



THE ARID AREAS PROGRAMME

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Towards Soft Boundaries: International cross-border tourism development in Southern Africa's arid areas



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1. Introduction

In the central hinterland of South Africa, Botswana and Namibia lies a vast arid area. This area is known as the Karoo (in the south-central parts), Namaqualand in the west, Richtersveld and Namib in the north-west, and Gordonias, Bushmanland, Griqualand, and the Kalahari in the north. For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to these areas as the “Nama Karoo”, which is the ecological name for the area consisting primarily of small desert shrubs and grasses. “Karoo” is an ancient Bushman word (the “San people”), meaning “dry place”.

This area straddles four provinces in South Africa (Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Free State), and stretches into the sovereign states of Namibia and Botswana.

Very important ecological research has recently been done by several universities in these regions, particularly in Namibia, Namaqualand and the Karoo. But there has been a general neglect of social, economic and political issues. Many natural scientists are now recognizing the importance of linking ecological research with issues of a more social and economic nature, particularly in the light of changes in land use by commercial and emergent farmers. This raises the question of adapting and planning socio-economic development to fit the constraints of the ecological biome – *a biome which straddles provincial and national boundaries*. The Arid Areas Programme (hosted by the University of the Free State) is the first attempt to focus on social and economic issues in the Greater Karoo. Soon after launching the Arid Areas Programme, the need for cross-boundary thinking on arid areas development became evident.

This paper will pose the question of the potential of cross-border collaboration for developmental purposes. This topic affects a wide range of developmental questions, including business development, agriculture, water, electricity, roads and transport, including air and rail. In this paper, we will focus on the prospects of *regional tourism*, and its potential for pro-poor development, in the arid provinces of South Africa, as well as their neighbours, Namibia and Botswana. It will examine the likelihood of cross-boundary (including cross-provincial and trans-national) development in the Nama Karoo.

As yet, such a discourse is in its infancy in Southern Africa, because provincial and national boundaries remain barriers to integrated planning thinking. In one field – ecotourism – significant progress has been made, although there is a great deal of scope for a more unified approach to tourism in general.

Tourism, as a sector, is particularly appropriate for cross-border development, particularly where areas share key characteristics – “a sense of place”. Tourists like to travel, and they do not want to be restricted by administrative borders. Furthermore, tourism has significant potential impacts on local communities, including the poor.

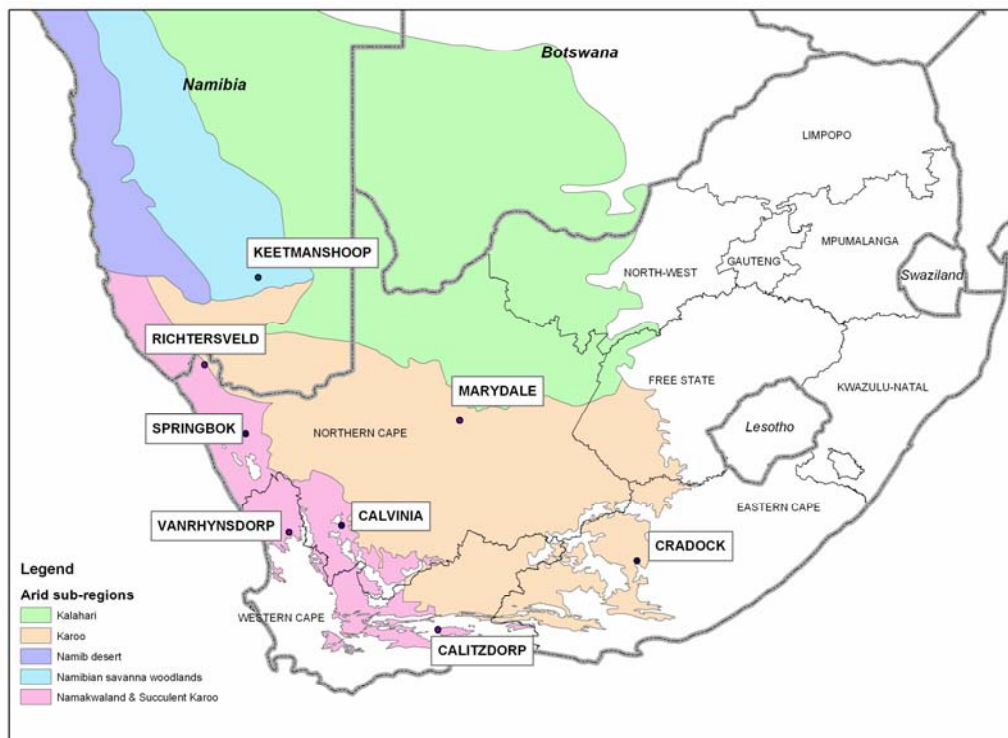
This goal of this paper is therefore to highlight the relevance of regional development thinking elsewhere in the world to the situation in Southern Africa. South Africans

need to learn from the experiences elsewhere in the world, of creating “soft boundaries”.

2. Spatial background

The arid areas in Southern Africa extend throughout the south-western parts of the sub-continent, across numerous local, district, provincial and national jurisdictions. In South Africa, the Nama Karoo stretches about 600 km from west to east, and also about 600 km north to south within South Africa, and another 400 km northwards into Namibia. It is an area of level plains, crisscrossed by low and stony mountain ranges, with a vegetation consisting primarily of small shrubs interspersed by grass. In some areas, dramatic canyons transect the plains. The Kalahari, located north of the Karoo, stretches another 500 km, into Botswana. The Kalahari is famous for its red sand dunes, thorny bushveld, grassy plains, and many types of wildlife. Namaqualand, along the western coast, consists of an area about 200 km from north to south. Namaqualand is rightly famous for its astonishing succulent plants, which create a “desert garden” filled with flowers during springtime. The Richtersveld is a harsh, stony desert, located north of Namaqualand, and straddles the Namibian border. North of that, the sandy Namib desert covers about 250 km from the Namibian coastline.

Figure 1: The arid areas of southern Africa



The sheer size of the Nama Karoo has meant that it has never been administered as a coherent entity. In Botswana, the arid southern areas straddle four jurisdictions (Ghanzi, Kgalagadi, Ngwaketse and Kweneng); and in Namibia, it includes the two southern districts (Karas and Hardap), as well as the western part of Namibia. The Nama Karoo in South Africa straddles four provinces and 10 District municipalities.

It also includes 31 Local Municipalities: 7 in the Eastern Cape, 2 in the Free State, 14 in the Northern Cape, and 8 in the Eastern Cape.

The arid areas are sparsely populated, and in some areas, the population density is less than 1 or 2 person per km². This has contributed to their political insignificance, as the various provincial and national governments have invariably given more attention to their more populous and industrial regions. Since the 1870s, industrialization has largely passed these areas by. The structure of small towns and extensive sheep- and goat-farming still bears the imprint of the mid-19th Century. During the last fifty years, extensive livestock farms have grown even larger, and shed a great deal of labour. Many of these unemployed farm workers have drifted to the small towns, to join the ranks of the urban unemployed. The recent advent of game farming has contributed to this trend, although opportunities in agri-tourism and eco-tourism are beginning to create scope for new and more sophisticated types of employment in the tourism sector.

