

The Role Higher Education Plays towards the Development of Sustainable Socio-Economic Opportunities for Mapungubwe World Cultural Heritage Site Communities

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Using Mapungubwe World Cultural Heritage Site as a case study, this paper investigates the role academics at Higher Education Institutions (HEIS) can play in facilitating the development of a more holistic approach to cultural heritage tourism (CHT). CHT is presented as a vehicle that can be utilised by higher education institutions within protected heritage areas towards mitigating poverty alleviation and socio-economic development, which contributes to addressing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 8 and 11. A sequential mixed method was adopted for this study. Focus groups were conducted with 15 participants using a semi-structured interview guide. The researcher also administered a survey of 100 questionnaires. Content analysis and SPSS were used to analyse the data. The key finding is that community engagement initiatives of HEIS could play an important role in socio-economic development. However, it is essential to involve different stakeholders in order to effectively identify socioeconomic opportunities aimed at addressing the primary needs of the communities. Stakeholders' involvement in decision-making processes about community development projects is vital because imposing development upon communities could result in disputes and withdrawal of community support. In the Mapungubwe area, HEIS, through community education, engagement and involvement in socio-economic development projects from an initial stage could contribute towards achieving sustainable socio-economic opportunities and in this way accelerate the implementation of SDGs. This study highlights the value of community engagement projects as potential drivers of a holistic approach to CHT and the drive towards more sustainable management of cultural heritage sites.

Keywords: cultural heritage tourism, community development and engagement, Mapungubwe World Cultural Heritage Site, higher education, Sustainable Development Goals



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Introduction

Globally, many cultural heritage sites are located in rural areas, and this often results in social and economic challenges related to job opportunities, infrastructure and socio-economic reforms. In some communities

located near protected area sites, the declaration of a World Heritage Site can be viewed as an opportunity due to an increase in the number of visitors to the geographical area, and an associated increase in income through tourism activities (Lopez-Guzman & Santa-

Cruz, 2016). On that note, a declaration could suggest an answer to the socio-economic challenges faced by the respective local communities. The envisaged benefits of the declaration of World Heritage Sites speaks directly to SDG 1 that advocates for the end of global poverty in all its forms, followed by SDG 8, that alludes to the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Lastly, SDG 11 strives to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (United Nations, 2015, p. 18).

Closely aligned to the 2030 SDG Agenda (United Nations, 2015) implemented in 2015 is the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) agenda captured in the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (DHET, 2013) that places the empowerment of society as one of the focus areas of Higher Education in South Africa. In addition, empowerment should include the building of a lifelong learning and training system that will not only assist in the eradication of the apartheid legacy but will also help to build a non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa where access to quality education (SDG 4) is viewed as an important component in the fight against poverty (SDG 1) and inequality in affected societies.

This paper investigated the role academics at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can play in facilitating the development of a more holistic approach to cultural heritage tourism (CHT). The focus of this paper was to investigate how community development initiatives undertaken by academics in the area of cultural heritage tourism has facilitated a more holistic approach in achieving sustainable development in a local community in South Africa, the Mapungubwe WHS communities. Such a study could play a role in empowering people to participate in the development of sustainable socio-economic opportunities in their own communities. Mapungubwe World Cultural Heritage Site (MWCHS) situated in South Africa, Limpopo Province has been adopted as the case study.

Background

The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Education* (DHET, 2013, p. vii) indicates that the pur-

pose of an education and training system is to provide the relevant knowledge and skills that are needed within an economy. With such a system, populations can have a better understanding of their own communities and be able to provide a more meaningful contribution to political, social and cultural societies in South Africa. The authors of this paper contend that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can, through their community-engaged research, contribute to a cohort of citizens who can think, who are creative, who are more effective and are ethical in their actions to achieve better lives for themselves within their respective societies.

A robust connection exists between tourism and Cultural Heritage (CH) because cultural tourism gives an experience and is related to cultural treasures. Furthermore, the CH belongs to the people of the particular community, clan or tribe. Through CHT, CH can be shared by many through education and the promotion of tourism. Similarly, the social and economic action benefits the locals and the custodians of the culture. Nowadays, the CH is packaged or commercialised in a way that suits and caters for the specific segment that exists in the tourism market. Therefore, through research, academics in HEIs can play a vital role in connecting communities and the management of these sites to ensure that more suitable management models are used that will be to the benefit of all stakeholders, including communities. Over and above this, research can also add value to the role that academics can play in the lifelong training of community members through community engagement. UNESCO (2007b) is of the view that CHT is an extended developing segment that permits maintainable growth through the development of and commitment to local but sustainable cultural tourism projects and related practices to the benefit of the local community. In support of the view by UNESCO, the argument for a need to educate communities using community engagement (CE) as directed by the South African DHET to HEIs becomes paramount. Keitumetse (2014) and Kurin (2004) advocate for community education and knowledge enhancement within their respective geographic sites, and this must include the potential commercial benefits that would proceed from the preser-

vation of the local cultural heritage such as relics, monuments, sites and physical and human landscapes. Furthermore, these scholars also indicate that educated communities tend to value heritage in such a manner that reinforces relations between the custodians of the culture and the project managers leading the process. Therefore, this paper suggests the importance of educating the custodians of the local culture, including the local communities that reside closer to protected sites. This education should relate to the systems, policies and the tangible and intangible gains or benefits related to CHT.

