

Assessing Niche Tourism Potentials at Kit Mikayi Sacred Site using activity-based segmentation: towards sustainable tourism product diversification.

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Abstract

This paper examines the niche tourism potential at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site in Kisumu County. The study analysed core niche tourism practices using the activity-based-segmentation; host communities' attitudes towards sustainable niche tourism development; potential tourism projects and the socio-economic factors likely to affect tourism development at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site, and proposes ways through which existing and potential challenges can be addressed. The research data was mainly analysed using the content analysis and thematic analysis methods. The study revealed that the site is frequented by individual and organized groups, dominated by domestic visitors. Identified tourists' activities include: seeing and climbing the Kit Mikayi Rocks, listening to traditional songs and participating in *dodo* dance, visiting homesteads, taking souvenir photos, and worshipping. Revealed Kit Mikayi site's potential niches include edutainment, photography, geology, and genealogy and music tourism. Though not unanimous, the local communities support tourism development because of the perceived socio-economic opportunities. Challenges linked to marketing, management, ethnic mistrust and competence inadequacies among the internal actors need to be addressed through partnership approach.

Keywords: Niche tourism, marketing approach, activity-based-segmentation, Kit Mikayi, partnership, cultural tourism.

1. Introduction

Whereas cultural and heritage attractions are well planned, developed and marketed in other parts of the world particularly in Europe, North America and Asia, most African countries including Kenya are yet to exploit the continent's heritage (Mckercher and du Cros, 2010; Akama, 2002; Lazzarotti, 2011). Limited studies on potential niche cultural and heritage tourism sites, overreliance on narrow, old and undifferentiated tourism product (wildlife and beach), emphasis on international market segments, absence of robust cultural and heritage tourism policies and inappropriate product packaging, hinder the development and expansion of niche cultural tourism products in Kenya.

Due to the uncontrolled commercialization and commodification the Maasai culture is becoming less exotic and attractive to habitual tourists. This threatens the global and regional competitiveness of Kenya's tourism industry. The "beach tourism" is also less appealing to routine holidaymakers due to insecurity challenges posed by the *Al-shabab*¹ and

the outlawed *Mombasa Republican Council*² (MRC). Given the stiff competition among the Africa's sub-Saharan tourist destinations, it is imperative to exploit niche cultural and heritage tourism opportunities as encapsulated in the Vision 2030³.

This study uses the marketing approach to examine the niche tourism potentials at Kit Mikayi Sacred/Tourist

¹ This is a terrorism group whose origin is linked to the Somalian extremists, associated with frequent terrorist attacks (bombing of public transport vehicles in Eastleigh) in Nairobi City and, tourist kidnappings in Lamu in 2012. This acts scare off habitual and novice tourists.

² A rebellious movement composed mainly of youths advocating for the cessation of Mombasa region from the republic of Kenya and the liberation of Mombasa from foreign (tourism) investors accused of the rampant poverty caused by land and resource grabbing, expatriation of tourism profits and inequitable distribution of resources.

³ Ministry of State Planning, National Development and Vision 2030.

Site in Kisumu County. The study sought to: determine the core niche practices at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site; establish the local communities' attitudes towards sustainable niche tourism development; identify potential tourism projects, and investigate the socio-economic factors affecting cultural tourism development at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site. The findings of this study can inform policy formulation and strategic tourism planning initiatives at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site. This will enhance the Site's tourism performance as well as improve Kisumu County's touristic image.

The Concept of Niche tourism

Hutchison in Robinson and Novelli (2008) observes that 'niche' is an optimum location whose resources suit and support a particular living organism in the presence of competitors. In other words, a niche appeals most to one particular organism or a group with similar demands and interests. In business, the niche concept enables entrepreneurs to commit resources to products that meet the needs of specific segment(s) than the mass market. A segment is a subset of market segmentation i.e. the process of separating target consumers into groups (segments) with similar needs. Activity-based-segmentation is where target clients are divided into groups based on their respective activities. Through niche concept, entrepreneurs develop marketing strategies and products that match target markets. In this context, it can be argued that niche product is one whose quality and features satisfy a narrowly defined group (niche market). Operating in a competitive business environment characterized by goods and services differentiation, tourism practitioners have adopted the niche concept from marketing. Destination developers invest in products that satisfy consumer's specialized needs, interests and desires. The dynamic tourist's experience, expertise, tastes and preferences inform this trend. Today's tourist demands activities that differentiate him/her from classic tourists.