The sheer aridity of the area fundamentally shapes the area, in numerous other ways: The dependence on underground water resources for urban and rural survival; the logistical challenges of road and telecommunications networks between far-flung towns; the lack of industrial development; and the consequent out-migration of people in search of work. In addition, there is now a growing appreciation of the fragility of the Nama Karoo desert ecosystem, which require careful environmental management.

There are worrying aspects of the socio-economic profile of the arid areas. The local economies of small towns are characterised by weak multipliers, because a great deal of purchasing power is leaked back to the larger centres, or to metropolitan areas situated outside these areas. A large proportion of income is derived from social grants (such as pensions and disability grants), and these seem to cause a mind-set of dependency. There is an out-migration of skilled people to the cities, due to a lack of local economic opportunities. Poverty levels are high, due to high levels of unemployment, and increasing rates of illness (HIV/AIDS and TB). The conditions of life of remote settlements of farm workers tend to be poor, with low mobility, and difficult access to health, education, recreation and shopping amenities. These are all socio-economic developmental challenges which need to be addressed.

But these areas also have significant assets for potential development, including desert tourism and desert agriculture (such as wool, mohair, mutton, olives and indigenous plants). Infrastructure in the towns is generally good, and represents a great deal of sunk capital in housing, water, sanitation, and roads. Long-distance tarred and untarred roads are generally in a good condition. Some of the towns have developed significant tourism potential, with niche attractions and activities. In particular, a distinctive “Karoo architecture” has evolved, sometimes with traces of a Victorian style. Many old homes in the towns and on farms have been renovated to their former glory.

These assets and challenges need to be addressed at an inter-district, inter-provincial and international level. They therefore pose challenges for public sector managers and policy-makers at a variety of levels. Co-operating across borders is never easy, because different jurisdictions have different policy priorities, administrative systems, and institutional capacity.

Curiously, the problem is probably as difficult across domestic (intra-national) jurisdictions, as it is across international jurisdictions. In South Africa, in particular, the provincial governments have taken on a large range of developmental functions, and have drafted provincial Growth and Development Strategies (GDS). There has, as yet, been very little co-ordination of these GDS documents, which implies that the four provinces' plans for the Karoo have developed in splendid isolation. Co-ordinating these strategies will be almost as difficult as co-ordinating national programmes.

3. Regional development

Internationally, there is a growing recognition of the need to plan and promote development across sub-national and national boundaries. Regional tourism is a subset of a broader question – the nature of regional development policy. While the goals of regional development may vary, the main concern is to even out the gap in life chances, employment opportunities and real income of citizens, across unequal regions (Telfer 2002: 112). Typically, regional policies assist peripheral regions to develop economic opportunities and to balance national development outcomes. Regional planning is an effort to attain the best possible spatial pattern of development.

The definition of a “region” is somewhat controversial. Smith (1995, in Telfer 2002: 114) outlines four definitions of “region”: Firstly, it can refer to an administrative or political unit; secondly, it can have an objective set of internal similarities; and thirdly, it can be a functional region, with a high degree of internal interaction. In the case of the arid areas of southern Africa, it is primarily an objectively defined region (based on its common characteristic of aridity), but there are the inklings of a functional region, with some cross-border activities and collaboration. The purpose of this paper is to examine its potential to become a much more effective functional region, at least as far as tourism is concerned. This leads to a fourth possible definition of a region, as a “contiguous area that has been explicitly delineated by a researcher, planner or public agency as having relevance for some aspect of ... planning, development or analysis” (Smith 1995: 175 in Telfer 2002: 115).

Regional development requires measures to stimulate growth poles, which contain enterprises that generate spread effects through investments, leading to cumulative growth. Economic agglomeration occurs through both forward linkages (suppliers attracting buyers) and backward linkages (buyers attracting suppliers). If tourism is to be a successful development tool, it will be essential to strengthen linkages within the local economy (Telfer 2002: 119). In fact, two sets of linkages are important: relationships with the exterior economy (including goods, services, capital, information and foreign exchange earnings), and linkages between local economic actors.

Curiously, South Africa's spatial policy is *not* aimed at redressing a spatially unbalanced economy. South Africa's National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP) document, which is increasingly used as the framework for spatial resource allocation, has an explicit purpose to direct public investment to areas “with economic

potential”. According to the NSDP, ‘development potential’ is based on the following criteria (NSDP 2003:18):

- Natural resource potential: agricultural potential, environmental sensitivity and the availability of water
- Human resource potential: levels of skills and human density
- Infrastructure resource potential: existing and proposed road and rail infrastructure and the main electricity grid
- Human need: spread of poverty and the size of the poverty gap
- Existing economic activity.

In South Africa, the arid areas have not, as yet, been ranked as areas with potential, and consequently, very little intellectual or policy resources have been devoted to exploring development options in the arid areas. Regional development thinking in South Africa is not very developed, and the only interest in this direction is the South African Department of Trade and Industry’s draft Regional Industrial Development Strategy (RIDS).¹This makes it much more difficult to argue the case for a focus on public investment in the arid areas.

Ironically, in Southern Africa, there is a stronger focus on regionalism (across national boundaries) than in South Africa itself (across provincial boundaries). There have been significant attempts to promote cross-border investment and trade. The South African Development Community (SADC) positively encourages countries to promote regional cross-border investment (Mutambara 2007: 54).

4. Regional tourism as an integrative force

Tourism has the potential to generate growth and development, because it brings financial resources into an area (either as capital investment or as the spending power of tourists), and because it encourages governments to provide infrastructure in the form of roads, transport systems, water provision and electricity. Governments can select tourism as a growth pole, which would mean that they would identify a site, and inject government and private investment into the area, possibly in the form of subsidised facilities and infrastructure. Furthermore, it is important that tourism agencies and economic development officers understand the existing linkages between firms, and how to strengthen these and build new linkages. Eventually, economic growth in the area becomes self-sustaining, and diversifies to include non-tourism activities. The growth of the residential population means that additional products and services are required, thus stimulating a wider range of markets (Telfer 2002: 121).

Tourism has certain benefits and disadvantages as a lead sector. It is beneficial, because it is labour-intensive and stimulates a wide range of entrepreneurial activities, and it is often based on rural and natural amenities which are available anyway. However, there are also negative factors: tourism often offers low paying jobs that can be seasonal, and the income derived from tourism could be lost by financial leakages from the region, which reduce the local multiplier effect. Also, tourist facilities may use up a disproportionate amount of water, energy, land, food and construction materials (Telfer 2002: 122), which may skew local prices. Tourism is

¹ www.dti.gov.za/publications/pdfrids/chapter1.pdf.

not a panacea for development; it has to be managed to maximise its beneficial impacts.

