The management of Ukahlamba Drakensberg World Heritage Park: Community perspectives, perceptions and prospects

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Abstract: Many a tourist has a grand and insatiable dream about visiting the Ukahlamba-Drakensberg National Park (UDNP), where nature has carved a theatre majestic features and cultural tapestry of rock art. At this place the tourist hopes to experience and derive satisfaction, from what nature and heritage have to offer in South Africa. This paper explores the existing relationships between natural and cultural attributes within Ukahlamba-Drakensberg National Park, how these relationships are planned for and managed by the parks authorities, as well as how local communities perceive the meaning and importance of these attributes. The paper not only seeks to relate park activities to the national and provincial strategic frameworks for tourism development, but also to ensure that the intrinsic value of the parks, wildlife, land and natural features are sensitively protected as a source of spiritual and long-term sustenance for future generations.

The findings of the paper indicate that the majority of Ukahlamba-Drakensberg communities understand the importance of ecotourism as a human activity. They also show that not all communities participate actively in promoting sustainable ecotourism development in the area. Finally, that existing ecotourism management practices are perceived as not adequately promoting sustainable ecotourism development principles.

Keywords: geopark; geo-science park; outdoor recreation; tourism; perceptions; cultural and heritage park; community perspectives; tourism management and tourism prospects

1 Introduction

The advent of the new democratic order in South Africa in 1994, brought about many and varied changes in the country. The decade following the democratic elections saw the development of various policies and programs designed to bring about a more equitable and non-discriminatory society (Spenceley, 2004; Viljoen, 2007). One of the key priorities of the South African government was to improve the quality of life of the previously disadvantaged individuals (pdi). To achieve this goal the government introduces policies and strategies which sought to create opportunities of economic

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development, poverty alleviation and community participation. According to Roger-
son & Visser (2004); Spenceley, Goodwin & Maynard (2004), some of the most im-
portant policy documents include: the White Paper on the Development and Promo-
tion of Tourism in South Africa (DEAT, 1996); Tourism in GEAR (Growth, Employ-
ment and Redistribution Strategy (DEAT, 1998); The Transformation Strategy for 
South African Tourism (DEAT, 2000); The Responsible Tourism Guidelines (DEAT, 
2002); The Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) (DTI, 2004) and 
Tourism Growth Strategy (SA) 2008-2010 (SAT, 2004). These policy initiatives were 
the basis for tourism change in South Africa, and Pigram & Wahab (2000: 28) have 
argued that “change is a powerful and positive force which, when harnessed construc-
tively, challenges individual, groups and organisations to perform to their optimum 
capability.”

Notwithstanding, that the changes impinging upon the nature and scale of tourism, 
spiring from geopolitical, socioeconomic and environmental imperatives, one of the 
high-profiled changes was the recognition that South Africa is a country endowed 
with natural beauty and pristine environments (Wahab, 2000; Magakgala, 2003; 
Goodman, 2003). In this regard, South Africa qualified for world heritage site status 
after rejoining the United Nations in 1994. Currently SA has eight World Heritage 
Sites two of which are located in KwaZulu-Natal. These World Heritage Sites are the 
Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park (UDNP) (2000) and the Greater St Lucia 
Wetland Park (1999). In essence this paper looks at Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Na-
tional Park, as an important resource, which seeks to give local people the opportunity 
to participate in its management and share in the benefits of tourism development 
(Viljoen, 2006).

These World Heritage Sites are currently drawing a lot of attention from both local 
and international tourists and scientists, and have subsequently become “not-to-be-missed” tourist attractions. In South Africa, like elsewhere in the world, tourism is one of the fast growing industries which involves commodified consump-
tion of all tangible and intangible assets that the society values. The World Heritage 
Sites, unlike other areas are protected by law. South Africa is the second country in 
the world to adopt into its national law (the World Heritage Convention Act 49 of 
1999) the World Heritage Convention (WHC) policies which ensures the protection of 
the South African sites and their associated world heritage values. In order for these 
sites, more specifically the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park, to retain their 
world heritage status, the protection and maintenance of their ecological integrity and 
ensuring their sustainable use, are of paramount importance (Wurz & van der Merwe 
2005; MacLeod 2005).

