and formally trained guide is a unique experience. There is sharing of indigenous knowledge (between) the traditional tracker with the tourists, because they're sharing to please people coming into the community, and this knowledge is shared again with the formally trained tracker which may come from the tracker college, learn new skills like how the springbok was acting relating to the stories told from traditional trackers.

Evidently, the cultural component on wildlife tourism offered by the community had become a prominent feature in the wildlife experience in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, of which was further affirmed with interviews with key tourism stakeholders in the area. Saayman and Dieske (2015) found that tourists visiting national parks in South Africa largely seek to experiences which enable them to explore and educate themselves. This is largely evident in the case of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and the host community allows for native interpretation of nature.

Similarly in Tsabong the study found cultural and natural attractions being important assets in developing wildlife tourism in the community. Therefore, the inherent resources found in the Tsabong provided the basis for the community to be able to develop their wildlife tourism industry. For instance, one respondent explained:

I mean, when you think about the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, it has an abundance of wildlife. It has some, also the fauna. We have some species here, and

we don't have in other areas of this country. These are the things that people come to see in Botswana.

Additionally, another respondent stated:

They (tourists) come here to Botswana to see the wildlife, they come to see what Botswana has that would interest them. When they come here they can learn (parts of our culture such as) our lifestyle, how we live, our language, and how our lives are going.

This supports the assertions in the interviews in which most stakeholders viewed the natural and cultural landscapes as primary assets to focus on when developing wildlife tourism in the community. In part, this is to be expected considering the most dominant form of tourism in Botswana is focused on nature based experiences, feeding from the surrounding protected areas. Indeed, tourist hubs in the country are found near prominent protected areas, such as the Okavango Delta. Accordingly, the tourism stakeholders in Tsabong similarly saw their natural attractions as that which can enable them to enter the tourism market. The respondents, however, were well aware of the differences in the scale of tourism development in the two regions of the country, that is, northern and southern Botswana. For instance, one respondent stated:

We are not there yet. Wildlife tourism in the region has not been fully developed. If we had something that would call people here, there would be a lot of money. People would be having something to do, because there are not that much developments on this side. (R6)

It is important to consider such statements in the context of tourism in Botswana. For a significant period of time, tourism development has been concentrated on the northern part of the country where internationally acclaimed attractions are found (Mbaiwa, 2017). In line with the National Ecotourism Strategy (NES), the Government of Botswana (GoB) has begun diversifying the tourist hubs to other parts of the country. While the implementation of the strategy may be seen in the long term, the development of CBOs and the Tsabong Camel Park are evidence of the strides that have been made in this regard.

#### **5.4. Complementary Nature of Conservation and Wildlife Tourism**

Frequently, the matter of conservation arose in the series of interviews conducted. This is to be expected given that the primary mandate in establishing the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, as well as other protected areas in the region, was to protect the unique biodiversity lying therein. Wildlife tourism and conservation are often discussed conjointly owing to the sustainability principles often embedded in protected areas in Southern Africa, being local development, social inclusion and

environmental management (Markwell, 2018). As such, conservation was found to be a prominent attribute of wildlife tourism. In the context of Askham, many of the respondents applauded both SANParks and the community on their strides towards conserving the natural environment which tourism is dependent upon. For instance, one conservation representative stated:

Yes, they are responding to (conservation efforts). Well they cannot ruin their land, as (they did) before, with domestic animals. The tourists don't want to go see that, they want to see the Kalahari. Then they come here to do drives. We have a lot of film companies coming to film the Kalahari. The Red Dunes Route has a lot of photographers and a lot of biologists. So, it became a teaching moment (for the Askham community) of how the Kalahari should be, should look like, and this is starting to (be) spreading (to the wider communities) now. And I think that's a big plus for conservation in this area. So, conservation is looking up in this area, compared to decades back.

This demonstrates the importance of wildlife tourism in not only changing the attitudes of the host community towards conservation but attaching a monetary value to natural resources thereby fostering feeling of preservation and protection towards such natural areas. This largely conforms with present literature on wildlife tourism and conservation which opines the custodianship over natural resources is more likely to emerge as communities are able advance their livelihood activities through the sustainable utilisation of the aforementioned resources, often through wildlife tourism (see Pour et al.; 2018; Sene-Harper et al.; 2018; Stone & Nyaupane, 2018; Winterbach et al.; 2015). The above may be particularly instrumental in supporting the work of not only SANParks but conservation authorities in the region. However, this may bring forth the question of whether this attitude and behaviour may change or be slightly altered should communities not be able to gain some monetary income from the wildlife tourism and conservation. This question becomes even more prominent during the Covid-19 pandemic where travel, especially that for tourism, is restricted. It is important to note that addressing this particular question is out of the scope of the present study as it only seeks to describe the characteristics and nature of wildlife tourism.