A “tourism destination zone” needs several characteristics to be a meaningful developmental unit (Smith 1995: 199, in Telfer 2002: 115). The region should have a set of cultural, physical and social characteristics that create a sense of regional identity; the region should have adequate infrastructure; it should be larger than just one community or one attraction; it should be capable of supporting a tourism planning agency and marketing initiatives; and it should be accessible – by various means of transport - to a large tourist market.

Regional tourism raises two key questions: Firstly, to what extent can provinces and national governments synchronise their tourism promotion efforts? And secondly, to what extent can such efforts promote local wealth creation and community development, and help to alleviate poverty?

Tourism is now regarded by scholars and donors alike as having a major potential impact on development in Africa (Rogerson 2007: 362). The potential of tourism to contribute to economic and social upliftment in Africa is emphasised by the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). However, the NEPAD Tourism Action Plan also highlighted the fact that tourism across Africa is performing below international standards. Key objectives are to create an enabling regulatory environment; strengthen the institutional capacity of tourism planning; improve tourism marketing especially on a regional basis; enhance research and development; upgrade tourism infrastructure and products; upgrade skills in tourism; and address the cross-cutting issues of gender, community involvement and AIDS (Rogerson 2007: 362).

In order to promote regional tourism, the SADC countries² signed a Protocol on Tourism in 1998.³ The Protocol highlighted the global significance of tourism, as the world’s largest and fastest growing industry, and its potential for promoting economic development. The Protocol aimed at ensuring equitable, balanced and complementary development of the tourism industry throughout the region. It also had a pro-poor focus, and aimed to promote the involvement of small and micro-enterprises, local communities, women and youth in the development of tourism throughout the region. To encourage the private sector to invest in tourism, the SADC governments agreed to provide incentives, infrastructure and appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks. Furthermore, environmentally and socially sustainable tourism development, based on sound management principles, would be promoted.

The SADC protocol makes several administrative proposals. These include co-operating on transport issues (air, land and water), shared visa systems, and tourism training. Several institutional mechanisms were created, including the SADC Committee of Tourism Ministers, a Committee of Senior Officials, the Tourism Co-ordinating Unit, and a Regional Tourism Organisation (RETOSA).

² South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

³ www.iss.co.za/AF/RegOrg/unity-to-union/pdfs/sadc/protols/tourism.pdf, downloaded on 15 October 2007.

RETOSA's task is to market the SADC tourism sector. Its mandate is to develop common and co-ordinated marketing and promotion strategies. RETOSA has created a very informative website⁴, offering extensive traveler information about its 14 member countries. It also enables tourism facilities to secure RETOSA membership, which entitles them to be featured in tourism booklets and on the website.

There is significant tourism potential in the arid areas. South Africa, Namibia and Botswana are growing rapidly as tourist destinations (Rogerson 2007: 367). From 1995 and 2005, international arrivals in South Africa grew by 2 833 000, in Botswana by 1 002 000, and in Namibia by 323 000. In Namibia, "desert tourism" is very prominent, particularly amongst European travelers. Botswana has a deliberate policy of promoting "low volume – high value" tourism, in order to promote the scarcity value of its tourism product, and to prevent pressure on fragile ecosystems. Government has limited any lodge inside a game reserve to 24 beds. In this context, virtually all accommodation inside protected areas are fully booked year round (Mearns 2003: 31). This offers a valuable opportunity for marketing the arid areas, and offering the type of "tourism product" which will not undermine the ecology of the arid areas.

"Desert tourism" is a potential new option on the tourism menu – and deserts often cross borders. Cross-border initiatives may play a major role to promote tourism in the arid areas of South Africa, Namibia and Botswana.

Borders have emerged as a "new frontier" in international tourism research (Rogerson 2003: 33). Cross-border co-operation can be significant. It positions regions more strongly in the market, because tourists will often have a regional rather than a specific destination in mind. It enables an ecological biome (e.g. the "Nama Karoo") to be marketed and branded. It can also allow the rationalization of investments in tourism infrastructure by allowing a sharing of facilities, such as airports. Furthermore, by co-operation amongst governments, different features can be combined from each of the countries to provide complementary tour circuits (Cleverdon 2002: 23).

In the arid areas, the most dramatic cross-border projects have been the creation of transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs). In comparison to national parks, TFCAs have the potential to conserve a greater diversity of species within larger geographical areas and to promote co-operation in wildlife management between nations (Spenceley 2006: 649). Underlying the TFCA process is the SADC Wildlife Policy, which promotes the establishment of TFCAs as a means for inter-state co-operation in the management of ecosystems which transcend national boundaries.

RETOSA is actively promoting trans-frontier conservation areas in the region. To date, seven of these parks have been created, including three in the arid areas: the Kalahari-Kgalagadi Park (over 14 600 square miles), which straddles South Africa and Botswana; the Ai-Ais/Richtersveld Park, which includes areas in South Africa and Namibia; and the Gariep Park, centered on South Africa's Augrabies Falls, and crossing into Namibia (Schiller 2000).

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www.retosa.co.za.

The Kalahari-Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is a co-operative venture between the South African National Parks of South Africa and Botswana's Department of Wildlife and National Parks. A joint management plan was approved by the two conservation agencies in 1997. Each country provides and maintains its own tourism facilities and infrastructure, giving particular attention to developing and involving communities. This park contains spectacular sand dunes, with bushveld, grassland and 60 species of mammals.⁵

The Ai-Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Conservation Park was created in 2003, after extensive community consultations. The Richtersveld National Park in South Africa is owned by the Richtersveld community, and managed on a contractual basis with the South African National Parks. The communities of the local towns will benefit from increased tourism to the area, and the cultural heritage and traditional lifestyle of the Nama Karoo will be retained. The park contains some of the most spectacular arid and desert mountain scenery in southern Africa, and features the world's second largest canyon, the Fish River Canyon. It has major plant resources, with at least 2 700 species of plants.⁶ There are now plans to expand this park in an eastward direction, along the Orange River.

Another approach of relevance to the arid areas, is "route tourism", a concept which refers to initiatives to bring together a variety of activities and attractions under a unified theme, and thus stimulate tourism entrepreneurs to provide ancillary products and services (Lourens 2007: 474). The concept of rural trails or heritage routes have been used in several parts of the world, particularly for promoting rural tourism and less explored areas with valuable cultural resources. In particular, it can appeal to specific "niche" markets. Routes vary considerably in length and scale (local, regional or international).

An ambitious initiative to promote regional tourism is the African Dream Project organised by the Open Africa Foundation, an NGO based in South Africa. It seeks to link the attractions of Africa in a continuous network of African tourism routes, from the Cape to Cairo. Using donor funds, Open Africa has developed 59 routes in four African countries since 1999. The Foundation aims to create routes that directly contribute to alleviating poverty in Africa's rural and marginalised area, while celebrating and fostering African culture and promoting nature conservation (Lourens 2007: 476; Visser 2004). In the arid areas, Open Africa has created four desert routes in the area which straddles South Africa and Namibia:⁷ the "Richtersveld route"; the "Kalahari Red Dune Route"; the "Kalahari Oasis Route"; which includes several small towns along the Orange River; and the "Nama Karoo Desert", which includes most of south-central Namibia.