In spite of insufficient information on the structure of niche tourism destinations and their contribution to global tourism receipts, Robinson and Novelli (2008) and the World Tourism Report (2012) confirm that demand for special interest tourism products is real. The sophisticated tourist is less excited by ordinary tourism activities (Robinson and Novelli, 2008), hence consistently seeks niche products, whose development still proves to be a challenge. According to Robinson and Novelli (2008), it is difficult for multi-tourism product firms to notice the niche markets' needs, because they target mass-market. Targeting the mass market is a risk management strategy, in case of change in consumption pattern of one market segment; firms would still have tourists to purchase their products, thanks to diversity. Sometimes, tourism entrepreneurs recognise the niche market, but associate it with insufficient returns. Also, potential niche products are unexploited due to insufficient information about their economic viability. To Robinson and Novelli (2008), the feasibility of a niche market can only be deduced from credible research findings and not assumptions. Research gives insight into the market opportunities, strengths, weaknesses and threats. This information enables product developers to craft policies, plans and strategies that can transform small niche markets into substantial, loyal and profitable demands.

According to Robinson and Novelli (2008) research on 'niche tourism' is still in the initial stages. It is therefore inappropriate to argue at this early stage of conceptual development that niche tourism can be studied or developed using a single approach. This explains why Robinson and Novelli (2008) use a multidisciplinary approach to elaborate niche tourism opportunities. The approaches include activity-practice (pilgrimage, cycling, photography, research); market segment (youth tourism) and specific theme (gastronomy, ethnography, geotourism...).

The diversity of approaches underscores the fact that niche tourism is a fragmented field of study, hence the need for prudence when selecting concepts. The use of broad themes is likely to occasion the abuse of the term 'niche tourism'. For instance, in the Kenya's Vision 2030⁴, cultural tourism is equated to niche tourism i.e. special interest tourism. This association is misleading because the work of Mckercher and du Cros (2010:135) demonstrates the multi-facets of cultural tourism. This concept encompasses diverse sub-categories⁵ (Charles and Bendle, 2012; Barbieri and Mahoney, 2010), rendering it a mainstream mass tourism activity. In other words, cultural tourism consists of different niche markets, and only one of them can correspond to special interest. Therefore, likening cultural tourism to niche tourism is not without risks: failure to determine appropriate market, selection of inappropriate marketing, product development and service delivery strategies. However, such uncalled for outcomes can be minimised via the application of marketing concepts supported by other approaches.

⁴ The country's economic development blue print 2008-2030.

⁵ Architecture, arts and crafts, foods, dress, language, religion and traditions, historical sites, monuments, castles...found at a destination (Charles and Bendle, 2012).

Using marketing concept to understand niche tourism

Mckercher and du Cros (2010), argue that marketing approaches can be applied in the study and development of niche tourism products. The strategic marketing requires that developers/entrepreneurs determine the need in the market i.e. define the core product⁶, identify and segment the desired visitors, and market the offer through appropriate tools. Developers need also to package and present the product such that it appeals to target consumers. It is difficult for entrepreneurs to satisfy every need in the market and any attempt to do so may amount to satisfying no one let alone unsustainable tourism practice (Edgell *et al.* 2008). Therefore, market need assessment is a vital stage, through which potential investors identify and differentiate primary resource users (segmentation), whose needs are compatible with the destination's heritage characteristics. This, in the long run, encourages suitable activities and practices.

2. Methodology

The study employed interview-based surveys, focus group, questionnaires, personal observations and analysis of existing relevant document from varied sources. The use of multiple research methods served to enhance the reliability of data collected because there exist insufficient information on Kit Mikayi Tourist Site.

According to Gavart-Perret *et al* (2008), face-to-face interview with appropriate respondents yields credible research data. Interviews were conducted between October 2010 and April 2012, the period through which the researcher visited, on several occasions, the study area to collect data. The researcher purposefully identified respondents, who were interviewed at their convenient venue. The respondents included the Domestic Tourism Marketing Officer (Kenya Tourist Board –Nairobi); Tourist Officer (Kisumu Office) and Provincial Cultural Department Officer (Bungoma). The interview guide's questions dwelt on tourism practices and government initiatives towards enhancing cultural tourism at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site. The researcher interviewed members from Kit Mikayi site management⁷. This sought to establish visitor frequentations and their nationality, and the existing or potential challenges at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site.