The World Heritage Committee (UNESCO, 2002) is aligned with the 2030 SDG Agenda (United Nations, 2015), and the *White Paper for Post-Schooling Education and Training* (DHET, 2013) declared job creation and community involvement as part of their key areas of performance. In acknowledgement of the declaration, the South African Government, through the National Department of Tourism (NDT, 2011), implemented the *National Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2026*, (NTSS) supported by the *National Heritage and Cultural Tourism Strategy* (NHCTS) that was implemented in 2012. The NTSS maintains that tourism is a crucial global industry, for its contribution to the gross domestic product of many countries and in addition to the local trade power. This implies that tourism has the potential to contribute towards job creation and to mutual understanding when it is well guided and managed. This is most likely why the South African Government plays an important role in its viability and success. The strategy recognises tourism as an industry with a massive potential role in growing the economy as it is in accordance with the NHCTS vision to ‘realise the global competitiveness of South African heritage and cultural resources through product development for sustainable tourism and economic development’ (NDT, 2012, p. 15). Evidently, since the adoption of the *White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation* (DST, 2019), the South African Government has been committed to using science, technology and innovation (STI), in which tourism forms a part, to develop the country through economic growth, job creation and socio-economic reform and to overcome the legacy of apartheid. For

these reasons, academics in HE, through their expertise, such as research, and guided by the *White Paper for Post-Schooling Education and Training* (DHET, 2013) and the *White Paper on Science and Technology* (DACST, 1996) aligned with the 2030 SDG Agenda (United Nations, 2015) and the 2030 National Development Plan (NPC, 2011), can take the current status of the tourism industry, in particular CHT, to greater heights by taking a lead in advocating for STI acceptance and usage, and development and adaptation of community education methods/content, including management models enhancement. Furthermore, academics can also play a role in facilitating the proper implementation of the SDGs on the ground level, which could assist in improving the interaction between site management and communities. In addition, this facilitation could also alleviate the existing discourse, in particular the barriers to achieving a more holistic development approach to CH and accelerating the implementation of the SDGs in a local community in South Africa.

Furthermore, the NTSS and NHCTS deal with the credit granted to tourism as a needed instrument that can be utilised to stimulate reciprocal understanding and tolerance during interactions between tourists and host communities. For example, South African National Parks (SANParks) is working in conjunction with the MWCHS Management towards the implementation of the stated strategies into practice in order to benefit all the inhabitants of Mapungubwe and local community members. Although the contribution of tourism to this community is substantial, a number of challenges remains. The challenges must be afforded attention in order to successfully facilitate more opportunities relating to sustainable local development and poverty alleviation, through the localisation of benefits.

These challenges include issues of ownership, access, economic leakages (from the local economy and through imports), local employment, benefit distribution, social and environmental impacts and dependency. Such challenges are perceived to effectively yield positive impacts when addressed at the destination level with the active participation of the local communities. In addition, Landorf (2009, p. 53) notes

that the concept of sustainable heritage tourism identifies two key principles of sustainable practice, namely: first, a planning process that is long term and holistic and second, multiple stakeholder participation in that planning process. On that note, the promotion of the integration of heritage resource conservation within urban and rural planning and in the context of social and economic development, utilising the reinforcement of policy and more operational administration with relevant legislative implementation, as is delineated in the National Heritage Resource Act (NHRA), No. 25 of 1999, could be envisaged as a tool to realise the desired goals. Similarly, the NTSS Strategy, UNESCO (2007a) Guidelines, Tourism White Paper (DEAT, 1996) and SDGS 2030 guidelines, including peer-reviewed literature (Triangulation), can also be utilised to serve this purpose.

A study conducted by Ayoo (2007) noted that the allocation of world heritage status could be utilised by the management of these areas as a very effective marketing strategy of their destination as the status could provide a competitive advantage when marketing a tourism site globally. On the same note, management can utilise the status to ensure that heritage management and conservation activities are perceived to be fundamental at all times, as alluded to by the NTSS, NHRA and UNESCO, just to name a few. In addition, Jimura (2019) alluded to the importance of sustainable tourism projects development relating to a proper management plan within WHS, as findings have established that through engaged research, tourism has the potential to address real life issues that can be beneficial to the local communities residing within and around the project area. It is noted that careful, considered and meaningful interactions with the local community are crucial to ensure a positive adoption of the management model by a WHS in order to eliminate a negative impact on the site. Through research and community engagement, academics in HE could position themselves to contribute meaningfully to the development of tailored-made management models that could benefit protected areas with unique characteristics, as is the case with MWCHS. Furthermore, HE, through their academics, could advise management or policy makers during the policy and strategy devel-

opment process to ensure practicality and sustainability, by ensuring that the SDGS guidelines are imbedded during the development of management models or policies and are not treated as an add-on at a later stage. In this case, MWCHS management could draw a great deal of insight from academics by ensuring the inclusion of concerned communities from the initial stage and also practice the bottom-up strategy at all times although it is viewed as a practice that is time consuming by some practitioners/managers.