5. Beyond elitism: The potential of tourism to benefit the poor

Tourism is often regarded as an elitist activity, with luxury tourism enclaves surrounded by a sea of deprivation and poverty. Enclave resorts are characterised by a lack of linkages to benefit the local residents, and are used almost exclusively by

⁵ www.environment.gov.za/ProjProg/TFCAs/kgalagadi.htm, downloaded on 16 October 2007.

⁶ www.environment.gov.za/ProjProg/TFCAs/artp.htm, downloaded on 16 October 2007.

⁷ www.africandream.org/africa/NA/NAFour, downloaded on 16 October 2007.

foreign tourists (Telfer 2002: 141). Local residents tend to be exploited as cheap labour, and are not involved in a management or supply-chain capacity.

There has been a great deal of research to investigate the possible impacts of tourism on local communities, and in particular, to create livelihoods. Researchers have emphasised the need to decentralise tourism development and integrate it into overall community-defined development goals (Timothy 2002: 149). There is also significant scope for “pro-poor tourism”, “community-based tourism” and participation by small and medium enterprises. According to Rogerson, “The writings on pro-poor tourism are one of the most notable contributions to international tourism scholarship derived substantially from Africa-based research” (2007: 371).

Tourism and poverty reduction can be linked (Ashley & Roe 2007: 61). Certain characteristics of tourism can make it more conducive to pro-poor growth than other sectors. Tourism can be labour-intensive, inclusive of women and the informal sector, based on natural and cultural assets of the poor, and suitable for poor rural areas with few other growth options. But typically, the costs and benefits of tourism are not shared equally (Telfer 2002: 147), because tourism offers opportunities for innovative individuals and groups, who have different levels of skill, information and capital, and which may therefore benefit more than other community members.

The concept of “pro-poor tourism” has evolved to refer to tourism that generates net benefits for the poor. Various interventions may be useful ways to initiate pro-poor tourism (Ashley & Roe 2007: 80). Cultural products can be offered, as additions to a core safari product; local producers can supply goods and services; local employment can be enhanced; and income can be maximised by income from investment equity or leases of property. It can impact on local livelihoods in multiple direct and indirect ways. These include SMME involvement, training, improvement of local infrastructure, telecommunications, and contact with the “outside world”. The participation of the poor can involve developing cultural products (dances, tours, crafts) and supply linkages (food, materials and transport). Involvement of the poor in tourist enterprises can be promoted by giving the poor a legal stake in investments, by enhancing the voice of poor tourism producers at policy levels, and by facilitating participatory planning processes at the local level (Ashley & Roe 2007: 67).

The benefits could be economic, but they may also be environmental, cultural or educational (Ashley & Roe 2007: 62). Empowerment of local actors in tourism ventures can have contribute to communities’ psychological self-esteem, which leads to increased confidence to seek training and investment opportunities; social benefits which enhance the local community’s cohesion and innovation; and political benefits, whereby communities strengthen their own participatory mechanisms Scheyvens (1999, in Timothy 2002: 152) In fact, there is a continuum of potential local involvement in tourism (France 1998: 225, in Timothy 2002: 151):

1. Enclave tourism: Exploitative relations with local communities, with no participation on the part of workers
2. Manipulative and passive participation, with a pretence of participation, often undertaken by highly centralized multinational corporations in developing countries, with neocolonial attitudes

3. Consultation, where residents lack effective control, and multinationals' operations are devolved to local elites
4. Material incentives, where locals contribute resources and are hired in some managerial positions
5. Functional participation, where major decisions are made externally, but local expertise is employed, often by local elites
6. Interactive participation, where residents contribute to planning, and local people own tourism facilities
7. Self-mobilisation of communities to undertake their own independent activities.

“Pro-poor tourism” is not the same as “community-based” tourism. Pro-poor tourism could involve poor individuals in their individual capacity (such as craftsmen or traders). Community-based tourism suggests some level of coherent community-level decision-making, based on institutional systems within a community. The most celebrated concept in this regard is Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM). Within the CBNRM rubric, community-based tourism can be defined as “tourism initiatives that are owned by one or more defined communities, or run as joint venture partnerships with the private sector with equitable community participation, as a means of using the natural resources in a sustainable manner to improve their standard of living in an economically viable way” (Rogerson 2002, in Mearns 2003).

CBNRM in the tourism sector can refer to several types of activities (Ashley 1998: 325):

1. Private lodges or luxury tented camp for wildlife-viewing tourists, without agreements with local residents
2. Private lodges voluntarily sharing revenue with local communities
3. Joint venture lodges, working as partnerships between private investors and local communities
4. Local enterprises run by representatives of local communities or by a local entrepreneur
5. Informal sector suppliers of goods and services (e.g. crafts and food).

These different systems create different types and levels of benefits for local communities, whether in the form of wages, casual earnings, business incomes, and collective incomes. There are also other potential benefits, such as skills training, improved local organisational capacity, more secure livelihoods during droughts, and a revival of cultural crafts. However, there are also potential negative impacts, such as community destabilization, the loss of land for livestock use, seasonal and unpredictable employment, the need for start-up capital, wildlife damage to agriculture, and intrusion of western values (Ashley 1998: 338).

Officially, South African and Namibian tourism policies promote community-based and pro-poor tourism, in a rather glib and uncritical way. The South African Government's *White Paper on Tourism* (1996) highlights the need for communities to benefit from tourism. They can seek partnerships with the established private sector operators, participate in decision-making with regards to tourism planning in their areas; and educate communities concerning tourism opportunities.

There has been a gradual increase in the participation of black and coloured people in tourism in the arid areas. Black people currently own about 24% of the accommodation businesses in Namaqualand (Govender-Van Wyk 2007: 181). In the Richtersveld, community-based tourism has been linked to a land restitution claim by the Nama people, and 85 000 hectares of desert have been allocated to the indigenous community. The community entered into an agreement with South African National Parks (SANParks), which was a milestone for the implementation of new community-based conservation practices in South Africa. SANParks now leases the land from the local community, and the proceeds are distributed by a charitable trust, the Richtersveld Community Trust (Govender-Van Wyk 2007: 183). The local community is allowed to use the land for grazing, according to certain limits on the number of livestock. Furthermore, some of the community members have been trained in accommodation management, conservation, tour-guiding and bookkeeping (Govender-Van Wyk 2007: 195).

A similar case is that of Riemvasmaak, a community located to the north of the Augrabies Falls, in the Kalahari. It is a land of rugged and rocky desert mountains, alongside the Orange River. In 1973, the community was forcibly removed because the South African Defence Force wanted the land for a military training ground. In 2002, the land title was returned to them. There are now efforts to establish a community-based tourism venture in Riemvasmaak. The area offers hot springs, hiking, mountain biking, abseiling, donkey cart drives and traditional meals and dances. A number of community members participate in the project, whether as office managers, marketers and cleaners (Vandecasteele 2007).