Focus group discussion was also employed to establish the cultural significance of Kit Mikayi Tourist Site. The researcher collaborated with the village elder to identify and select six residents of varied knowledge and experience, who participated in the focus group discussion. Participants were drawn from the Kit Mikayi Tourist Cooperative Society⁸, Kangeso Women Group (dance group) and Legio Maria church and a local tour guide. This number of participants was within what Ghauri and Gronhaug (2010) consider being acceptable and manageable. The author moderated the discussion to ensure that the participants remained focused on the themes under consideration. Contrary to interview and questionnaire, focus group discussion is inexpensive because the investigator meets the respondents at one venue (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010).

The questionnaire was used to survey host communities and tourists. Questionnaires were randomly administered to residents' aged 18 years and living within the radius of 1 kilometre from the Kit Mikayi Tourist Site. The author assumed that residents aged below 18 years would provide insufficient information regarding the cultural significance of Kit Mikayi Tourist Site. Residents' questionnaire captured information regarding the importance of Kit Mikayi sacred/tourist site, visitor frequentation to the site, tourism benefits to host communities, potential projects and habitants' involvement in tourism development. 41 males and 55 females out of the targeted 100 residents duly completed questionnaires in the presence of the researcher. The researcher randomly administered questionnaires to persons who visited the Kit Mikayi site (excluding residents). A total of 72 visitors (these included disciples of Legio Maria, Power of Jesus Around the World, Roho and Christ Apostolic churches) filled questionnaires. The questions focused on visitors' motivation, source of information, interaction with the host community and potential tourist projects. Participant's religious affiliation was omitted because respondents seemed to be uncomfortable with the subject. However, the researcher identified some followers of Legio Maria, Power of Jesus Around the World, Roho and Christ Apostolic church with the assistance of local tour guides/interpreters.

⁶ The main benefits client gets from a good or a service (Niegel, Campbell and Stonehouse, 2008).

⁷ Members were excluded from participating in questionnaire surveys.

⁸ This association (the official Kit Mikayi site management team), composed of 14 women and 11 men (of these 25, ten contributed voluntarily land towards the tourism project), manages the activities of the Kit Mikayi site. These include, appointing local tour guides, story tellers and interpreters; scheduling tour guides; approving traditional dancing groups; identifying cultural homesteads; diversifying tourism products; marketing the site and its resources, collecting entry fee...

The data was analysed using three methods: content analysis, thematic analysis and Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 17.0. Contents analysis is suitable for open-ended questions, where response content differ from one interviewee to another (Bardin, 2003). It is an effective method when done by the researcher because he knows the objectives of the study and the theme covered in the interview guide. The researcher analysed the vocabularies and descriptors in the responses to each open-ended question, grouped related vocabularies and descriptors into suitable themes, where a unique numerical code was assigned to each theme. This enabled the researcher to identify challenges likely to affect tourism. Similarly, a unique numerical code was assigned to each answer of the closed-ended question. The codes were fed into the SPSS system to facilitate quantitative analysis (percentages).

Major limitations to this study included language barrier where the researcher had to recruit a local translator on casual basis, this implied more costs. The investigator had to observe strict cultural protocol i.e. never interview a woman without the consent of her husband; this occasioned long waiting time, thus affecting the planned research schedule.

2.1. Study Area

Covering about 20 234 m², Kit Mikayi Tourist Site is located about 29 km from Kisumu city and 1.5 km from Kombewa shopping centre, along the Kisumu-Bondo route. The site borders two villages i.e. Kangeso and Kamenga located in Kit Mikayi and East Othany sub-locations respectively. The Kadol inhabits the former village and the Ogwal dominates the latter (both are luos). Three mystically arranged granite rocks characterize the site of Kit Mikayi, where the largest and centrally imposed symbolizes the first wife (*dhako ma mikayi*) in a polygamous luo family set up. The rocks on the right and the left represent the second (Nyachira) and third (Reru) wives in that order. The site has got two caves, important sacred points revered by the luo community and members of Legio Maria (a syncretic faith), i.e. combines traditional religious practices and roman Catholic's. Of late, the site is frequented by members from other churches including the Power of Jesus Around the World, Roho, Dini ya Musambwa and Israel. The Kit Mikayi area including the touristic site hosts about 37 indigenous medicinal plants⁹. Regarding socio-economic activities, the main sources of livelihood around Kit Mikayi Tourist Site are livestock keeping, crop cultivation (cassava, groundnuts, sisal), small-scale businesses and fishing.