To complement the employed paradigms, the Complexity Science Theory and the Basic Needs Theory were employed. Saturation of employment of these theories is based on the nature of the study. Complexity Science Theory is perceived as complex because of many challenges that are often dynamic and unpredictable and of multi-dimensional nature through relationships that are interconnected (University of Victoria, 2012). In the case of MWCHS, complex issues, some relating to community involvement and engagement pertaining to sustainable community development, including decision making regarding projects initiation or project prioritising based on community needs, do exist. Within the Basic Needs Theory, as applied by de Wet (2018), community development expanded beyond earlier applications of the theory, through an integration of the multi-dimensional nature of community development, into a theory that acknowledges the complexity of the interdisciplinary approach to development. This is done by introducing a priority index into a basic needs assessment technique that enables the researcher to prioritise the 'real' basic needs in a particular community (de Wet, 2018, p. 1). Prideaux et al. (2008) noted that tourism and culture in any particular geographical setting could be utilised for a variety of purposes that could extend from entertainment, preservation, information, education, profit and propaganda. The stated utilisation could be done through socio-economic development that prioritises responsible and authentic tourism and in this way could speak directly to the various guidelines of the SDGS. In the case of MWCHS communities, it is clear that a number of 'real' basic needs require the attention of various stakeholders such as HEIS, MWCHS Management and Community Traditional Leaders. Appli-

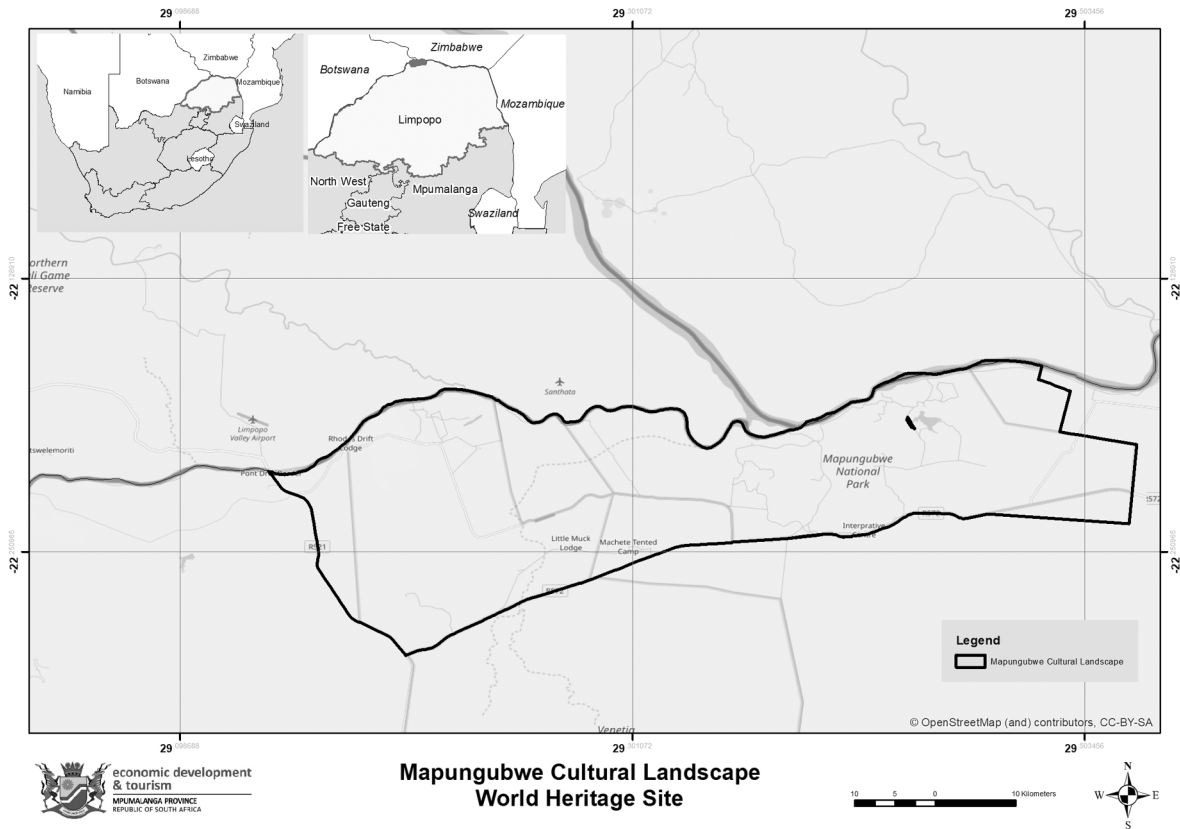


Figure 1 Mapungubwe World Heritage Site Map (adapted from Shabalala, 2020)

cation of a bottom-up strategy from the initial stage becomes key, as it gives a chance for affected and concerned stakeholders to contribute towards achieving a sustainable development and yield meaningful benefits for the community.

Description of the Study Areas and Methodology

Study Area

This paper makes use of a case study of Mapungubwe World Cultural Heritage Site as presented in Figure 1. The study extended to the local communities’ residential areas, which included Musina, and the All-Days area, including the descendants’ residential areas (in Venda) in Limpopo Province. This Province is geographically situated on the northern part of South Africa, and considered to be one of the developing provinces in the country (Tshiala et al., 2011, p. 14). According to Limpopo Department of Agriculture and

Rural Development (2018), this province has distinct climate regions that vary from a semi-arid to a sub-humid climate.