2 Objectives of the study

This study is a portion of a larger study investigating the management of natural 
recreation and tourism resources as well as community participation patterns, in some 
areas of KwaZulu-Natal, such as Isimangaliso Wetland Park, the Oribi Gorge Nature 
Reserve and Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park. The intention of this paper is to 
report on the existing relationships between natural and cultural attributes within Uk-
ahlamba-Drakensberg National Park (UDNP) and how these contribute to a better
quality of life in KwaZulu-Natal. The economic potential of tourism as the key driver of development in South Africa is well documented (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Viljoen & Kholadi, 2006; Viljoen, 2007) and is based on the competitive advantage that the country generates through utilising and exploiting the natural and cultural resources that is it endowed with. These nature-based tourism resources in KwaZulu-Natal account for 21% of the gross geographical product and 30% of total employment in the north east of the province (Aylward, 2003). Thus Cassim, Jackson & Gavera (2004) suggest that nature-based tourism is a fast-growing sector of tourism in South Africa.

In the light of the above notion, this paper seeks to assess community participation patterns in the planning, development and management of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park. It also wants to find out the role of stakeholders in the whole decision-making process.

More specifically, the objectives of this study are four-fold: (a) To reveal the extent to which the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg communities understand the importance of ecotourism as a human activity in the study area. (b) To determine the degree to which the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg communities participate in activities that promote sustainable ecotourism development in the area. (c) To assess whether the perceived ecotourism management practices are in line with accepted sustainable ecotourism development principles.

3 Background to the study

This study not only attempts to portray the unfolding conceptual frameworks relative to the subject matter and objectives at hand, but also describes existing characteristics and resource base of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park. According to Magakgala (2003) many natural and protected areas, such as Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg in KwaZulu-Natal, are presented with enormous opportunities, some of these are: (a) a sound resources base; (b) well studied and understood agenda relative to the surrounding landscape; (c) located in areas where a small change can make a big impact to local communities, (d) have not been sufficiently exploited in the past; and (e) perfectly positioned for developing sustainable development initiatives. Notwithstanding, these very areas are immobilised by challenges such as: being located in areas of abject poverty and underdevelopment; high rates of illiteracy, lack of technical skills and community overreliance for existence on natural resources, as well as perceiving the protected areas as “idle assets which breed problem animals” (Magi, 2007; Magakgala 2003; Ashley & Roe, 2002).

With regard to the listed challenges Young (1973) cited in Wahab (2000) has advised that:

Where there is high unemployment, a relatively unskilled labour and few alternative sources of employment.....then stimulation of the tourist industry may well be a correct course of action.

3.1 Sustainable tourism development

The basis of this discussion has its foundation on the general understanding of sustainable development, which is the kind of development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own
needs” (WCED, 1987, cited in Magi, 2000b). In line with this understanding, sustainable tourism development implies the need for a balance between tourism and other existing activities so as to achieve sustainable development (Viljoen & Tlabela, 2006; Pigram & Wahab, 2000). However, this proposition is not always successfully applied in developing economies (Wahab, 2000), because at times sustainable development is utilised as a political slogan rather than an analytical tool (Wall, 2000). Politicians in South Africa have also sloganeered that tourism must be implemented in a manner which is sustainable, Integrated, people-driven, community-based, democratic, accountable, transparent, participative, consultative, and so on (DEAT, 1996). It is necessary for tourism to graduate from a catchphrase position to be rather a useful tool of execution and survival.