The Kit Mikayi sacred site was chosen for study because it is an emerging tourist site in Kisumu County, featured in tourism guides produced annually by the Ministry of Tourism (Kenya). It's also located in the lake Victoria region, which the government of Kenya has earmarked for niche tourism development in the Vision 2030¹⁰. This is based on the fact that the Western Kenya Tourist circuit's¹¹ rich potentials, especially the lake Victoria region, are not fully exploited. The study area was chosen because about ten residents close to the sacred site contributed land for the development of tourism projects, which they know little about. The study therefore endeavoured to generate information that could guide tourism development at Kit Mikayi Sacred site. Being a community cultural site, a sanctuary yet a tourist site, Kit Mikayi requires unique approaches that aim at enhancing coexistence among the diverse site's users and addressing existing and potential challenges.

3. Results and analysis

3.1. Niche tourism practices

Out of the ninety-six residents surveyed 71.9 %, agreed that non-residents visit Kit Mikayi Site and this varied between respondents ($X^2 = 18.375$, $df=1$ $p=0.001$)

The site is highly frequented by individual and organized groups tourists (79.2%, n=76). There was a significant comparison between the travel categories i.e. Independent, Organized groups and combined (organized groups plus Independent) ($X^2 = 91.313$, $df=2$ $p=0.000$).

Majority of residents surveyed (86.5%, n=83) noted that Kenyans dominate the site, and there was a significant difference between respondents ($X^2 = 51.042$, $df=1$ $p=0.000$). This finding concurs with survey from tourists

⁹ Arwa, Nyunja, Anyango, 2010.

¹⁰ Ministry of State Planning, National Development and Vision 2030.

¹¹ This circuit is composed mainly of the former Nyanza and Western Provinces and a western section of the former Rift valley province.

(n=72), of which 93.1% were Kenyans.

Table 1: Tourists' activities at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site

Motivation	Agree %	Disagree %
<i>n=72</i>		
See & climb Kit Mikayi rocks	80.6	19.4
Listen to traditional songs	27.8	72.2
Listen to Kit Mikayi story	33.3	66.7
Visit traditional homestead	15.3	84.7
Conduct research	26.4	73.6
Worship	6.9	93.1
Take souvenir photos	31.9	68.1

Source: Data obtained from respondents through survey.

Table 2: Cultural significance: Why the residents visit Kit Mikayi Tourist Site?

Motivation	Agree %	Disagree %
<i>(n=96)</i>		
Reconnect with the past	100.0	
Admire the Rocks landscape	48.8	51.2
Pray	3.1	96.9
Perform traditional rituals	1.0	99.0
Narrate story to tourists	12.5	87.5
Dance for tourists	17.7	82.3
Guide tourists	17.7	82.3
Conduct Security patrol	1.0	99.0
Gather traditional medicine	1.0	99.0

Source: Data obtained from respondents through survey.

While at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site residents (they visited the site but were considered as tourists) interact with visitors. The study revealed that 53.3 % (n=55) interacted with visitors only that there was no significant difference among the respondents. The interaction was through selling of local agricultural products and assisting visitors to get direction to the site. Similarly, 66.7 % (n=48) visitors confirmed to have interacted with residents in more less the same manner.

3.2. Local community's attitudes towards tourism

The findings indicated that 65.6 % of residents considered visitors to be friendly, while 6.3 % indicated that they were unfriendly, and 28.1 % argued that tourists exhibited dual qualities (friendly and unfriendly). There was a significant difference among the respondents $X^2 = 51.938$, $df=2$, $p=0.001$. 77.8 % of the tourists indicated that residents were friendly, 4.2 % were unfriendly and 18.0 % exhibited both traits.

3.3. Potential tourism projects

Table 3: Projects preferred by tourists and local people

Project	Agree %	Disagree %
<i>Tourists (n=72)</i>		
Homestay	15.3	84.7
Friends & Relatives homes	16.7	83.3
Lodges	56.9	43.1
Community Campsite	6.9	93.1
<i>Local community (n=96)</i>		
Cultural centre	53.1	46.9
Campsite	53.1	46.9
Lodge	79.2	20.8
Curio shop	76.0	24.0

Source: Data obtained from respondents through survey.

3.4. Socio-economic factors likely to affect niche cultural Tourism Development

3.4.1. Roles

Table 4: Host community's anticipated roles

Roles	Agree %	Disagree %
<i>(n=96)</i>		
Vet and approve projects	41.7	58.3
Identify site for projects	41.7	58.3
Provide labour	52.1	47.9
Finance projects	9.4	90.6
Manage projects	69.9	30.1

Source: Data obtained from respondents through survey.