The positive attitudes towards conservation was further affirmed in the interviews with community representatives and CBOs. These respondents had acknowledged the importance of conservation in their community and the need for the further understanding of the community's role in this practice. For instance, one respondent explained:

With nature conservation, we have realized that we have to teach our people about what nature conservation is, so they will need to be aware of (the importance of) nature. They will need to be aware of the animals within our environment; they

will need to be aware of how to take care of nature, so that nature can take care of us.

The conservation of the natural environment has become a prominent global concern (Black & Cobbinah, 2018; Chiutsi & Saarinen, 2017; Mbaiwa, 2017; Muboko, 2017). Regarding wildlife tourism, conservation is a core component of the sector as the very existence of wildlife tourism is dependent on the attractiveness and viability of the natural environment (Bhatasara et al.; 2013). While literature has questioned the extent of community support for conservation in protected areas, the present study illustrates that communities hold a positive attitudes towards conservation, which in part can be accrued to the community being recognised as an integral component of conservation.

Similarly in the case of Tsabong, the support and commitment to conservation was examined. Most of the respondents affirmed that the community recognises the significance of conservation, with one respondent stating:

At the moment they are realising that there is value in an impala rather than just having the meat ... You cannot have the meat, and rather have the impala, so that you get P10 today, P20 tomorrow, and in 10 years' time, with just one impala, you can have made a lot of money over time. Because then people come to look at it, and so forth.

The above statement supports the argument that wildlife has a higher economic value alive rather than dead, owing to wildlife tourism. It is this argument in which many conservation and protected area managers put forth to foster community custodianship on natural resources (Curtin & Kragh, 2014; Bhatasara et al.; 2013). Wildlife tourism and conservation is therefore seen as an alternative means for the community to survive off the natural resources. Such views are were further supported by another respondent from a wildlife organisation, who explained:

I mean, some members of the community are supportive of wildlife conservation. But this is because they are aware that these natural resources are important. And now, it is also because they know about wildlife tourism, and that you can have another way to have an income from the wildlife.

Consequently, the findings indicate that the monetary value of wildlife is that which fosters positive attitudes towards conservation. Interestingly, one conservation representative added that the idea of conservation is already ingrained in the culture and traditions of indigenous communities:

Sometimes, we tend to confuse them (the community) when we get there, with these terminologies such as conservation. So it is not that they are not (practicing) conserving, its only that they don't prefer it called conservation, they just know that it is their tradition, that when you catch fish and you find that you have

(caught) the smaller ones, you throw them back to water. That's conservation. But they don't really justify it that way, it is just (part of) their tradition.

Such views foster the position affirmed by previous studies which strongly argue that some indigenous community often have principles of sustainability and conservation inherently part of their traditions and culture (Qinming et al, 2012; Roy, 2016; Soe & Yeo-Chang, 2019; South Africa. DEAT, 2020). The above quote additionally supports the views brought forth by many of the respondents, in that communities generally hold a positive attitude towards conservation. For example, one respondent stated '*slowly but surely, they are getting what conservation is about.*' The present study findings may suggest the Tsabong community as realigning their natural resources to sustainable development through wildlife tourism and conservation.

### 5.5. Wildlife Tourists

In examining the characteristics of wildlife tourism in Askham, it becomes important to discover the types of tourists visiting the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and the adjacent host communities. Interestingly, in the case of Askham, the study found the domestic market to comprise of the largest tourists market, with international tourists comprising a smaller portion of visitors to the Park. Such findings were yielded from the interviews held, with the tourism representative from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park outlining:

The main tourists at the moment are South Africans. They make up the majority of the people who come to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. We do also have international guests as well; however, presently, it is mostly South African and SADC tourists. Most of our international tourists are from Germany, a lot from Italy, some (from) France. Regarding (the) SADC countries, we (have) got some tourists, but not many. But a lot of the tourists come from Botswana and Namibia, with Namibia being the biggest one. (R7)

Additionally, another respondent, an owner of a tourism establishment in Askham stated:

We have got a lot of South Africans, rich South Africans. We get quite a few from abroad, (although) not as many as we used to. In the past, we received some Germans, Italians, and French. There were a lot of French last year, but not this year. There are still some, but not as many as we had last year, only those, the Germans, Italians mostly. (R9)

These findings were found to be consistent with the research conducted by SANParks (2019) which stated that South Africa constituted 72.4% of visitors to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, with international tourists coming the second

largest group, comprising of 25.3% of the Park visitors and the South African Development Community (SADC) visitors making up the smallest visitor shares (2.3%). These findings are further similar to those conducted in other national parks and game reserves in South Africa, which were found to be most visited by the domestic market as part of their recreational activity (Butler and Richardson, 2015; Ramukumba, 2016). Additionally, the owners and managers of the tourism establishments interviewed pointed to this domestic market to be dominated by white South Africans. For example, one respondent described:

Most of them that come this side are from overseas and more from South Africa. It is only the white people, as I said, but sometimes you have the (South African) coloured (racial population) also going in there, and paying for the bookings.