But generally, tourism outside the government-owned game parks still tends to be dominated by the private sector, in the form of guest houses and game farms.

Namibia has also made significant progress towards community-based tourism and natural resource management – probably more so than South Africa. Since 1995, community involvement in tourism has been an explicit government strategy (Ashley 1998: 323). In particular, this has focused on communal lands, where tourism and conservation interests are brought together. In 1996, legislation was passed to enable communities to establish wildlife “conservancies”, which are legally registered bodies formed by a community, with a constitution, registered members, committees, and locally agreed boundaries, with rights to benefit from wildlife. Namibia has a strong programme to support Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM).

Similarly, in Botswana, over 50 community-based organisations are active in various fields of CBNRM in Botswana, ranging from thatching and grass harvesting, herbal tea marketing, handicraft production, campsite management and trophy hunting.

However, it is important not to assume that community control is a guarantee of social or environmental benefits. Many authors (including Timothy 2002: 154-5) leap to unwarranted conclusions: that community control is more likely to be environmentally sensitive than mass tourism; that community control will be in harmony with cultural traditions; that community-based tourism will be inclusive of all community members; that community co-operation will prevent individualism and unhealthy competition; and that local control will keep the most sacred spaces and

tourism spaces from being defiled by the tourism gaze. In fact, our experience of small towns in the Karoo suggests that community members' responses to tourism are likely to be very uneven, and are as likely to cause conflict as social cohesion. "The community" is a problematic concept, and often a cluster of different and potentially conflicting interests.

A valuable case study of community-based tourism in the Richtersveld (Govender-Van Wyk: 2007: 195) has shown how community involvement in the tourism venture has generated frustrations as well as benefits. Some people have been trained, but subsequently found that there is not sufficient work for them; some of the trained people do not actually enjoy the new kinds of work; many community members do not bother to attend consultation meetings; and there have been accusations of nepotism and favouritism. It is also becoming clear that once-off training is often not sufficient – a process of ongoing mentoring and problem-solving may be more suitable. This has led to conflicts between the Richtersveld community and SANParks. Community-based tourism raises expectations and unleashes new ambitions, and it is very difficult to establish management systems which can accommodate the range of local attitudes, from conservatism to entrepreneurialism. It is, thus far, an unfortunate reality that government often does not have the skills or the staff to engage in these exercises, and much of the funding finds its way to expensive consultants (Govender-Van Wyk 2007: 203).

Advocating pro-poor or community-based tourism will require careful attention to the conditions under which such activities are undertaken. Furthermore, local personalities can play a key role in either promoting or destroying community cohesion or participation in local tourism ventures. In real situations, there is often a paradox that local tourism can flourish and may contribute to local economic development, at the same time as promoting inequality and even conflict. The advent of modernity and entrepreneurship in a local community is often fraught with new tensions.

On the South African side, there is a growing appreciation of the complexities of community involvement in nature conservation and tourism. SANParks has established a Social Ecology Unit to undertake interactions with neighbouring and local communities (Cock & Fig 2000). The Unit creates management structures and forums for community-based parks; on these structures, a wide range of stakeholders are represented, including tribal authorities, youth leaders, educators, NGOs and government departments.

Without such institutional support, together with sufficient levels of funding, training and mentoring, community-based and pro-poor tourism are unlikely to succeed.

6. The poor and the not-so-poor

South Africa, Botswana and Namibia are ex-colonial countries with a strong rural middle-class population (in most cases, white residents). Many of these property owners in the small towns and farms have embraced the economic potential of tourism with enthusiasm, energy and innovation. In effect, they function as important local elites, who have sufficient capital and entrepreneurial expertise to initiate

tourism enterprises. These entrepreneurs are the “not-so-poor” local communities. By means of their efforts, they have renovated and built facilities, and offer employment to local residents.

A key question is: Is this kind of tourism development sufficient? And is it appropriate to local conditions? According to Telfer (2002: 121), “Tourism has the potential to generate growth and development but it can also enhance inequalities if only the local elite benefits”. Local and small-scale elites and established entrepreneurs can be drawn into tourism initiatives. As Ashley (1998:324) notes, for tourism to be relevant to local development, *all* forms of involvement, whether by communities or individuals, whether community-based or not, need to be analysed, because they affect rural lives.

There is not a clear line of demarcation between “poor” and “non-poor” enterprises, or between “elite” and “community” enterprises. Britton (1987, in Telfer 2002: 132) has shown that there are at least seven categories of tourism, ranging from highly concentrated investments to grassroots initiatives:

1. Large-scale, capitalist, foreign-owned enterprises
2. Large-scale tourism enterprises owned and controlled by national private capital
3. Medium-scale tourism enterprises controlled by local companies and individuals
4. Small- and medium-scale tourism enterprises organised as co-operatives at the village or community level
5. Small-scale tourism enterprises organised as individual or family concerns, and
6. Small-scale tourism enterprises organised by individuals and families as a supplement to simple commodity production.

In the southern African case, many middle-class local tourism operators can be ranked as (3) or (5) above, whereas community-based black enterprises would rank as (4) or (6). Also, there is a growing class of black individualistic entrepreneurs, particularly in the urban areas, who prefer to own and manage their own businesses. The distinction between the white and black/coloured middle class is beginning to break down.

There seems to be a general view that decentralised, smaller-scale tourism can have a greater impact on improving rural living standards, reducing rural-urban migration, rejuvenating rural communities, and countering structural inequalities of income distribution (Britton 1987: 183). However, it tends to develop gradually and incrementally. It also requires local skills, experience and capital accumulation before effective investment in tourism enterprises can take place. It is worth remembering that community-based enterprises may also have unintended consequences, for example, increases in the price of land and goods (Telfer 2002: 136), which may create barriers for future entrants in the market.

In the arid areas of South Africa and Namibia, white commercial farmers have played a major role in establishing game farms and small guest lodges, within a limited budget. These entrepreneurs are not poor, but they are also not part of national and international corporations. Their businesses are often family-based, and are financed

by family savings. These businesses have several advantages: They can provide employment; they are well networked locally; they are familiar with local black communities; they understand local environmental and ecological issues; and they offer a more friendly and interactive experience than the corporate game lodges. They are also local residents, and not absentee land-lords.

The term “pro-poor” is probably an unfortunate one. Who would qualify as “the poor”? There are degrees of “poverty”, ranging from the truly indigent to fairly prosperous small-scale enterprise. There are also types of poverty, including a poverty of assets, income, capital, or skills. A more suitable description may be “local multiplier tourism”, where the focus is on keeping money circulating in the local economy, to the benefit of a wide range of local residents.

Such “local multiplier tourism” can promote the involvement of small enterprise in several ways: By *out-sourcing* (particularly functions such as food supply, laundry services, furniture production, transport and guiding), and by *in-sourcing* (the creation of independent service providers by groups of erstwhile employees) (Kirsten and Rogerson 2002: 38). Once again, there is a wide diversity of local entrepreneurs who may become involved. Such service providers may be local black collectives, or they may be local white or black-owned businesses. Their “pro-poor” impacts may be varied, ranging from offering formal employment to supporting informal trades and services.