3.4.2. Prospective partners

76 % of the local community expressed willingness to partner with the government to develop tourism at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site; 20.8 % advocated for a hybrid collaboration (combination of the government agencies and the non-governmental organizations), and 3.2 % indicated the desire to work with the NGOs. Collaboration with external actors is limited to facilitation and not the management of the site's anticipated tourism projects. 49 % of the residents argued that the local community should manage the site's economic activities.

Other factors likely to affect niche tourism at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site include: unreliable transport service from Kisumu city; lack of clean water, insufficient washrooms and lack of electricity at the site.

4. Discussion

4.1. Tourism opportunities

The results presented earlier, confirm that visitors to Kit Mikayi Site interact with the local people and the geo-cultural heritage space. The site qualifies to be an attraction, given the diverse visitors' motivations expressed through their activities, especially rock climbing, sightseeing and listening to traditional songs (c.f. table 1). The assemblage of these activities constitutes special interest tourism (Novelli, 2008). Some practices categorized into niches using activity-based segmentation are discussed below: -

4.1.1. Edutainment tourism, Religious tourism and Research tourism

The Site's features like the sacred caves; the three rocks, the flora and the entire landscape offer varied

experiences to visitors and residents. Travellers especially students¹² who are the majority get educated and entertained through story telling, traditional musical performances and spectating musical performances. Kit Mikayi Tourist Site therefore exhibits the characteristics of a potential site for edu-tourism and Youth tourism (Benson, 2008:135; Richards and Wilson 2008: 41). Students seek knowledge and enjoyment i.e. edutainment (Puczko, 2009). If they were to be considered in light of the depth of experience sought against the importance of cultural tourism in travel decision-making, students fall in the category of sightseers, pulled by the uniqueness of the cultural rocks' landscape and superficial learning.

However, the disciples of Legio Maria, Power of Jesus Around the World, Roho and Christ Apostolic churches, who represent about 2 % of the tourists surveyed, have created 'places' within the Kit Mikayi Tourist Site¹³. Their visits are purposeful i.e. exclusively spirituality motivated (religious tourism). They seek the divine power embodied in the site's sacred spots (the lower and upper caves, on top of the rocks and under certain trees). In this perspective, Kit Mikayi Site can be equated to what R. Sharpley calls a "sacred tourism" space (Sharpley, 2009). The religious groups seek divine help to their social and economic problems through prayer and fasting. Legio Maria followers either as individuals or organized groups congregate at the site, especially on weekends, to exorcize demons from possessed victims, seek divine healing and deliverance from presumed captivity. The site is also foci for peaceful contemplation. Compared to students, religious groups interact "intimately" with the site; their visit is planned unlike that of students, which is more of impulsive nature. Presently, the religious groups do not pay entry fee. However, they can contribute to the local economy by paying for essential amenities like water, ablution, and, day /baby care services for those who come with children.

On the other hand the botanists from Maseno University are interested in the diverse medicinal flora of Kit Mikayi Tourist Site's (scientific affinity). This presents an opening for research tourism (Benson, 2008:137). The existence of a signage 'Kit Mikayi Research Site' underpins the fact that botanists use the site. Scientists from Maseno University collect plant specimen, which they analyse in laboratories to ascertain their medicinal values. At the moment, it's not clear how the Institution and the research it conducts contribute to the well being of the site. Introduction of research fee can be one way the site's management team can benefit economically from research tourism. Similarly, there could be a policy, which compels researchers to share their findings with the management team. Some results might just assist enhance informal herbal medicine field.

4.1.2. Photography tourism

Some visitors frequent the site either as individual or groups mainly to take pictures. The Kit Mikayi rocks therefore provide a good photographic background. The site is ideal for photographic tourism (Palmer and Lester 2008:16). Photography is one of the oldest tourism practices dating way back in the nineteenth century. During the study, it was noted that some visitors preferred photography to interpretation or guided tours/walks. After paying the entrance fee, they proceeded to taking photographs of the landscape using mobile phones or cameras. They also congregated to discuss and exchange pictures via Bluetooth. As Palmer and Lester (2008) observe, photographing allows them to disconnect from routine, by capturing and storing memories in electronics gadgets. This is what Bourdieu in Palmer and Lester (2008:19) calls protection against time.

