The Business of Creativity and Creative Arts for Business: Perspectives on the Potential for Zambia’s Tourism Promotion

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The Zambian government has identified tourism as one of the sectors that have the potential to promote growth and reduce poverty. Zambia does have a considerable comparative advantage in the tourism sector. However, to date, not enough has been done to translate that comparative advantage into competitive advantage. This paper discusses a number of ways in which Zambia’s tourism sector can be more effectively promoted with a particular emphasis on the development of the creative arts. The country needs to provide incentives and opportunities for Zambia’s artists and also be able to aggressively market its tourist attractions to the outside world by developing comprehensive, innovative, and cost-effective packages to potential tourists that will provide them with memorable, authentic, and edifying experiences to carry home.

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Introduction

We live today in a globalized world characterized by open economies and intense competition. The growth and development of countries, therefore, largely depend on the extent of competitive advantage they are able to develop. Underlying competitive advantage is the comparative advantage that countries possess. Many countries possess comparative advantage in many areas, but, owing to a number of factors, external and/or internal, the comparative advantage does not get commensurately translated into competitive advantage.

Zambia’s Sixth National Development Plan has identified tourism as one of the sectors that have the potential to promote growth and reduce poverty. The long-term vision for the tourism sector is “to ensure that Zambia becomes a major tourist destination of choice with unique features, which contributes to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction” (Republic of Zambia, 2011, p. 11). And this is rightly so, since Zambia does possess comparative advantage in the area of tourism.

So far, however, there has been a somewhat narrow perspective of this comparative advantage. Zambia’s tourism has been largely associated with only a few of its natural endowments: its major game parks with their varied species of wildlife still living in primordial splendor; its environment still largely uncorrupted by human encroachments and depredations; and its renowned Mosi-oa-Tunya/Victoria/Livingstone Falls, offering one of the most spectacular and awe-inspiring sights in the world. But Zambia’s tourism potential is far more than these, and it is in this respect that there has been a failure to translate fully the country’s comparative advantage into competitive advantage.
Zambia, in other words, has so far made efforts to promote jungle tourism and also offer some adventure tourism in terms of activities such as white water rafting on the Zambezi, paragliding, bungee jumping, walking safaris. These are facets of ecotourism. Even in this regard, the country has not yet developed so many areas of potential tourist interest. The list of such places in Zambia is indeed long. The world has little or no familiarity with, for example, the Katolola rock paintings, Kapishya hot springs, Nachikufu caves, Mumbwa caves, and several other waterfalls such as the Lumangwe Falls (the biggest waterfall that lies wholly within Zambia), Kundalila Falls, and Chishimba Falls. In other countries, such places would have been prominently developed and showcased as tourist resorts.

What is more, some of these places have become dilapidated owing to neglect, taking, for example, the Nachikufu caves in Zambia’s Northern Province. Great excitement is offered by the climbing over the craggy rocks to reach the mouths of three caves located at three levels on top. The caves date back to the Stone Age. There is a small display of artifacts used by the cavemen within the entrance of the cave. But the glass case enclosing these artifacts would be covered with layers of dust and one would have to scrub them out in order to see what was inside the case. The reason is that Zambia’s Northern Province has hardly been envisaged as a tourist destination.

**Types of Tourism**

Besides ecotourism and its subsets, there are also other categories of tourism that remain to be explored and developed. Indeed, tourism is regarded as a major engine of growth in most parts of the world and each country has been focusing on those categories in which they have discovered their own comparative advantages. For example, medical tourism has become important in many countries, notably India and Mexico (Liu & Chen, 2013). Dubai relies majorly on shopping tourism for its inflows of foreign exchange. In fact, Dubai has been shown to become the most popular shopping tourism destination in the world, beating mega cities like Paris, London, New York, and Beijing (Yahoo! Maktoob Research, 2011). And cultural tourism is what brings in the needed revenue in many countries. For example, the State of Vatican City that has no taxation relies almost exclusively on cultural tourism and in particular on the sale of tickets to museums and sale of stamps, coins, medals, and tourist mementos, and on publication sales (Economy Watch, 2014). Florence attracts millions of tourists every year and, during summer, the floating tourist population is even known to exceed the local population. Just the sale of replicas of the Statue of Liberty (most probably made in China) earns millions of dollars for the United States. In addition, there are also religious tourism and sports tourism.

In the context of the different types of tourism, it must also be noted that tourists are not all the same. One interested in religious tourism may have little interest in sports tourism. Similarly, tourists interested in shopping would prefer to travel to Dubai rather than the Vatican. In view of this heterogeneity among tourists, market segmentation becomes important for countries to study opportunities for their own spheres of competitive advantage (Dolnicar, 2008).