Mapungubwe is celebrated as a National Park, declared in 2004, and a World Heritage Site, declared by UNESCO in July 2003 (South African National Parks, 2014, p. 2). Previously, the Mapungubwe National Park was referred to as the Vhembe Dongola National Park, and is now globally labelled the Mapungubwe World Cultural Heritage Site (MWCBS) under the management of South African National Parks. According to scholars such as Carruthers (2006, p. 1) and Schoeman and Pikirayi (2011, p. 1), the geographical area of Mapungubwe was occupied by one of the earliest kingdoms in the region and there is recorded evidence in the MWCBS of its extensive regional and continental links with East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Persian Gulf, India and the Far East. It must be noted

Table 1 Qualitative Data Collection Participants

Representative participants	Village, area and date	Sample size
Vhangona cultural movement member	Mutale Village, Thohoyandou, March 2019	1
Tshivhula representatives from the Royal family	Elias Resort, Ndzhelele, March 2019	2
Leshiba representative from the Royal family	Dzanani, Ndzhelele, March 2019	1
Lemba representative	Tzaneen area, March 2019	1
Sematla	Den Staat Farm (west boundary of Mapungubwe), May 2019	1
Mapungubwe staff member	Mapungubwe wCHS, April 2019	1
Machete Royal Council members	Andermark Village, All Days & Vivo, March 2019	5
SANParks: Head Office Staff Representatives	Pretoria: SANParks Head Office, March 2019	3

Notes Interview method: semi-structured interview. Adapted from Shabalala (2020).

that MWCHS borders three countries, South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, with a meeting point between the Limpopo and Shashe rivers (Schoeman & Pikirayi, 2011, p. 1). A study conducted by Chirikure et al. (2010, p. 34) described the site as important, firstly for its evidence of the earliest state system in the region and for the unique farming communities that existed on the 169 hectares of savannah southern Africa. According to Shabalala (2020), there are six Mapungubwe descendants groups who regard themselves as the heirs of the land as they claim to be the offspring of the indigenous people who were forcefully removed from the land by the colonial government, namely: the Vhangona Cultural Movement, the Tshivhula Royal Family, the Leshiba Royal Family, the Machete Royal Council, the Lemba Cultural Association and the Sematla people. In line with the purpose of this paper, due to the rich culture and heritage of the study area, an excellent opportunity is presented for academics at HEIS to apply their mandate of engaged research and community engagement to contribute to sustainable development of the area that will be of benefit to all stakeholders.

Study Methodology

The data used in this paper was collected as part of a bigger research project by the same author/researcher and only the data relevant to the purpose of this paper is provided as the basis of the analysis and discussion section. A sequential mixed method was adopted for this study. Focus groups were conducted with

15 participants formed by the Mapungubwe descendants traditional leaders using a semi-structured interview guide. The researcher also administered a survey of 100 structured questionnaires to the community. Content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data and SPSS was used to analyse the quantitative data. Secondly, in order to determine the socially constructed reality, including the deeper meanings and significance of the respondents' responses, qualitative data was collected through interactions with respondents in the form of focus groups using interview guides. The data for the latter were then analysed and interpreted by the researcher.

Sample Selection

The study adopted a non-probability purposive method of sampling, to identify sampling participants (Table 1) that met specified criteria, i.e. had a direct connection with the research area as the claimant of the land, and also are one of the recognised traditional leaders from the six descendants groups. The Mapungubwe descendants traditional leaders, MWCHS Staff, and South African Parks staff, including a Heritage Sites Manager, formed the participants. The Snowball Sample Method was applied in an attempt to secure the participation of the community during the last days of stage 2 data collection. It must be noted that, in accordance with the wishes of the traditional leaders, hard copies of a translated version of the survey questionnaires were administered to encourage the local people to willingly respond to the survey questionnaire. The

local community residing around the area formed part of the respondents (survey).

The target population for the descendants was geographically dispersed and the total is unknown to the researcher. For this reason, a non-probability purposive sampling method was applied to identify respondents who satisfied specific criteria and could thus be included as research respondents. As was the case with the collection of the qualitative data, the identification of participants for the quantitative part of the data collection was done through the knowledge of the researcher and referrals from other participants. Although the researcher interviewed 100 people, the responses of 17 respondents could not be utilised as the completed questionnaires were considered to be incomplete. Despite the loss of these responses, the 83 questionnaires utilised for data analysis was considered sufficient as data saturation had been reached. The researcher was accompanied by local field workers from the area who are fluent in the local language and who understood the local dynamics. The field workers guided the researcher in terms of the traditional protocols and observation, especially when meeting and interviewing the royals (chief/royal council members). As this research was undertaken in a traditional rural area, it was important for the researcher to gain an understanding of the community dynamics and traditional protocols as this played a vital role in building trust with communities and their leaders. The questionnaire was administered a month after the qualitative data collection. All data collection tools utilised in this study were applied using the indigenous language of the participants and respondents.

Data Analysis

Although the data collected was for a bigger research project by the same author/researcher, relevant responses related to the purpose of this paper were extracted. Both the qualitative and quantitative data collection questions included topics such as economic benefits derived from MWCHS for the descendants/local communities, and the role presented to descendants/local communities by MWCHS, including the level of knowledge of the descendants about the existing products/services in MWCHS. Respondents and

participants were also asked to present or list sustainable opportunities that they wish to see being presented or developed by the park, that will not only benefit them but the park as well, especially CHT products/services.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the quantitative data and a content analysis (thematic and descriptive in nature) was used to analyse the qualitative data. The analyses were done according to content analysis style, where coding (Selective Coding, Axial Coding, Open Coding) was applied using themes and sub-themes, aligned with the research objectives. The identified themes included socio-economic benefits, role presented to descendants/local communities, existing products/services knowledge and so forth.