In an attempt to implement sustainability within Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg, the policies of Ezemvelo-Wildlife KwaZulu-Natal, which is an organisation responsible for managing all natural parks and conservancies, seek “to ensure that the intrinsic value of the parks, wildlife, land and seascapes of KwaZulu-Natal are sensitively protected as a source of spiritual and long-term sustenance for future generations” (Derwent & Porter 2003). These policies are also seen as seeking to ensure the sustainable conservation of biodiversity in partnership with people of KwaZulu-Natal and specifically inhabitants of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg, hence the expected inclusion of local people and traditional leaders in the parks boards and councils (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002; Derwent & Porter, 2003).

In line with the notions expressed above, ecotourism seems to be the most appropriate form of sustainable tourism. A general definition of ecotourism as suggested by Ceballos-Lascurain (1996) in Page & Dowling (2002) is that by its nature ecotourism is environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations. In supporting a relationship between nature and culture, Hall & Lew (1998): aver that ecotourism is “Purposeful travel to natural areas, to understand the culture and natural history of the environment; taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people”.

### 3.2 Characteristics of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg

The Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park, which may also be designated as a geosciences-park, bears a double-barrel name combining Zulu and Afrikaans languages. The Zulu name *Ukhahlamba* refers to the mountains as “barrier of spears” suggesting a shield that blocks a barrage of spears. Figuratively, it suggest a barrier against attacks by warring invaders, very similar the historical role or function of the Great Wall of China. The Afrikaans name *Drakensberg* means “Dragons Mountains” suggesting the range of mountains similar to a huge dragon traversing the landscape. The Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg (Figure 1) cover an area of about 243 000 ha and rise up to a height of 3, 482 metres above sea level. The mountain range has a number of peaks with various names and descriptions, some notable peaks include Mafadi at 3,450m, Makoaneng at 3,416m, Njesuthi at 3,408m, Champagne Castle at 3,377m,
Giant's Castle at 3,315 m, Cleft Peak 3280 m, Mount Aux Sources at 3 282 m, Windsor Castle 3068 m, and Ben Macdhui at 3,001 m above sea level. Similar to other protected area in KwaZulu-Natal, Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg is a globally significant area with exceptional biodiversity and cultural heritage resources (Clarke, 2003). Not only has Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg been declared a World Heritage Site, it is has also been listed as a Ramsar site as well as a Transfrontier Conservation Area between Lesotho and South Africa (Cowan, et al. 2003).
It has been argued that the geology of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg can be related to the remnants of the original African plateau. The mountains are capped by a layer of basalt up to 1,500 metres thick, with sandstone formation lower down, resulting in a combination of steep-sided blocks and pinnacles. More towards the north the mountains have rugged and broken quartzite formations, which pose a challenge to rock climbers and hikers. The sandstone formations give the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg mountains their numerous caves, which have been associated with the San people also called Bushmen.

The physiographic attributes of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Natural Park or geo-science park, lends itself to what has come to be known as the stone-age rock-paintings. This geo-science park has a collection of 800 year-old rock art found in 600 sites with more than 35 000 individual images (Figure 2). The popularity of this rock art has made Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg one of the popular tourist destinations for both domestic and international tourists. Archaeological remains such as rock art are “incredibly fragile” and may suffer irreparable damage if exposed to irresponsible visitation (Wurz & Van der Merwe, 2005).

Due to the fragility of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg area, there is an urgent need to understand the degree to which this ecosystem can sustain livelihoods, by introducing more efficient management and governance approaches. According to Clarke (2003) the development and management of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg World Heritage Site require a high level of co-operation, capacity building and technical support for strategic planning to ensure that identified development goal are met.

3.3 Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg as a tourism resource

Without doubt Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg has been described as an important ecotourism resource, which is underpinned by two philosophies, that is, biocentric (promotes ecological process to operate as freely as possible – protect the integrity of the ecosystems) or anthropocentric (use and enjoy – maximisation of direct human use) in nature (Cooper, et al., 2000).