If one looks at the list of the top tourist destinations of the world, only a few of them have any major natural spectacle of the kind Zambia and other countries in Africa have. And yet, no tourist spot in Africa finds a place within the top 25 most popular tourist destination attractions in the world, with the exception of Luxor, Egypt as per the latest survey (Warner, 2013).
The Role of Creative Arts in Tourism Promotion

If systematic planning and investments are made, Zambia’s image as a tourist destination can be drastically changed. And one of the ways this can be done is through the development of creative arts. Indeed, creative arts are becoming increasingly recognized as a major form of attraction for tourists. It is becoming an important facet of cultural tourism. Richards (2011) stated that there is a rapidly developing relationship between tourism and creativity. Such a relationship helps provide more authentic experiences that can be co-created between the host country and the tourist. The tourist takes away more fulfilling and meaningful impressions of the everyday life of the destination. This “experiential tourism” is in contrast to the serial reproduction of mass tourism that has been in vogue so far (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Indeed, “Creative tourism involves more interaction, in which the visitor has an educational, emotional, social, and participative interaction with the place, its living culture, and the people who live there. They feel like a citizen” (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2006). It is in this sense that the philosopher Francis Bacon aptly wrote nearly five centuries ago that, “Travel, in the younger sort, is a part of education; in the older, a part of experience” (Bacon, 1615).

Accordingly, countries interested in providing a genuine dose of their indigenous cultures to their visitors are promoting creative industries and creative cities. In Europe, there are several notable examples of creative tourism. Spain has the Creative Tourism Barcelona Program. France has established Creative Paris, offering a range of creative experiences for visitors including visual arts, performing and culinary arts, fashion and design, writing and philosophy, and gardening. Likewise, Austria has Creative Tourism Austria.

In recognition of the important linkage of creativity and creative arts to tourism, some countries have assigned names to the Tourism Ministry to reflect this. For instance, the Indonesian Ministry of Culture and Tourism has been renamed as the Ministry for Tourism and Creative Economy (Richards, 2011). Within Africa, Ghana’s Ministry of Tourism is today known as the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts whose objective is to ensure the development and promotion of tourism and improvement of the capital city Accra on a sustainable basis. And this objective in turn “aims at optimizing the socio-economic growth and positive environmental impact for the benefit of deprived communities in particular and the country at large” (Government of Ghana, 2011, p. 1). The Ghana government also announced the setting-up of the Council for Creative Arts to develop the creative industry. This is in addition to the Board of Tourism and Culture that already exists.

Although tourism does have a lot of potential for generating growth and reducing poverty, countries have to compete with one another in an already saturated market and, to do this, each country has to think of what it can offer that is new or different. The development of creativity and creative arts is one such avenue for doing this.

The Status of Creative Arts in Zambia

The unpleasant fact of the matter is that Zambia has for a long time not done enough to promote Zambian arts and artists. We provide below a telling anecdote that exemplifies this situation:

“Years ago, this writer was walking inside Manda Hill, one of the malls in Zambia’s capital city Lusaka and his attention was grabbed by some artistic products made out of wire displayed in front of the South African chain store Shoprite. Three figurines that portrayed three traditional functions of African women in the
rural areas—fetching water, collecting firewood, and preparing a meal—were particularly impressive. The artist had made each figurine out of a single piece of wire. Even after gazing at a figurine for some time, it would not be easy to figure out which was the starting and which was the end point of the wire! Such was the skill of the artist. By his appearance, one could make out that the artist was living in a state of penury and was eager to sell his creations to get some money. After some bargaining over the price, he finally agreed to sell each figurine for Zambian Kwacha 35,000 (roughly nine US dollars at the then prevalent exchange rate). In other developed countries, they would have been worth a lot more. But the story does not end here. Sometime later, this writer got the distressing news through the grapevine that the artist was no more. One wonders how many artists of such remarkable talent Zambia may have lost over the years for lack of patronage and opportunity to make a sustainable living out of their art”.

But Zambia has set up the National Arts Council whose purported mission is “to facilitate the promotion, development, and nurturing of all forms of amateur and professional arts to a level of excellence countrywide and to promote the arts into an integral part of the lives of the people of Zambia” (FilmZambia, n.d.). The council comprises nine arts associations representing performing, literary, media, and fine arts. This was a much needed step in the right direction. Hopefully, it could help prevent many living artists from meeting with the sad fate of the artist who made those figurines. In the context of linking creative arts to tourism, perhaps the mission statement should have been extended to making Zambian arts an integral part also of the experience of visitors to Zambia.

But setting up an institution like the National Arts Council of Zambia is only the first step in the promotion of creativity and creative arts. The institution must perform efficiently and show evidence of fulfilling its stated mission. Already, the council has become bedeviled by controversies (see, for example, Mulenga, 2012). Currently, a move is afoot to introduce a bill for the creation of the National Arts and Culture Commission that will replace the National Arts Council.

**Policy Lessons for Zambia**

But whatever institution may be in place, the core question remains: Under the aegis of the institution, what can Zambia do differently from her competitors to translate her comparative advantage into competitive advantage?

The theory of monopolistic competition tells us that in an environment of intense competition (as is the case with the tourism industry), an individual competitor can acquire some monopoly power through aggressive marketing and advertising. When one competitor markets his/her product aggressively and his/her rival does not, it leads to information asymmetry and even misinformation. Often, one has heard of tourists flying into South Africa, thereafter flying into Livingstone on South African Airways, staying in South African hotels, visiting the Mosi-oa-Tunya Falls, and flying back to South Africa, most probably carrying the impression that the Falls is in South Africa. In other words, a visit to the Livingstone Falls was part of a South African tour package instead of a Zambian tour package, with most of the revenue accruing to South Africa. Zambia’s vice president Guy Scott reiterated recently that many people did not know that the Victoria Falls was in Zambia due to lack of aggressive marketing (Mbulo, 2013).