Results and Discussion

Qualitative Results and Discussion

The results of the study indicate that HEIS, in collaboration with MWCHS Management and Communities, can assist in mitigating challenges with the goals of achieving sustainable development. Communities reported that cultural heritage tourism in Mapungubwe should firstly be about bringing the communities close to the park to partake in activities that will contribute towards ensuring community development, as CHT seems to have the potential to develop communities. Park management style and strategy implementation becomes key. The findings indicate that park management style has an impact on community involvement and participation, including the fair benefit sharing to stakeholders. This has a direct impact on the role of MWCHS. As shown in Table 2, the quantitative results suggest that the Mapungubwe management style is very poor, with only 9% viewing it as good. The table shows that 32% of respondents rated MWCHS management style as poor and 59% as very poor, meaning that 91% view the MWCHS management style as poor. 2% of the respondents reported that they regard the MWCHS management style as good, and another 2% as very good, which gives a combined score of 4%. The remaining 5% reported that the management style is excellent. Overall, 91% of the respondents view the MWCHS management style as poor and 9% view it as

Table 2 Mapungubwe Management Style

Excellent	5
Very good	2
Good	2
Poor	32
Very poor	59

Notes Adapted from Shabalala (2020).

good. HEIS can assist with development of a stakeholder participation model and also assist management with ways on how to apply a bottom-up strategy in a fruitful manner or possibly provide workshops/training to both communities and park management under the pillar of community engagement.

The descendants of Mapungubwe also wish to see themselves benefiting economically, therefore, they wish for the park management to establish a form of benefits sharing whereby the proceeds derived from MWCHS can be shared with the descendants. An emphasis was placed on park management to consider offering bursaries to deserving students from local communities and descendants groups to further their studies in conservation or tourism and other related studies. The reality is that some of the children of the descendants' community sometimes need a place to do their Work Integrated Learning (WIL) for their formal qualifications, and they could be afforded such opportunities by the park. The findings suggest that academics and stakeholders such as HEIS, UN, and UNESCO have a crucial role to play in identifying socio-economic opportunities for sustainable development aimed at addressing the immediate needs of the targeted beneficiaries and potentially improve their lives. Given a chance, the very same communities could play a vital role by advising project managers on which projects to implement and prioritise based on the real needs of the respective communities. Therefore, researchers should be the voice of their respondents, ethically carry out their views and educate management about the importance of community engagement and involvement in order to achieve sustainable development and secure community buy-in. The study participants indicated, in various ways, that they should be part of the initial stages of any actions related to the

socio-economic development of the area. This is reflected in the following comments of Respondents A, B and C (Table 3). For instance, this research established that the study participants wish to see the main roads leading to Mapungubwe fixed and well maintained. The community also expressed the need for the park management to look at the possibility of attracting other businesses (for example a petrol station) closer to the park and in this way reduce the travelling to re-fuel in towns located a distance from the site. In addition, the Mapungubwe descendants traditional leaders believe that constructing a cultural village in MWCHS could yield positive outcomes such as sustainable job creation opportunities, and enhance the value or authenticity of the cultural heritage tourism products and services offered by the park. In addition, it could enable skills transfer as the senior citizens could be presented with an opportunity to teach the youth on how things should be done (in line with their customs and traditions) while sharing their culture with the world (tourists). Furthermore, these seasoned traditional leaders could also serve as advisers to management, scholars and policy makers on certain matters, especially heritage, cultural and spiritual-related matters in protected areas such as Mapungubwe. In this manner, the achievement of accelerating the implementation of sustainable goals could be realised.

The focus of this paper was to investigate how community development initiatives undertaken by academics in the area of cultural heritage tourism has facilitated a more holistic approach in achieving sustainable development in a local community in South Africa, Mapungubwe WHS communities. The three SDGs underpinning this paper, namely: SDG 1, SDG 8 and SDG 11 advocate for achievement of sustainable development that comprises the nature of projects like the above narrated wishes from the MWCHS communities. On the same note, some of the wishes narrated by the MWCHS community can be realised sooner, provided HEIS, through their academics, take a lead in this agenda and contribute to sustainable development through the act of teaching, research and community engagement in CHT. In conjunction with the key finding and the results of the study, the paper demonstrates that the descendants' traditional leaders and the

Table 3 Study Participants’ Views (Mapungubwe Descendants’ Traditional Leaders) about Their Expectations towards Community Involvement and Engagement

Respondent	Excerpt
Respondent A	They wish to be consulted on the initial stage, not be treated as the park management is currently doing, only consulting them on the drafted document at the last minute for input and approval without giving them enough time to deliberate.
Respondent B	They wish to be a part of the products/service initiation and of development and enhancement of these products because they believe that they know what needs to be done and how it needs to be done culturally.
Respondent C	They want to be involved from the initiation stage, not when the project is already at an advanced stage, when all the important decisions have been made.
Respondent D	The communities expect to be included during the planning process; also to be consulted by management before starting whatever they want to do, and for them to also make use of a language that they will understand.
Respondent E	Since they are indigenous people, some of them have not acquired any formal education, therefore use of technical jargon when management make presentations in meetings makes things difficult, and at times results in communities not being able to interact. Instead they just sit there like a piece of stick lying down.
Respondent F	The communities wish for management to also give them a chance to present their proposals or suggestions that they have as communities, not it always being the park management that proposes or suggests. For instance, the communities’ leaders indicated that they have been presenting the need for building a cultural village right inside the park. They also believe that they cannot say the site is a cultural landscape while there is nothing cultural, such as a cultural village.
Respondent G	As the descendants they communicated their thoughts regarding the park management plan draft with the park management but it was not reflected in the new draft.
Respondent H	Most importantly, the descendants indicated that they do not want to hear only what the park management is saying about the new management plan, instead they must also hear what, as the descendants, they have to say (their proposals), how they wish to see the place develop so that it will appeal to them, cater for their needs, and also attract tourists.