Kit Mikayi Site is potentially a photographic site i.e. where photography can be the primary motivation and not secondary. According to Palmer and Lester (2008:15), photography tourism is a 'young' niche market evolving gradually. In Kenya, it is yet to be recognized as a form of tourism in its own right. Currently, photography tourism is associated with "safari". After the ban on hunting safari in 1977, the "camera" replaced the "gun". Therefore, photo-tourism is used in a generalized context, thus far from the niche tourism context. Mostly, it is presumed that any tourist with a camera is participating in a photographic safari or all tourists engage in photography. Photography as a tourist motivation is yet to be given great attention compared to visiting friends and relatives, business and holiday. Even if a person visiting friends and relatives engages in photography, the intrinsic drive for and value of the act is not identical to that of an amateur photographer. It takes a meticulous analysis for one to distinct them. Since most destination and site managers tend to focus on classic tourism (business, safari and visiting friends and relatives), the opportunity to identify, develop and enhance photography tourism is missed! Different from the mainstream tourists, amateur photographers need to be briefed about the site's vantage photographic points while novice enthusiasts need photographic tips on panoramic and landscape photography. Unfortunately, there are no professional tour guides to offer advice at Kit Mikayi site.

¹² The study established that students frequent the Site during the April, August and December holidays.

¹³ As noted elsewhere, visitors were not asked to state their religious affiliation. However, the researcher was assisted by appointed local site's guides /interpreters to identify some visitors' religious affiliation by observing their dressing code and manner of worship, all supported by the guides'/interpreters' experience and knowledge.

4.1.3. Geology tourism

The site's scenery composed of granite rocks of varied heights and contrasting forms makes Kit Mikayi ideal for rock tourism, by extension geo-tourism. The rocks attest of the geological forces that led to the site's current landscape. Given its low tourism profile, Kit Mikayi Tourist Site is yet to attract geological and archaeological studies. When conducted, such research could provide interesting insights that can inform geotourism development. In UK, where geotourism started in the 1990s, some geosites¹⁴ rocks have had ores and fluxes that contributed to the world's industrial history (Hose 2008:28). Consequently, such geosites are legally recognized and protected. Being a historical and cultural Luo site; who knows, Kit Mikayi might have interesting fossils that might enhance Kenya's global tourism and scientific image. This geoheritage site deserves well-planned and coordinated protection. Geotourism will enable tourists to understand the geology of Kit Mikayi Tourist Site and the entire region.

Presently, the geological interpretation of the site is absent; the current site interpretation is premised on history. The adoption of the geological approach will introduce the scientific interpretation perspective likely to excite more scientists. In Malaysia, the country against which Kenya benchmarks itself, geotourism is well developed to the extent that there is a branch of geology called 'tourism geology' (Hose 2008:28). This has made geoconservation just like bioconservation an important concept in Malaysia. In Kenya, the latter dominates while the former is almost unheard of, yet vision 2030 promises the development of niche tourism products!

Associating the concept of geotourism to Kit Mikayi will help identify, package, market and manage the physical basis of the site, and develop effective environmental interpretive materials. The approach will add value to the site by giving it a broader meaning and significance thus justifying the need for bio, cultural and geoconservation. The broadened significance can be used to attract conservation resources and enhance the global image of the site.

4.1.4. Genealogy tourism

Going by the first three tourists' motivations (see and climb rocks, listen to traditional songs and listen to Kit Mikayi story, it can be argued that the Kit Mikayi site is potentially a genealogical tourist site. It is also supported by the fact that residents-although their visit to the site is not considered to be touristic in nature-frequent the site to reconnect with the past. Kit Mikayi site mediates between the past, the present and the future generations. Genealogy tourism involves participants travelling to a destination in order to learn more about psychohistory-their family history or ancestral research (Birtwistle, 2008:60). Travellers, especially those of Luo descent seek to understand themselves through information related to the site's cultural significance to the Luo community. How does it influence family life i.e. marriages, social practices and cultural identities? As argued elsewhere, Kit Mikayi rocks have both symbolic and functional significance. Though the research did not focus on the tourists' ethnical background, there is a possibility that some of the tourists were motivated by the symbolic and functional values of the Site. Historically, newly married Luo women underwent marriage ritual ceremonies at the Kit Mikayi's lower cave under the supervision of elderly women. This makes sense to visitors who draw their origin from the Luo community. The visit to the Site is dualistic i.e. for recreation and personal identification with the Site. The symbolic rockscapes, stories about Kit Mikayi and the rural set-up fill up the 'rootlessness' and 'placelessness' in some tourists.