Tourism development in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg is promoted by resource managers, wildlife officials, service providers and the local communities. Some of
these stakeholders own a variety of hotels and resorts appearing on the slopes of the
geopark. According to Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife (EKZENW, 2006):

Standing on top of the world in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Park you are sur-
rounded by craggy peaks, sandstone cliffs, cascading water falls, crystal streams,
rocky paths, caves and sweeping grasslands. This is one of South Africa’s pre-
mier ecotourism destinations”.

The park offers tourists many facilities and activities (Table 1) as well as the best
access to the San people’s rock art and thousands of the massive eland antelopes can
be seen as they forage the grasslands. Many of the tourists visiting the geopark are
attracted by the splendour of the beautiful environment as well as the many outdoor
recreation facilities and activities available in the area. Table 1 shows a plethora of
activities occurring in the 240 000 ha of cliffs, valleys, caves and rivers.

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Source: EKZENW (2006)

Tourists have indicated that they participate in the following activities: mountain
climbing, hiking, authentic rock art viewing, museum rock are viewing, trout fishing,
walking on trails, nature appreciation and mountain driving. Many of the tourist des-
tinations have facilities such as caves, camps, accommodation, restaurants, and curio
shops. It is worthy of mentioning that very few of destinations have facilities and
trails for disabled persons, as well as local community crafts and markets. The latter
suggests the paucity of community involvement in small entrepreneurial activities in
the area. On the whole, many of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg peaks offer challenging mountaineering. While the major summits have all been conquered, a number of minor pinnacles have yet to be ascended. Hiking is also a popular activity, the navigation on long hikes is often aided by GPS receivers, and current maps distributed by Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife.

4 Understanding the importance of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg

It cannot be gainsaid that understanding the importance of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg as a vehicle for sustainable development, is the most viable programme a government can give for its people or communities. Needless to say that sustainable tourism should be understood as a form of economic development that is geared to ameliorate the quality of life of the host community as well as guaranteeing a higher level of tourism development (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Wahab & Pigram, 2000). In pursuit of such ideals the South African tourism authorities at national and provincial levels, have put into place various strategies towards promoting nation-building, peace and respect for human life through tourism (DEAT, 2006; SAT, 2004; Spenceley, et al, 2004; Cowan, et al. 2003; KZNTA, 2003; Binns & Nel, 2002)

In testing the levels of understanding what tourism is about, respondents in the geo-science park were asked to reveal their understanding of the importance of eco-tourism as a human activity in the study area (Figure 3).

On the whole, the majority [63%] of the respondents, mainly the local community members, indicated that they were not conversant with the meaning of the various aspects of tourism. On the other hand, only 21 percent of the respondents showed good understanding of the concept, whereas 16 percent were not sure of the meaning. This majority response may be accounted for in that the local community is not sufficiently educated, informed and involved in tourism activities and facilities in the geopark. Understandably the local communities have been denied access to such natural resources and facilities in the pre-democracy period (Goodman, 2003).

It should nonetheless be noted that more than half of the total number of wildlife officials, tour operators and tourists interviewed, were conversant with the meaning of and importance tourism. This group continually worked for and with the authorities. Indeed, the communities around the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark see it as a resource for their survival through tourism development. The Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife as the custodian of geopark, has concentrated its effort on promoting ecotourism development that is seen as a sustainable form of tourism. This promotion encompasses conservation of cultural and heritage assets mainly the rock art and the history and heritage of the Sans within the geopark. In this paper the term ‘local community’,
refers to what Lubbe (2003), regards as people living in relative proximity to the tourist destination, product or activity, and who should benefit from activities. It could be argued that if tourism is wisely planned, the communities can enjoy the advantages while experiencing ownership of and control over the development. In this regard, the perceptions of local community members would assist in identifying the expectations of communities residing next to the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg as a tourist destination. The paper supports the view of Gartner (1996) who contends that members of the community should form tourist organisations that will represent them in all matters pertaining to tourism in their areas. There was no evidence of such community involvement around geopark. It is therefore the view of this paper that the community’s understanding of the importance ecotourism and sustainable tourism development, would mark the beginning of better tourism planning, management and delivery systems in the study area.