Notes Adapted from Shabalala (2020).

community members are better positioned to address their own needs and the needs of their communities as they were well informed about the community dynamics. As such, a bottom-up strategy is a key component in any community engagement and involvement. The study participants presented their views in line with their expectations towards community involvement or engagement and are captured in Table 3 (Respondents D, E, F, G and H). HEIS could contribute by aligning their SDGs-related research to advocate for community engagement and involvement. Furthermore, academics at HEIS can foster mutually beneficial ways of doing things and can actively document and/or develop models that will ensure the

all-inclusive achievement of the SDGs in CHT sites. Community education, engagement and involvement in sustainable socio-economic development projects from the initial stages play an important role towards achieving the desired sustainable socio-economic opportunities creation. The descendants in particular are in possession of indigenous knowledge and skills; they also view themselves as heirs who are deserving to economically benefit through sustainable job opportunities and are in a position to improve their lives when they are involved or advising management. Therefore, it is important for researchers to take into consideration the views of respondents and participants on how they wish to see their communities contribut-

ing towards uplifting of the park. The same applies to management, practitioners and policy makers.

The findings of the paper established that communities and SANParks staff representatives were of the opinion that CHT should play a more prominent role in achieving community sustainable development. Furthermore, MWCHS should be the platform that can be utilised to facilitate the restoration of the presently non-existent (or limited) networks and connections that would use community development and participation in such a way as to restore the dignity of the descendants community.

Descendants group 1: 'It means the descendants of Mapungubwe should visit the site from time to time, because that is how they understand Mapungubwe; it must be a tourism centre which they could benefit from through the economy created by tourism led by SANParks or Mapungubwe.'

Descendant group 5: 'Their understanding would be that the descendants should have been involved in development of tourism in Mapungubwe in such a way that they have a full role that will result in the development of Mapungubwe Heritage Site communities.'

The SANParks representatives said, 'We view the role of Cultural Heritage Tourism regarding community development in Mapungubwe as one that contributes towards giving a sense of pride to communities about their culture and heritage.' In addition, 'we believe that the role will reflect back to the communities as they will be witnessing their own cultural heritage being expressed and shared with visitors, which gives them an opportunity to express themselves. As a result, this act could present the communities with a chance to tell their story as the owners of it, and also assist the communities to connect with their heritage in every possible way and result in a sense of belonging for them.'

Furthermore, The SANParks representatives said, 'We believe that the role of Cultural Heritage Tourism regarding community development in Mapungubwe could be perceived as one that contributes to the economic development of the communities. When tourists come to the park, they could be the ones involved in taking the tourists around the cultural heritage site and this could result in job creation for them as well.'

Therefore, HEIS, in partnership with MWCHS management and SANParks, should join forces with communities to ensure that CHT plays a prominent role in achieving sustainable development in local communities.

Quantitative Results and Discussion

In order to establish if the qualitative results were valid, the quantitative data collected used the Cronbach Alpha and Likert Scale to measure the involvement of stakeholders (descendants and local communities) and to establish their respective benefits. Amongst the variables and the items used in the scales, statistically significant correlations were established on the following:

- Economic benefit to descendants and those living in the local community.
- The need for descendent and local communities to provide substantial input into the protocols, products, service development and cultural preservation.
- Descendants and local community members' representation on various MWCHS committees.
- Regular consultation and engagement between descendants/local community and the management of MWCHS.
- The need for an active Park Forum.
- Proper implementation of the park management plan and park management style/strategy.

In terms of the first two correlations, it is established that some respondents reported that they were already actively participating in the MWCHS and were receiving some economic benefits. However, a number of community members reported that they were not given a chance to participate and had not benefitted in any way from the proceeds derived from MWCHS. Descendant group 3:

Our great forefathers lived there in Mapungubwe for quite some time and they have everything that connects them with the Mapungubwe landscape. We believe that if we can sit down with the park management, there are lot

of things that can be done, so that our community can benefit from cultural tourism, as currently our community does not benefit from tourism at all.

The responses to the semi-structured questionnaires completed by respondents indicated that the majority of the local people and descendants had little knowledge about the CHT products/services that exist in MWCHS. Statistical significance indicates correlation between the statement by the local community members and descendants indicating that they receive no benefits from the proceeds derived from MWCHS and their knowledge of the CHT products and services in MWCHS. Descendant group 2:

Our communities who are directly descended from Mapungubwe must keep on going there, either for rituals for those who seek rituals, or for those [who go for a] tourism purpose let it be for tourism. Whoever comes to the park should be able to develop the park. Also, descendant communities must benefit from the revenue or any proceeds that come from Mapungubwe Park.