Considering that the study area is a small cultural-tourism space, it will be preposterous for the researcher to discuss all the possible niche tourism opportunities. For this reason, the researcher has only highlighted some key niche tourism activities.

4.2. Local community's attitudes towards tourism

The cultural value of the rocks of Kit Mikayi transcends their extra-ordinary landscape. The sacred caves, the serenity of the site and the medicinal plants are key elements that connect the local people (Kadol and Ogwal clans) to the site. The site justifies the polygamy practice among the Luo community. The name 'Kit Mikayi' is unmistakable brand. 'Kit' describes the nature of the site/place i.e. has stones and 'Mikayi' evokes a personality (first wife) in the Luo community. This personality confers to the site of stones a privileged status i.e. it is respected just like the first wife, the mother of the community. Symbolically, the site is a 'home' to the Kadol and Ogwal clans. How then will they feel when uninvited external guests visit 'their lawfully cultural home'?

Generally the study indicated that the local people (66 %) have a positive attitude towards "outsiders". The local people interacted with visitors through story telling, dance performance, tour guiding, and assisting guests to get

¹⁴ 'Geosite' refers to a delimited area of geological or geomorphological interest (Hose 2008: 29).

direction to the site. The positive attitude implies that the local communities are hospitable. This is supported by 78 % out of the 72 tourists interviewed. However, the study revealed that the hospitality can be adversely affected if visitors interrupt prayers in the sacred caves, photograph or visit residents without their consent or even refuse to pay for guiding, interpretation services or performed dances. On the other hand, tourists expect that local people do not force them to purchase locally produced goods (roasted groundnuts or ripen bananas) or beg for money.

4.3. Potential projects

Local people's positive attitude towards tourism is also based on anticipated tourism benefits. There is a strong belief that tourism development will generate informal and formal jobs. At least 55 % of women and 45 % men expressed interest in informal jobs. Given that, currently, job opportunities are limited to informal tour guiding and site interpretation, there is need for the Kit Mikayi site management team to create more employment. Of the potential projects (cf. table 3), a cultural centre is needed urgently. The so-called 'cultural homesteads' (Kangeso and Widows corner) have diverse heritage collections, but kept in deplorable conditions i.e. dusty worn out suitcases and baskets. In such conditions, the metallic exhibits are exposed to rusting and fragile ones to breakage or vandalism.

An exhibition hall in a cultural centre offers a better alternative where the cultural heritage assets can be showcased and preserved to guarantee their aesthetic values and physical integrity. As an interpretation facility, a cultural centre can be a common place where one can access conveniently the Luo cultural heritage information, thus saving time. At the moment, homesteads' visits are marked with disappointments and uncertainties. Without prior arrangements, it is difficult for visitors to find hosts in homesteads. The cultural centre concept will allow the Kit Mikayi site management team to professionally manage cultural heritage assets-collect and document relevant information on each asset. At the moment, the assets in cultural homesteads are not documented, let alone being appropriately labelled.

The sustainable exploitation of the opportunities is not a challenge free venture. Some challenges exist and others are potential.

4.4. Challenges facing tourism development

The success of a niche tourism destination and site depends on several factors. The destination or site managers must possess appropriate competencies. These enable them to develop, package and deliver interpretive materials in entertaining and interesting ways that satisfy the targeted tourist/visitors (Hose 2008:30). Unfortunately, the Kit Mikayi Tourist Cooperative Society's team does not have sufficient knowledge about niche tourism. The general historical site interpretation does not respect the diverse market segments frequenting the site. This begs the question: are the visitors really satisfied with the interpretation service? And if the market is fragmented further into specialized segments based on niche activities, what guarantee is there that 'consumers' will get value for their money? The actual interpretation service doesn't correspond to customer expectations. The two can only be linked when interpretive/tour-guiding objectives are aligned to appropriate interpretation technique. At Kit Mikayi, interpretation focuses on sharing information with that visitor who has paid, what that information does to the client is of little value to the "interpreter"! One cannot tell whether interpretation is meant to reinforce learning, behavioural change, or is affective or management oriented. With no clear objectives, one cannot assess the impact of interpretation. At Kit Mikayi all visitors are treated equally, hence its difficulty for each one to get the sought after enjoyable and meaningful experience!