Whether the focus is on “pro-poor tourism” or “local multiplier tourism”, there are significant practical challenges. There is often a massive skills and capacity gap in the local community; there may be poor communication with government and private sector agencies; and pro-poor projects may actually have financial costs which are greater than government or private budgets can afford (Ashley & Roe 2002: 78). Business finance may be difficult to access. In arid areas, where black communities are located far from game farms, it may be difficult to become involved in the provision of eco-tourism goods and services (Kirsten and Rogerson 2002: 46).

Furthermore, tourism in the desert areas has specific characteristics. Long-haul tourists require fairly stringent international standards (Ashley & Roe 2002: 74). Quality and reliability are essential, which requires government programmes to promote training and quality improvement. Tourism operations may require a major outlay of capital.

Governments need to have proactive policies and programmes for supporting local tourism, and promoting local multipliers. Government commitment is essential, at the level of policy, regulations, spatial planning, infrastructure development, land tenure, business regulations and investment in skills (2002: 76). To promote pro-poor tourism initiatives, four types of interventions are essential: establishing effective links with the private sector; securing the support of national tourism bodies; improving local marketing skills; and identifying markets (often “niche markets”) and matching products to them (Ashley & Roe 2002: 75).

Such interventions are required at all levels of government – local, district, provincial, and national. Additional funds from NGOs, donors or tourists may be needed to build the capacity of local entrepreneurs. A useful example of such support is the Namibia

Community Based Tourism Association (NACOBTA), which is supported by the Green Development Foundation, a Dutch organisation whose mandate is to work towards poverty alleviation and to increase the economic opportunities of marginalised social groups. NACOBTA is a non-profit membership organisation that supports communities in their efforts to develop tourism enterprises in Namibia. NACOBTA assists its members through training, business advice, marketing, funding, advocacy and operating a booking and information office. In an interesting case of cross-border co-operation, NACOBTA visited Fair Trade in Tourism in South Africa (FFTSA) to share information and insights.⁸

Namibia's experience with pro-poor tourism has been valuable, to highlight the institutional prerequisites for such strategies. This includes the role of NGOs, the need for enhanced capacity in government departments (such as Community Tourism liaison officers), and the need for appropriate and flexible regulations (e.g. to register tour guides or accommodation facilities). In particular, the CBNRM experience highlights the very important prerequisite that local communities are involved in joint planning exercises, instead of unilateral private sector decisions, so that different activities and impacts can be examined and incorporated meaningfully in tourism projects.

7. The future prospects for “desert tourism” in southern Africa

South Africa's environment has long been a drawcard for overseas tourists. However, its potential as a “desert destination” has not been fully appreciated.

Desert tourism has become increasingly significant throughout the world, to the extent that the United Nations' World Tourism Organisation has published a document entitled *Sustainable Development of Tourism in Deserts – Guide for Decision Makers* (2007). This document warns of the need to combine sensitive ecosystem management with the protection of indigenous cultures.

Desert tourism is a subset of “rural tourism”, which has the distinguishing hallmark of giving visitors personal contact with the physical and human environment of the countryside, and as far as possible, to allow them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of the local people (Viljoen & Tlabela 2007:3).

Internationally, many rural areas are using tourism to regenerate their economies as a process of diversification from agriculture, particularly in the difficult global economic climate of intense competition and low prices for agricultural products.

In many countries, farm tourism is actively promoted by government, and ecotourism is focused on activities which are conducted in harmony with nature. There is a growing market of travelers who want to escape to remote rural areas, away from the pressures of modern life. Desert tourism is, typically, a form of eco-tourism and adventure tourism; and in many cases, can be a type of farm tourism. The game farming industry has expanded massively in Southern Africa. In South Africa, the number of game ranches has increased to about 6 000, extending over 10 million

⁸ <http://fairtourismsa.org.za/news/messages/nacobta1102204.html>, downloaded on 16 October 2007.

hectares, in contrast to the 3.3 million hectare total of South Africa's national parks (Viljoen & Tlabela 2007: 17). Registered game farms in the Northern Cape have increased by dramatically: "Game ranching is replacing conventional livestock farming as a more cost-effective use of renewable natural resources" (Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, Environment and Conservation, Northern Cape, 2003; quoted in Govender-vanWyk 2007: 177). The growth in the number of game farms has been accompanied by an increase in ecotourism activities, such as game drives, hiking, bird-watching, and hunting.

But rural tourism is not a panacea to ensure rural development (Briedenhann and Wickens 2004: 191). One should not be blind to the numerous difficulties in promoting rural tourism. Local areas often lack sufficient skills, finance, entrepreneurship, marketing expertise and reliable market information. Lack of tourism awareness and understanding amongst rural communities is a significant constraint to effective participation, communication and decision-making. Local economic multipliers are eroded by the purchase of goods and services from businesses external to the areas (and often located in the cities). Many rural tourism businesses struggle to identify appropriate promotional and communications programmes and face complicated booking procedures. Furthermore, rural tourism enterprises, like any others, have to survive in a tough business environment.

For effective rural development, rural areas need at least two major support strategies. Firstly, tourism should form part of a wider economic diversification strategy (Briedenhann and Wickens 2004: 193). Secondly, rural tourism needs to move beyond a supply-led strategy and begin to promote tourism demand, increasing tourist volumes, and escalating market volume (2004: 200).

Increasingly, the governments of Namibia, Botswana and South Africa are realizing that "desert tourism" is a potential niche market, for overseas and domestic tourists. The Northern Cape Province in South Africa has recently highlighted the attractions of Namaqualand and Kalahari, at the Indaba 2007 travel trade show in Durban (*Travel Weekly*, 28 May 2007).

An important new initiative is the "Cape to Namibia Route", which was launched at the International Tourism Exchange trade show in Berlin in March 2007 (Press release, 14 March 2007: "Cape to Namibia Route – A self-drive feast for the soul"). This is a new strategic alliance between the Namibia Tourism Board, Cape Town Routes Unlimited, and the Northern Cape Tourism Authority. "Following extensive research, the alliance, a first for regional African tourism development, has crafted a brand identity and a wide-ranging strategy to promote the new route". The aim is to stimulate new growth in the estimated 250 000 European and South African visitors that travel on this north-south route every year. Interestingly, Namibia's strong historical links with Germany made the new route an ideal tourism experience to launch at the Berlin trade show.⁹

But as yet, desert tourism in South Africa is limited by a wide range of issues (Govender-Van Wyk 2007: 178). Air travel to the Northern Cape is limited and expensive; limited packages are offered to tourists; there is unco-ordinated tourism

⁹ www.capenamibia.com.

development in the province, and this is also poorly integrated with the products offered by Namibia and Botswana. Government funds for tourism development are extremely limited. Local cultures, such as the Nama, San and Khoi-Khoi are not adequately brought into mainstream tourism products, such as local cuisine.