5 Stakeholder participation in ecotourism development

Various policies ranging from the White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa (DEAT, 1996), through to the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) (DTI, 2004; Rogerson & Visser, 2004), have made it imperative that various tourism strategies and programmes should be developed so as to achieve the tourism policy goals and objectives. Community participation in decision-making is paramount in ensuring the acceptability of tourism goals, and this is a universally accepted strategy (Wahab, 2000). According to Cowan, et al, (2003) there are various strategies being pursued in South Africa to ensure social viability of natural areas such as Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg. Some of these include: ecotourism destinations supported through the national economy; initiation of community-based enterprises (Njobe & Botha, 2003); active participation in tourism development; empowerment of community structures and community involvement in planning, implementation and management (DEAT, 2006), increased tourist volumes and promotion of transformation (SAT, 2004), as well as tourism stimulating local economic development (Rogerson, 2007). The execution of these strategies seeks to develop the tourism sector as a national priority and to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of every South Africa (Viljoen & Tlabela, 2006).

The official policy of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg World Heritage Site seeks to promote sustainable ecotourism development. Sustainable ecotourism as a strategy for sustainable development and conservation of physical and socio-cultural environments demands that the local community should be involved in planning, development and management of the geo-science park. (WTO 2004). Good management policies should contribute to the well being of local communities. It should be noted, however, that participation of the indigenous communities in the ecotourism development activities in the geo-science park has been very contentious. This is because the park has lost most of its indigenous communities, the San community in particular. The San people have been displaced and some are now found in faraway places, and their history has been reconstructed and commodified.

Among other things, this study sought to establish the degree to which the local communities participate in activities that promote ecotourism development. In this regard tourists, officials, tour operators and communities were asked to give their
views regarding the level of participation in management related activities of the natural park. The responses are depicted in Figure 4 and show that about 62 percent of the tourists respondents reflected a high level of participation in sustainable ecotourism development activities, whereas 29 percent has a low participation level. It is important to note that tourists did not necessarily base their level of participation on the basis of benefits to the local hosting communities at Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Heritage Park.

Not surprisingly, 78 percent of the officials felt that their participation in ecotourism development activities were high and positive, since it was their mandate to promote sustainable tourism development in the area. The tour operators on the other hand, perceived their participation in ecotourism development activities to be high (59%) as against 32 percent who perceived them as low. The majority of tour operators (59%) were interpreting their business involvement in geopark as equivalent to tourism development, whereas this was not necessarily so. A significant number (32%) of the tour operators were not convinced of any sustainable development being achieved. Finally and importantly, the local communities at three sections of the geopark, were non-committal (52%) by indicating that they were 'not sure' about their level of participation in sustainable development activities in the geopark. A further 32 percent indicated a low participation rate. The main reason for these negative responses were that many of the local communities were not well educated about and adequately exposed to participation in tourism planning, management and development of ecotourism activities in the geo-science park. It is unfortunate that this study does not support the notion that participation of local communities in community-based tourism initiatives should be a precondition for sustaining policy based initiatives (Viljoen & Tlabela, 2006).

Further to the preceding comment, it may be argued that the findings on participation of stakeholders, fall short in affirming the success of the national strategies and approaches. In this regard the following strategies are not supported (Magakgala, 2003):

(a) The role government should be playing is funding conservation planning and management.
(b) The notion that protected areas in South Africa have the ability to deliver significant economic and social benefit.
(c) That communities and people living in poverty require immediate solutions to
(d) The government priorities in South Africa are usually socio-economic, particularly job creation and poverty alleviation.