This extended to responses that some community members and descendants were not actively participating in the maintenance and preservation of cultural heritage tourism products/services in MWCHS. This finding could explain why many communities were losing interest concerning cultural heritage issues, and this can relate to their lack of knowledge and the scarcity of resources to obtain such knowledge, including the lack of traditions/customs adherence in the site. MWCHS staff alluded to the claim made by the descendants concerning their participation in the park, and stated that,

though currently there is no clear community participation and involvement, he believes that it is something that can be worked on. It is believed that there are some engagements happening there though they don't meet the required standard. For instance, a few years back during

the previous management, in 2005–2006, there was an issue of human remains that needed to be reburied; during those times communities were hands on, they were very much involved in these kinds of issues. It was like a full time kind of relationship between the park and descendants groups. But in recent times, a bond between the park and these communities is not being demonstrated. The new park management plan could be what the park needs to start fixing the disconnected relationship.

To address this matter and to ensure the achievement of SDG 1, SDG 8 and SDG 11, academics at HEIS could play a prominent role in the development of a general community education programme on the WHS and CHT, and more tailored education related to local culture and heritage.

In terms of the latter three correlations, research results related to the descendants community and local communities representation in any role in MWCHS and the level of involvement of these communities in relation to looking after the existing heritage are depicted in Table 4. The evidence revealed that 20% of the study respondents were definitely not involved in looking after the existing heritage in the site but 39% of the study respondents reported that they were not sure about their involvement. However, 22% of the study respondents were neutral about their involvement, which resulted in only 2% of the study respondents reporting that they were well involved in looking after the existing heritage. The remaining 17% of the study respondents indicated that they were very involved in looking after the existing heritage in the site.

The study respondents were further requested to indicate their level of involvement during the planning and decision making process of any activities that took place in MWCHS (Table 4). Only 41% of the study respondents stated that they were definitely not involved in planning or taking any decision in any activities that took place in the site. Interestingly, 37% of the study respondents noted that they were not sure about the level of their involvement during the planning and decision making process of any activities in the site. Only 17% of the study participants chose the neutral option as

Table 4 Comparison of Various Aspects of Community Involvement in Mapungubwe

Item	Very well	Well	Neutral	Not sure	Def. not
Involvement looking after existing heritage	17	2	22	39	20
Involved in planning and decision making	5	0	17	37	41
Any involvement on serving on the site/events planning	0	7	12	34	46

Notes In percent. Adapted from Shabalala (2020).

their answer regarding their involvement during the planning and decision making process of any activities in the site. However, 5% of the study respondents reported that they were very well involved during the planning and decision making process of any activities in the site, and no participant chose the well involved option as their answer. Table 4 also depicts the level of involvement of the study respondents in relation to any activities taking place in the site, such as events planning. Only 20% of the study respondents reported that they were definitely not involved in any activities taking place in the site such as events planning. However, 39% of the respondents said that they were not sure about their involvement in any activities taking place in the site, while 21% of the respondents chose the neutral option as their answer. A low 2% of respondents indicated that they are well involved in activities taking place in the site such as events planning. The remaining 17% of respondents reported that they are very well involved in activities taking place in the site such as events planning.

Concerning the development of sustainable socio-economic opportunities, the findings propose that management or practitioners consider the engagement and involvement of communities in all decision-making stages in its true sense, not solely deciding on projects to be implemented in those respective communities. In this manner, a number of possible sustainable socio-economic opportunities for communities can be generated and presented by protected areas such as the MWCHS. Lastly, educating the community about CHT products and services provided by the park is important. For HEIS to ensure the success of the idea stakeholders such as decision makers (sites managers), policy makers, leaders, and parastatals, including funders, should join forces in this agenda, as the goal for HE is to achieve sustainable development.

Consolidation of Results and Discussion

The presented evidence established that a correlation existed between the challenges that are experienced by descendants and communities and the MWCHS management style. The challenges include customs/traditional protocols adherence in Mapungubwe Hill (where some of the descendant's royal ancestors are laid to rest) and so forth. Therefore, many, including the traditional leaders, to bring the change that they are wishing for, hope for the proposed new park management plan. The excerpts in Table 5 present the voice of the descendants and MWCHS staff regarding community involvement in the site.

The study findings and excerpts demonstrated that HEIS could take a leading role in closing the existing gap as a facilitator for a more holistic approach. In fact, HEIS are in a good position to encourage research with a main focus on sustainable solutions to matters faced by protected areas such as MWCHS and its descendants and local communities, including the farmers bordering the site. In addition, HEIS could make use of community engagement as a tool to encourage park management or practitioners to acknowledge the importance of community involvement and engagement. Most importantly, during the identifying, planning and implementation stage of community development, projects that are aimed at the socioeconomic benefit of the communities can also be utilised to address immediate needs of the communities or beneficiaries. Furthermore, HEIS could be aggressively involved in educating the communities about the essentials of how protected areas should function and be managed against the traditional way of doing things and so forth, taking the SDGs guidelines and African Heritage Laws into account but not leaving out the existing tourism strategies and policies. As a result, this approach could revive the relationship between the

Table 5 The Voice of the Descendants and MWCHS Staff Regarding Community Involvement in Mapungubwe World Heritage Site