The promotion of tourism in desert areas is not a straightforward issue. There are ecological trade-offs to be made. For example, in Namaqualand, it has been found that the major drawcard for tourists are the wide expanses of desert flowers in spring (Turpie and Joubert 2004: 661). But in fact, the best expanses of flowers are found on land which has been previously ploughed, and in fact, the more rare species may have been destroyed. “Deliberate disturbance is not desirable in a national park, but deliberate disturbance seems to be essential to maintain mass flowering display” (Van Rooyen 2002: 221). Also, in Namaqualand, the current visitor profile mainly consists of domestic tourists, who have limited budgets, and thus the scope for new tourist products in Namaqualand is limited. To increase the number of tourists in Namaqualand, and to increase the financial benefits of such tourism, more international marketing may have to be done – but this, in turn, may lead to “negative congestion effects and possibly also environmental damage” (Turpie and Joubert 2004: 661). The issue of ecological impacts on fragile environments has to be taken into consideration.

Desert tourism also has social consequences. In Namaqualand, tourism income is starting to replace agricultural activities, in a process of “de-agrarianisation” (Hoffman & Rhode 2007: 655). Tourism is the fastest growing economic sector in Namaqualand. Local people are gradually moving from agriculture to trades such as catering, accommodation and tour-guiding. In her study of the Richtersveld, Govender-Van Wyk (2007: 204) found that tourism offers better incomes than agriculture. Tourism offers new economic opportunities; but it also means that local people are vulnerable to global tourism fluctuations and factors, such as the price of transport.

8. Regional tourism governance

The various institutions of the state can have an impact on how tourism is used as a vehicle for regional development (Telfer 2002: 125). This includes the central government, administrative departments, provincial and municipal departments, and regulatory agencies. Governments at all levels can play several major roles: co-ordination, planning, legislation, promoting entrepreneurship, and protecting social and or environmental interests. By use of their fiscal powers, governments can invest in the general infrastructure of a region as well as in specific tourist infrastructure. They can also provide incentives for entrepreneurs. Significantly, governments can identify tourism development regions to help structure programmes for the redistribution of wealth and to narrow inter-regional disparities.

Governments are well-placed to market destinations which encourage travelers to move beyond the established sites. The *White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa* (DEAT 1996) explicitly stated, as one of its economic goals, “To facilitate balanced tourism development in South Africa”. According to the White Paper: “Tourism brings development to rural areas ... Many

of the prime tourism attractions are not located in the city centres but in the rural areas. Tourism allows rural peoples to share in the benefits of tourism development, promoting more balanced and sustainable forms of development”.

As the tourism market continues to diversify and to satisfy an ever-increasingly demanding market, the geographic location to which tourists are traveling to, gets further and further away from developed areas, and into the periphery. Such peripheral areas are more rural and remote, poorly modernized, with poor information flows and remote from decision-making. Their main attraction is the scenic beauty, wildlife and adventure. Not only do these fragile ecosystems require careful and skilled management, but these areas are also home to some of the world’s remaining indigenous people whose lifestyle is under threat. This raises major questions of the management of tourism to maximise beneficial impacts and minimize disruption of local societies (Telfer 2002: 143).

In South Africa, Namibia and Botswana, provincial and municipal institutions have significant management capacity, but tend to be weak as regards economic development. Yet all four South African provinces, as well as its international neighbours, are grappling with similar issues and problems – which is not surprising, since they all share similar arid biomes and social realities.

The most significant tourism support programme is the Integrated Tourism Entrepreneurship Support Programme (ITESP) in the Western Cape Province. The ITESP represents a partnership between the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) trading as Cape Town Routes Unlimited (CTRU), Department of Economic Development and Tourism (DEDT) and the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) ITESP provides an integrated support to tourism SMME's, including access to capital, skills and markets. The intention of the programme is to remove the challenges that prevent transformation in tourism and promote demographic distribution of ownership in the industry within the province. A sum of R4 million was allocated for the 2004/2005 financial year, and a further R1.85 million has been allocated by the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) toward this project. However, the activities of ITESP have not been extended to the Karoo areas. At this stage, the organisation remains primarily focused on Cape Town and the coastal areas. Nevertheless, it sets an example for future tourism support activities. Its budget is very limited, and was a mere R6 million per annum when it started (<http://www.tourismcapetown.co.za>).

Tourism planning and institutions remain essential, because it involves many different types of tourism enterprise. It also provides linkages with businesses not directly related to tourism, but whose operations directly impacts on the ability of tourism operators to deliver a satisfactory level of service (for example, construction, agriculture and transport) (Cleverdon 2002: 14). In southern African states, however, there is a chronic lack of capacity at local, district and provincial level. Such authorities have insufficient understanding or budget to facilitate the promotion of tourism. Furthermore, funding for tourism investments is difficult to obtain. According to Cleverdon, the financing community needs to be educated about the nature of tourism project capital and operating finance, in particular the problem of high initial capital costs and low levels of return on capital in the early years (2002: 16).

The emerging desert cluster in southern Africa will have to evolve new institutions to facilitate collaboration. According to Smallbone *et al*, “Internal cross-border regions emerge as new spaces of social and economic activity, ... eventually becoming centres of gravity of economic activity” (2007: 26). Such entities may gradually acquire more autonomy to develop and implement their own policies and to build their own institutions of governance. The “new regionalization” refers to increasing interconnections between areas, which are located in neighbouring states. Furthermore, such relationships could local authorities have acquired a central position in the evolution and functioning of cross-border regions.

A regional identity is the identification of a group of people with the social system of a region, its culture, history, traditions and landscape (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 75, following Paasi, 2003 and Raagmaa 2002). Following Paasi (2003), there are four key influences which shape regional identity formation:

- The territorial shape
- The symbolic shape – the system of visible symbols that create a shared feeling between the inhabitants of the region
- The institutional shape (formal institutions such as government, education, firms and NGOs, but also informal relationships)
- The emerging socio-spatial consciousness of the inhabitants, and their identification with institutional practices and symbolisms (Smallbone *et al*, 2007: 76).

Other factors which can shape a region’s development is the degree of “institutional thickness”, governance structures, the autonomy of local authorities to use resources in a creative way, and the region’s branding strategy (Smallbone *et al*, 2007: 78)

Smallbone *et al* (2007: 87) note that little is known about organisational learning, involving enterprises or institutions, in a cross-border context. We need to understand the role of knowledge and learning for organisational change and business success. In the context of cross-border co-operation, collaborative know-how and experience are both important for successful inter-organisational learning (2007: 89, following Simonin 1997). “Institutions that encourage alertness to, or awareness of, previously unknown knowledge have a potentially important role ... Entrepreneurship development requires a bundle of social capabilities, in terms of institutions and policies, which will support the acquisition and diffusion of information and knowledge that are indispensable for entrepreneurship to develop” (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 150).