The study unveiled that Kit Mikayi Tourist Cooperative Society's team has not established structured collaboration with other tourism players at the county and national level. Given the low income generated from entrance fee, the management team has been unable to market the site satisfactorily. Additionally, the team lacks the necessary marketing expertise. Most of the visitors interviewed came because they heard of the site through friends. Industrial collaborations allow for joint marketing and can create opportunities for Kit Mikayi Tourist Cooperative Society's team to exchange ideas with established tourism business players. This can assist in improving tourism at Kit Mikayi.

Also, visitors expressed concerns about limited washroom facilities and lack of clean water. Even the guests (*Legio Marians*) who come to pray and fast had to contend with walking long distances to access water. Current visitor management strategies put in place include barbed wire enclosure, unmanned gate and pay as you enter. Unfortunately, the site has no codes of conduct to moderate visitor behaviours. Management complexity is reinforced by the fact that sanctity, profanity and traditions compete for spatial superiority. It is indeed difficult

to guarantee guest satisfaction amidst these conflicting interests. Partnering with external actors to manage the site is one way the Kit Mikayi Tourist Cooperative Society's team can improve its visitor management and professional skills as well as general tourism experience. However, the partnership approach seems not to be well supported by the residents interviewed. They feel that the role of external participants like the government and non-governmental organisations should be limited to financial assistance. The fear is that these stakeholders might dethrone the community of its cultural site. This thinking is based on the fact that the host insufficiently understand the role of the mentioned players in tourism development. The local people consider external actors to be competitors and not complementary forces. Under the new Constitution of Kenya 2010, the host community no longer needs to entertain such thoughts. Their ownership rights are safeguarded. It only needs to ensure that any collaboration with external actors is conducted transparently under a structured framework.

5. Conclusion

In spite of the challenges highlighted above, Kit Mikayi Tourist Site presents cultural niche potential, which when sustainably exploited, will make the Western tourist circuit more vibrant and visible. The study used activity-based segmentation to highlight key niche activities. Each niche will require specialized knowledge and skills to appreciate the site's resources. Currently, tourism development is done on *ad hoc* basis against the backdrop of insufficient financial resources and poorly coordinated efforts. Successful exploitation of Kit Mikayi resources demands the political will of the County (Kisumu) and National governments, which need to intervene in support of small-scale community-based niche tourism ventures. At the moment the Kit Mikayi Tourist Cooperative Society does not have a formal collaboration arrangement with the government. This gap can be addressed through community-government partnership.

There is need to develop appropriate but controlled hospitality *restscapes* in the neighbourhood in order to add value to the site. The County government, especially the Ministry of Commerce, Tourism and Heritage can support Kit Mikayi site by facilitating tourism education among the rural residents through seminars and workshops. This will enable Kit Mikayi Tourist Cooperative Society's team to acquire relevant tourism competencies through the exchange of ideas with experts. This will enhance the team's technical skills.

Although some visitors didn't possess camera, the desire to have themselves photographed was real. They were disappointed upon learning that the site's management couldn't provide photography services. There is need for the site's management team to develop and implement strategies that promote photograph tourism. It can start by availing relevant equipment and resident photo expert. Visitors can access photography services at a fee.

Edu-tourism, geotourism and genealogy tourism can be enhanced through a cultural centre. It was noted that groups of guests who arrived in the afternoon, particularly during the rainy season, did not get value for their money. Usually, interpretation and site tours were conducted in haste because there was no spacious shelter to accommodate them when it began to rain. Therefore, a cultural centre can assist address such challenge. It can also serve as a training venue for the Kangeso Women Dance Group who performs traditional dances namely *dodo* to guests. This is potential niche-performing art tourism-which is well established in Seoul, Korea (Lim and Bendle, 2012). The potential is immense at Kit Mikayi, because the Kangeso Women Group have theatrical pieces on indigenous marriages and other cultural performances, which they can blend with contemporary life to enhance guests' experiences. They don't have the audience because they lack venue. A cultural centre is also likely to reinvigorate cultural talents such as poetry.

The development of niche tourism products at Kit Mikayi Tourist Site needs to be supported by relevant marketing strategies. The site's management team can exploit affordable information communication and technology tools like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter to market their services and activities. With robust visitor management strategies implemented the site can cope with growing demand.

The key challenge is to ensure coexistence among clients; some driven by search for pleasure, relaxation or motivated by egocentric and hedonistic needs and some pulled by divine powers embodied in the site.

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