Respondent	Excerpt
Descendants group 1	The park invites people who know nothing about Mapungubwe and the history of the descendants to talk about Mapungubwe. They noted that due to the news about the new park management plan, they hope that they will now be involved in the activities taking place in the park. Therefore, the history of Mapungubwe should be rewritten to carry out the true reflection of Mapungubwe and be told by the owners of the culture, the descendants who know the history of the area.
Descendants group 2 concur with group 1, and expressed that	They are aware of the scripts used by the tour guides when they are sharing the history of Mapungubwe to the tourists or visitors; those scripts do not include any details about the descendants as part of Mapungubwe landscape history. They present their own history that goes hand-in-hand with what the professionals and researchers say. This is one of the reasons why the descendants are saying there is political interference in the site because people who are not descendants are the ones that Mapungubwe management trust and invite to tell our history or give input in the reading of the presentation of the history, including preservation of their culture in MWCHS.
MWCHS Staff	At present, when we talk about community participation and involvement in the park, it is a situation that is not pure; areas of improvement exist on the management side. In the same breath, the new park management plan is envisaged to be what the park needs to use as a tool to mend the disengaged relationship with the concerned communities or stakeholders. There is hope that the once-good relationship that the 2005–2006 management of park shared with the communities during the engagement regarding the reburial of human remains can be restored as communities are involved and engaged during the process. The participant alluded to the fact that the kind of involvement was like a full-time kind of relationship between the park and descendants’ groups. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the current bond or relationship between the park and these communities; a disconnection exists.

Notes Adapted from Shabalala (2020).

site management and the communities to potentially start to see things eye to eye and achieve a healthy and fruitful partnership. This type of education could also be extended to the protected areas personnel as well. The realisation of the above-mentioned findings could yield sustainable socio-economic opportunities, benefiting the community members and eventually improving their lives, which can be viewed as one of the many ways that can be used to accelerate the implementation of the stated three SDGs.

SANParks representatives reported that they understand that MWCHS management is presently working on development of a new park management plan. The new management plan is expected by the concerned communities to turn things around for the better and restore the trust and relationship between the park management and the communities. This in turn would mean a partnership with all stakeholders, including descendants, and reflects SANParks’s determination to forge more meaningful and posi-

tive partnerships for the future. HEIS could form a partnership with SANParks with an aim to assist with forming and maintaining healthy partnerships with its stakeholders, most importantly with local communities/descendants of each park. The partnership can start with academics proposing to site managers to consider bringing knowledgeable researchers on board as advisors when drafting or updating their park management plans, with an aim to guide and support the process for the plan to embrace the 2030 SDG Agenda and also be geared towards the achievement of sustainable development in CHT.

Beyond reasonable doubt, HEIS can, in collaboration with MWCHS Management and Communities, assist in the mitigation of challenges with the goals of achieving sustainable development. In line with the aim of the study, as an academic at an HEI, the researcher proposes that community involvement and participation in decision making will not only benefit CHT, but will facilitate a more holistic approach in

achieving sustainable socio-economic opportunities development in CHT by 2030.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals how HEIS can utilise community engagement to contribute to achieve sustainable development in CHT through community development initiatives undertaken by academics in the area of cultural heritage tourism while facilitating a more holistic approach in achieving sustainable development in a local community in South Africa, Mapungubwe WHS communities. On the other hand, researchers can develop or enhance teaching methods when educating the descendants and the broader community, with the goal of achieving sustainable development. In addition, the study identified the role of HEIS in the development of sustainable management models that will present a platform for both management and community to work together in harmony. Through research, academics at HEIS can add value by connecting communities and the management of the sites, and provide a crucial role in the lifelong training of community members through community engagement. While encouraging the participation of academics in engaged research, it is crucial that academics take into consideration the views of the study respondents and participants. In this way HEIS, together with all stakeholders, can assist communities in their mission to ensure that their indigenous knowledge is retained in the park and at the same time be able to benefit economically through the creation of sustainable job opportunities and in so doing be in a position to improve their daily lives. On that note, it is important for sites like MWCHS to utilise knowledgeable practitioners who practice the roots-driven strategy and engage the communities to ensure they are included in the decision-making processes that will drive and accelerate the implementation of SDG 1, SDG 8 and SDG 11.

Study Suggestions

Based on the findings of the conducted investigation and conclusion of the research, the paper suggests that site management must be encouraged to involve communities in inclusive decision-making

at the early stages of the development of projects. Only if communities are involved can site management truly claim that community development has been undertaken to the advantage of communities. Furthermore, it is suggested that HEIS play an active role through research and CE in seeking solutions to the longstanding issues between management of protected areas and its communities. Engaged research that addresses the real issues/needs of the communities could be used as a vehicle to make realistic recommendations/suggestions to policy makers and strategy developers, while ensuring alignment with the SDGs guidelines. Furthermore, scholars can use CE and community involvement as tools to understand community dynamics and in this way draw realistic findings/recommendations that could include identifying possible sustainable socio-economic opportunities for communities. Lastly, HEIS should consider making it a requirement for their researchers to share their research findings with the communities where they conducted their research. This will mean that researchers must not only visit communities for the purpose of data collection for research purposes, but will take full social responsibility of their activities for the betterment of the communities that have supported their research roles. This act may result in researchers building trust with communities and in return for communities to see the importance of research and community engagement initiatives undertaken by HEIS in their own lives. The result will be that communities might place more value on the research undertaken by HEIS, and the establishment of a better relationship with HEIS could assist with the holistic drive for sustainable development into the future. Suggested further research could include investigating the role of advisory boards or the importance of advisory boards in sites like Mapungubwe Heritage Site. Obviously, such a board will incorporate academics as experts in the field. The fact of not having an advisory board for this site could have contributed to some of the challenges experienced thus far.

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