An interesting example would be that of Desert Knowledge Australia, which promotes the development of the “Outback” across provincial boundaries (DKA 2005).

To promote cross-border collaboration, a range of new concepts need to be put on the table. A crucial factor is the “*absorptive capacity*” of an organisation or a group of organisations – that is, its ability to recognise the value of new, external knowledge, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends (Smallbone *et al*, 2007: 93, following

Cohen and Levinthal 1990. Another valuable feature is *relational capital*¹⁰, i.e. the level of mutual trust, respect and friendship that arises out of close interactions between alliance partners (Smallbone *et al*, 2007: 94, following Kale *et al* 2000). This, in turn, is influenced by the quantity and quality of knowledge transfer between partners, and the partners' willingness to be transparent to each other (Inkpen 2000; Janowicz and Noorderhaven 2002). The development of trust can lower transaction costs, facilitate inter-organisational relationships (Doney *et al*, 1998). A common history, common experiences, and shared codes of conduct may foster spatially clustered business systems (Humphrey and Schmitz 1998). Informal institutions (such as conventions and social and moral norms) promote trust (Raiser 1997).

The lesson for policy makers is that they need to build on and support existing enterprise initiatives (Neergaard and Ulhoi 2006). The existence of universal and impartial political institutions together with public policies which enhance social and economic equality creates social capital (Rothstein 2005). The state plays a major role in creating "trustworthy" environments, which allow market players to develop new rules of the game (Radaev 2005).

The term "*governance*" refers to "conscious collective action extending beyond government, and deploying the capacities of businesses, community groups and academic institutions (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 125, following Hart 2003). The growing focus on *partnerships* reflects this increased participation of non-state organisations in policy-making (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 127, following Getimis 2003; Adshead 2002).

There also needs to be an increased focus on the appropriate governance structures for entrepreneurship development. This includes the creation of a business support infrastructure to promote new and small enterprises (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 130). South Africa is no exception to this, although the implementation of such business support programmes is still at an early stage.

Good practice regional development policy needs to be sensitive to the specific strengths and weaknesses of the target regions. Such policies need to be based on empirical evidence (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 135), to determine potential competitive advantage. Clustering can create positive externalities and increasing returns to scale, it can build on geographical ties, relational assets, local tacit knowledge, long-standing social norms, and local conventions of communication and interaction (2007: 136).

Specific policy measures for regional development might be concentrated on four different aspects: (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 136, following Amin 1999)

- Developing the supply base (skills, education, innovations, communications)
- Developing the demand-side of regions, by finding new markets
- Developing the institutional framework (development agencies, business associations, political representation)

¹⁰ "Relational capital" can be distinguished from "social capital". The latter tends to refer to organisational life (e.g. within a family or NGO), whereas "relational capital" highlights the relationships and networks between organisations. But the two concepts do tend to overlap.

- Identifying firm-level interdependencies, exchange relations and rationalities that work to local advantage, as well as those that hinder the development of local initiatives.

Significantly, this can be done in areas that are economically underdeveloped: “In less favoured regions, initiatives that seek to build a sense of pride and regional identity may be a helpful tactic, when introducing new policies and in seeking to gain support for them. Moreover, in a cross border context, where border regions artificially divide cultural regions, with common traditions and a common language, developing this regional identity could well benefit from a cross border element” (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 136). This has huge relevance for a remote arid area such as the Karoo; in Australia, the efforts of Desert Knowledge to promote the regional advantages of the Outback illustrates the potential success of such initiatives.

Such policy priorities might be:

- Creating a vision for the region, using symbols accepted by the regional community, to create a regional brand
- Promoting participatory decision-making and informational transparency
- Building local social capital through projects designed to restore a pride of place, community development programmes, and building social capital
- Targeting active labour market programmes towards vulnerable social groups such as young people, under-qualified people or ethnic minorities
- Assisting informal enterprises to upgrade their operations, by means of bridging loans and specialized services
- Providing training to increase human capacity (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 137, following Kumssa and McGee (2001) and Amin (1999)).

Local governments can play an important role in regional development, particularly in providing and facilitating social and physical infrastructure (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 146). This could include promoting entrepreneur and workers associations, local technical skills, credit co-operatives, strong networks of local banks committed to local lending because of an extensive knowledge of client’s trustworthiness and local economic conditions, technology transfer centres, and the marketing of the region.

Specific measures to promote cross-border collaboration include (Smallbone *et al* 2007: 160-7):

- Introducing measures to raise awareness of the opportunities presented by cross-border partnerships among enterprises, e.g. by organising study tours and exchange visits
- Establishing cross-border partnership search facilities, to identify suitable partners for firms
- Fostering business-to-business contacts through joint events and distributing information
- Increasing the international networking capacity of business associations
- Establishing cross-border partnership support programmes
- Promoting business support networks in border regions, to provide information, advice and training to small companies

- Planning joint infrastructure (e.g. roads, airports)
- Promoting regional branding.

Building cross-border alliances can be a lengthy task. Also, it can take different forms, ranging from co-operation (initial efforts between adjacent jurisdictions to solve common problems), to collaboration (where joint efforts are well established), and integration (where partnerships exist without boundary-related hindrances) (Timothy 1999: 184-5). This process may require a great deal of administrative effort. Nevertheless, “some degree of interjurisdictional networking is vital because it has the potential to reduce economic, social and ecological imbalances that occur on opposite sides of a boundary ... and will lead to more holistic and efficient planning as all parts of the attraction are considered as one, and the duplication of development projects may be eliminated” (Timothy 1999: 195). Joint efforts could include administrative frameworks, infrastructure development, conservation, human resource development, and shared promotional efforts.

Africa can learn from experience elsewhere. Notably, the European Union’s LEADER programme focuses on transnational co-operation in rural areas. There have been several phases of the first programme, starting with a focus on networking of skills as a regional development tool (1991-1994), to LEADER II, which facilitates the funding of transnational co-operation projects, and subsequently to LEADER+. Funds are made available to enable potential partners to derive a shared definition of co-operation projects, to have preliminary meetings, and to complete feasibility studies. In particular, this assists potential partners to attain a “critical mass” of their product. The programme now funds pilot projects, managed by “Local Action Groups”. Such projects will be integrated territorial rural strategies, based on bottom-up participation.¹¹ This approach sets a useful example for institutions such as SADC and NEPAD.

Conclusion

Increasingly, development planners realize that problems and economic development transcend artificial political boundaries. Natural resource management, regional business clusters, tourism and infrastructure development often have to be synchronized amongst provinces or nations. With the exception of transfrontier game parks, this kind of thinking has hardly surfaced in South Africa.

The integrated development of tourism in the Nama Karoo is an idea whose merits are obvious. The arid regions share many characteristics, problems and economic opportunities. The international literature can play a very useful role in alerting us to these opportunities, and to guiding us to make the best of them. At present, the Nama Karoo is still a geographic term; with the right kind of investment, it can become the hallmark of brand of a development region.

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¹¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leader2/rural-en/biblio/coop/art02.htm>.

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