Such findings were not unique to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. In fact, a study by Butler and Richardson (2015) examined reasons for the lack of visitation of protected areas in South Africa by black South Africans. The study found this population group to be comprising of less than 9% of total visitation to national parks in South Africa, in which most of their visits were related to school excursions (Butler and Richardson, 2015). Some of the reasons accounting for this included socio-economic conditions, the lack of travel culture, and the political history of protected areas in which they were perceived as being strictly for the (touristic) consumption of white South Africans. While the present study did not investigate such reasons, it does argue that economic and conservation policies of the past largely still influence the relationship between protected areas and people.

The study respondents further discussed the travel patterns of visitors to the Park. One business owner described them as *'it's seasonal. On holidays you have families coming through, and when that's over you have international tourists coming when it is not our holidays.'* This largely reflects the tourism patterns of the wider tourism industry in South Africa, in terms of domestic and international travel behaviour (South Africa. DEAT, 2020).

In Tsabong, as the nature of wildlife tourism was found to be focused its transit status, and therefore limited to the accommodation sector, this largely determined the travel behaviours of tourists. The respondents explained that they don't see much of the tourists in the community as they only utilise Tsabong as a place to rest on their way to the Park. For instance, one respondent stated that *'people come here only to stay the night and go somewhere else. It is part of the route, it is not the destination.'* Similarly, another respondent explained:

They (tourists) want to see our land. They go to the guesthouses (and) hotels. They go there to sleep, they give the business to ... the accommodation (sector). I think most of them go to the parks, where there are animals of Botswana.

In further describing these tourists, an owner of accommodation stated:

The tourists are mostly people from South Africa. They spend mostly 2 nights or 3 nights and they leave. They come around the side of Bokspits, passing here to Gaborone and the Park and they come here again when they leave

Another respondent described the activities of these tourists, stating:

They mostly come around winter, because I would like to think winter is the best time to come to Botswana if you want to see animals. So, people are always in transit, camping. If they are to come here, maybe it is for breakfast, and then they are back on the road. So, this is the best time to go camping.

The responses received affirmed the little touristic activity done in Tsabong, besides lodging. Several of the respondents point to the lack of tourism activities and attractions in the community as the reason for this. While respondents point to the establishment of the Tsabong Camel Park as a step in engaging communities within tourism and providing some experiences to tourists passing by. This thereby affirms tourism in Tsabong to be in its early stages of development, as articulated earlier by Moswete and Thapa (2018).

## 6. Conclusion

The present study explored the nature and characteristics of wildlife tourism in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. The study found the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park to be a low impact protected area, which thereby places restrictions to the scale of tourism development in the region but offering tourism diversification opportunities for the adjacent communities. The study saw communities in Askham diversifying the experiences of the Park with their own cultural and wilderness experiences. In Tsabong, while wildlife tourism is still largely centred as a transit nature of the community, with natural attractions were identified as being able to further develop and grow wildlife tourism in the community. The study found South Africans to be the largest tourist market visiting the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park which is postulated to offer more sustainability, particularly in periods after the COVID-19 pandemic where domestic and regional travel will be highly dependent upon. In conclusion, while wildlife tourism in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, and in the host communities, is based on the natural appeal of the Kalahari ecosystem, the most prominent characteristics of the experiences in this region are culture and conservation values. The study argues that optimising the inclusion of cultural and conservation values in wildlife tourism enables the achievement of both wildlife conservation and community development, as the community would be empowered to be involved in the sector.

While research into Transfrontier Parks in Southern Africa is continually growing, many of these studies predominantly focus on the dynamics between the park/people relationship (see Bhatasara et al.; 2013; Thondhlana et al.; 2015;



Moswete et al.; 2020; Chiutsi & Saarinen, 2017, 2019; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2019). This is owed to the historical injustices rooted in these transboundary protected areas and their present conceptualization as agents for broad environmental and sustainable tourism development goals. This current study makes some valuable theoretical contributions by utilising a cross border approach to understand the nature of wildlife tourism in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and provides new evidence on how this influences the subsequent development and characteristics of wildlife tourism in the adjacent communities. Therefore, this study argues that wildlife tourism development, from the same protected area, can be realised differently in two separate communities. Obtaining a holistic understanding of Transfrontier Parks in Southern Africa, and their role in socio-economic development in host communities requires future research to consider the principles and characteristics embedded in wildlife tourism development and the subsequent influence on community participation and, therefore, benefits of the sector.

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