Thus, in the first place, there is a need to sell Zambia abroad by offering attractive, cost-effective tour packages that will contain elements beyond the Falls and some stylized national parks. The packages must include opportunities for visits across the length and breadth of Zambia with Zambia as the only port of call and
exit for the potential tourist. Taylor and Banda-Thole (2013), for instance, showed the scope for exploiting the potential and opportunities of the Northern Province of Zambia for sustainable tourism development and rural development.

Zambia has failed so far to provide adequate information about its wide spectrum of tourist attractions ranging from ecotourism to participatory cultural tourism that could translate into memorable experiential visits for the tourists. Some time back, there was a commentary that although Zambia has some nine traditional ceremonies (of which the kuomboka is, relatively, the best-known), there is no enough information on these ceremonies on websites even for Zambians, let alone foreigners. This situation needs to be corrected.1

Many countries organize festivals, notably flower festivals. Seattle in the United States, for instance, has an annual lavender festival. Visitors are taken to see the beautiful lavender farms and are also treated to three days of continuous musical entertainment. A talented group of local artists, jewelers, photographers, and “craftsmiths” showcase their products for purchase. In particular, lavender themed gifts such as lavender creams, lavender soaps, lavender perfumes, etc. are on sale.

Likewise, the cherry blossom festival is one of the age-old colorful festivals in Japan. The local name is Hanami, which means viewing flowers. Although viewing the cherry blossom is the main attraction, there is also a presentation of traditional Japanese performing arts. There are also vendors who sell various local food and souvenirs and regional crafts.

Rose festivals are held in some countries. In particular, the one in Kutno, Poland is well known. It is an annual exhibition of roses and florist arrangements. Music concerts are held during the festival and folk artists’ handicrafts are also displayed that interpret modern art with flower-related topics.

Two things need to be noted about such festivals. The first thing is that the dates of the festivals are fixed and known and so tourists can plan their visits. The lavender festival takes place every year between July 19 and 21, the cherry blossom spring festival in April, and the Kutno rose festival at the beginning of September. The second thing is that the festival offers an opportunity for the display of local creative arts.

The upshot of all this is that Zambia too, as part of its marketing strategy, could organize an annual festival that will reflect indigenous culture (a paprika festival, for instance, since Zambia exports paprika?) and offer a platform for Zambian performing artists and an opportunity for the creative artists to offer their creations for sale.

In here, one should make a special mention of the Sunday Pakati market in Lusaka’s arcades. This is getting growing recognition largely through word of mouth. Here, you can buy a comprehensive array of indigenous crafts and often there are also musical, theatrical, and cultural shows. Visitors to the Pakati market invariably go with very positive feelings of the visit. In all probability, however, most of the arts and craft items sold are from West, East, and South Africa and only a small percentage from Zambia. Efforts should be made to increase the share of Zambian creative art products in the market. Also, the idea of the Pakati market could be extended to other parts of Zambia. In addition, a short advertisement clip of the Pakati market in the international media may be appealing to many potential foreign tourists. In fact, Mali is a tourist destination partly because of the market in Djenne, held every Monday (Lonely Planet, n.d.).

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1 Recently, the Zambia Tourism Board has begun to advertise a short impressive clip on CNN showing Zambia’s tourist attractions, but they show mainly the game parks, the Livingstone Falls, and some adventure sports. No doubt, this is a very welcome, long overdue move. We hope that there will be more of such clips, especially in respect of projecting creative arts.
Monitoring and Evaluation

Finally, the real extent of success in harnessing art for growth and poverty reduction via tourism can be known only through regular monitoring and evaluation. For this purpose, one could use a domesticated version of the Creative Vitality Index (CVI) developed in the United States by the Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF), an organization founded in 1974 for the creative development and preservation of the arts. We shall not go into the details about how this index is calculated. Just the basic methodology is mentioned here.

The CVI provides a framework for conceptualizing and understanding the creative economy as a network of many creative actors and helps track the creative economy as a significant driver of economic growth and a key factor in a country’s quality of life. It has two main component measures: occupational employment in the arts and community participation based on per capita revenues of arts-related goods and services, with weights of 40% and 60% respectively.

The CVI is regarded as an excellent baseline tool to grasp the size and overall impact of the creative sector. The CVI also helps identify which are the growing creative occupations and which are the shrinking ones. For instance, in the state of Minneapolis in 2012, the growing creative occupations were: fashion designers, photographers, multimedia artists, and writers and authors; while the shrinking occupations were: floral designers, dancers, architects, and sound engineering technicians (City of Minneapolis, 2013). Such information is obviously useful for policy-makers. From the illustration, the need to domesticate the CVI to include creative occupations more relevant to Zambia is also clear.

References