Therefore, in concluding this section, the overriding question which is: ‘what causes the lack of participation of the local communities in this destination?’ needed to be addressed. Accordingly, Lubbe (2003) argues that host communities tend to avoid participating in destinations, where the infrastructure and services are not owned by them and there are opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. Furthermore, destinations have a great deal of flexibility and innovative opportunities for creating tourist flow and augment existing attractions. Arguably if the facilities in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark accommodate host community participation, it is logical to conclude that innovative strategies have not yet been adequately put in place in this destination. There is therefore, a dire need for an innovative development of the tourist destination of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark.

To achieve this innovative development of the rock art features within the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark, sustainability ought to:

- Contribute significantly to the conservation of the history and cultural heritage;
- Include local and indigenous community in the planning, development and operation of tourism activities.
- Contribute meaningfully to the well being of the local communities
- Interpret correctly the significance and meaning of the natural and cultural heritage of the destination for visitors’ educational and experiential benefit and
- Be meaningful to self guided tourists as well as to organized tours.

Sustainable tourism development requires that all stakeholders are equally important (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002).

6 Perceived ecotourism management practice

Probably the most prominent benefit of sustainable ecotourism planning and management is to foster development that provides benefits for local communities and their natural and cultural environments (Page & Downing, 2002). In an attempt to activate the management practices in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg area, the park authorities following national priorities have put up strategies for successful implementation of tourism development (Njobe & Both, 2003), which include: stakeholder partnerships and co-operation, fulfilment of community aspirations; improved understanding stewardship; equitable access to travel opportunities and tourism attractions (DEAT, 2006); Black economic empowerment, job creation, affirmative treatment of women, youth and disabled people (Yawitch, et al, 2003; Ashley & Roe, 2002).

The Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark community’s perception of existing ecotourism management principle in relation to tourism practices can be viewed utilising two approaches. First, there are views of the previously disadvantaged communities, which largely comprise residents with no formal education, no profession and who are employed as labourers in the agricultural and timber plantation sectors. Their perception of ecotourism management principle seems to be that there is a degree of disparity in ecotourism practice in the study area, because it is a playground of those people who can afford holidaying at hotels, guest houses, game parks, horse-rides, fishing,
canoeing and mountain-hiking.

Secondly, there are views of the previously advantaged communities, which tend to be well educated, resourced and privileged, possibly from the previous apartheid dispensation in South Africa. This group tends to be the commercial and entrepreneurial leaders of the tourism industry and hold tourism-officer positions and tour-operator businesses. Their perception of ecotourism management principle seems to be underscored by the existence of abundant business opportunities and therefore the need to ‘protect’ the natural resources in the geopark. To a large degree, the tourists as visitors may be regarded as comprising a privileged group, which has financial resources to visit and enjoy the outdoor recreation resources available at the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark.

Notwithstanding the existence of the ecotourism strategies, some of the tourism practices have not adequately responded to local community needs. It is for these reasons therefore, that the respondents (tourists, officials, tour operators and community members) were requested to furnish their perceived views on ecotourism management practices and development needs which they consider appropriate for the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark. In this regard, Figure 5 depicts the responses obtained from various stakeholders as to whether they understood and appreciated the role of the development and management practices of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife authorities. The stakeholders perceptions were based on practices such as, land and resource acquisition, visitor management, establishment of accommodation facilities, development of game areas, safety and security of tourists, and rock-art and cave preservation. The responses of the subjects, comprising the tourists, officials, tour operators and communities are reflected in Figure 5.

![Figure 5](image-url)

**Figure 5** Perceived beneficial state of ecotourism development and management practices (n = 322. Some of the subjects gave more than one response for each statement)

The analysis of development and management principles within the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark were perceived by tourists, officials, tour operators and community members to differ noticeably among these stakeholders. As indicated in Figure 5, the majority of tourists (56%) and officials (68%) felt that land and resource acquisition well established, whereas the tour operators (38%) and communities (26%) thought this was less beneficial at the time of investigation. Possible reasons are that the tourists appreciate what they see since they are visitors and officials are supporting government policy in their responses. The tour operators and community members think there is room for improvement because the state owns and controls most
the land and natural resources.

With regard to the practice of visitor management, the majority of tourists (67%), officials (78%) and tour operators (63%) generally regarded this practice as well managed and bearing good outcomes. Conversely, the local communities (32%) were not happy with the practice as it exists, mainly because the visitors were not channelled to their areas of operation, where they would be able to make money by serving the tourists. These perceptions did not vary markedly in the three areas of Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg.

The proposed plan of establishing accommodation facilities as a management principle in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark, were positively viewed by tourists (58%) and officials (76%). On the other hand, the tour operators (44%) and communities (42%) thought this practice was less beneficial to the stakeholders. The possible reason for this view is that most of the existing accommodation facilities are owned by big business and not by local tour operators or community members.

Notwithstanding that lapses in safety and security, such as fears for personal safety, exposure diseases and wild animals attack (Pigram & Wahab, 2000), have been regarded as a threat to tourism development in many parts of South Africa. In this regard the majority of tourists (55%), officials (68%) and tour operators (58%) felt that safety and security practices were reasonably well managed. On the contrary, 46 percent of the local communities were not happy with the practice as it exists, mainly because communities are the ones that feel the burden of the lack of safety and security. It has been argued that the gaps in safety and security are increasing because of high levels of unemployment in KwaZulu-Natal.

In conclusion, the Ukhahlamba Drakensberg geopark has management strategies for both the park and the visitors to the facility. The site management strategies are meant to protect the socio cultural and the physical environment especially the rock art found in the caves in 600 sites. Protecting the rock art is different from protecting other types of environments because rock art is highly sensitive and delicate. Ecoltourism management practices emphasise the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (WTO, 2004).

One of the key national strategies revolves around the question of job creation and poverty alleviation. Even though this world heritage site has embraced ecotourism as a strategy for job creation and poverty alleviation, it still has unique problems to deal with the execution thereof (Ashley & Roe, 2002). Whilst the local community has looked at tourism and poverty from a livelihoods perspective, the KwaZulu-Natal local authorities have focused on tourism as having positive and negative social, economic and environmental impacts on local communities (Cowan, et al, 2003; Binns & Nel, 2002). Notwithstanding that several case studies have been undertaken in Kwa-Zulu-Natal and elsewhere is South Africa, there has been no conclusive evidence of the success of such a strategy, nationally (Clarke, 2003). Furthermore, several tourism-related poverty alleviation projects in southern Africa have received much attention, but no comprehensive and conclusive acceptance as the core strategy for successful tourism development (Ashley, Hayson and Poultney 2005). Finally, there seems, still to be fewer studies that show how tourism impacts on poverty as well as offer methods of assessing such trends (Spenceley, 2005).
Ukhahlamba Drakensberg has to deal with the conservation of the delicate rock art that is currently suffering from overexposure to tourists and the natural corrosion which is leading to gradual fading away of some of the paintings as well as the inclusion of local communities to the decision making level. In conclusion, despite the presence of strong supportive policies and attempts by various stakeholders to generate socio-economic benefits for local people through tourism, there are problems regarding the extent to which tourism growth and investment actually benefits local communities (Spenceley 2005; Spenceley, et al, 2005).

7 Conclusion
Notwithstanding that the declaration of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg National Park as a World Heritage Site has assured more popularity and economic viability of the geo-science park, it has come to be recognised that its strongest attribute is that the park is both a natural attraction and cultural heritage. The sensitive relationship between natural and cultural attributes within the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg geopark, has to be planned, developed and managed in a sustainable manner so that the resource could adequately begin to benefit the communities of KwaZulu-Natal for a very long time to come. This achievement would represent a successful implementation of sustainable ecotourism development as envisaged by various national and provincial tourism strategic initiatives.

References


