

Telling or selling? Experiencing South African cultural heritage tourism products

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Abstract

With the advent of the experience economy the unique experiential value of cultural heritage products comes to the forefront of cultural tourism development and is the main value proposition for emerging destinations, including South Africa. As South Africa's democracy dividends had paid out by 1998, South African Tourism was left with an array of dormant cultural heritage resources (still) unable to turn them into meaningful tourist experiences. The reason is lack of understanding of tourist experience as opposed to tourist consumption. Consumer segmentation and marketing mantra of *telling and selling* simply does not work on tourist experience arising from consumption of cultural heritage products. Two propositions underline this type of experience: attractions cannot speak for themselves and we tell the story to sell the experience. The art of telling the story converges on both sides of experiential paradigm (tourist and attraction) thus *telling is selling* principle is a point of sale for cultural heritage products. Unpacking this principle in creating unique experiential value of cultural heritage products is the main theoretical contribution of this paper to South African cultural tourism discourse. The proposed experiential framework pertinent to cultural heritage sites integrates three paradigms namely product, experience and interpretation and the resultant tourist experience as a gestalt phenomenon. Against this framework the experiential value of South African cultural heritage products is assessed with data from official South African sources.

Keywords: Cultural heritage product, tourist experience, heritage interpretation, South Africa.

How to cite this article:

Ivanovic, M. & Saayman, M. (2013). Telling or selling? Experiencing South African cultural heritage tourism products. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and Dance*, September (Supplement 2), 172-186.

Introduction

A transition from Fordist economies of scale driven by mass production of products and services with universal appeal, to the Post-Fordist economies of scope associated with product specialisation and consumerism is reflective of the paradigm shift from production to consumption. As the cultural heritage sector jumped onto the mass tourism bandwagon by offering visits to cultural heritage sites as part of the packaged tours, the supply of cultural heritage for the first time outstripped the demand (Richards, 1996: 274). The supply-driven fallacy is that consumers of cultural heritage are only interested in generalized and 'familiar' cultural and heritage products (Prentice, 2004: 926) and that culture of

one region is as good as the culture of the next region when it comes to tourism development. This resulted in the widespread 'serial reproduction of culture' and the proliferation of standardised and highly commodified mass cultural heritage products (Richards & Wilson, 2006: 1216).

The shift from production to consumption resulted in the breakdown of once undifferentiated, homogenised, sun-lust tourism mass market into a number of special interest sun-plus (Post-Fordist) consumers markets. Continued product differentiation, which was typical of special interest tourism (SIT), was underpinned by market segmentation and deeper understanding of consumer preferences and behavior arising from expectation-experience-satisfaction paradigm (Beeho & Prentice, 1997:75). The marketing focus turned from *selling* (the mass produced packages) to *telling and selling*: telling about the product to selected market segments to sell a product developed for a specific market.

In this new context cultural tourism emerged as a SIT and cultural heritage sector as a specialised niche of cultural tourism. Nevertheless, it was only with the rise of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) that cultural tourism emerged as a leading component in global tourism with the cultural heritage sector becoming a dominant form of tourists' consumption. As various types of cultural heritage became the ultimate guarantors of authentic and differentiated tourist experiences an ongoing delineation of cultural heritage based on object authenticity attracted 'new' (Poon, 1997:47), sophisticated, serious leisure tourists (Stebbins, 1996) in pursue of authenticity and meaning. The new cultural tourists were extremely sensitive to the authenticity or 'genuineness' of cultural attractions and very selective in their consumption choices. What they expected was not a continuous supply of new authentic attractions but rather constant production of new, authentic tourist experiences. Based on the unique experiential value arising from the consumption of authentic cultural heritage attractions the transformation of production and consumption characteristics of the experiential economy resulted in a convergence between heritage and tourism. The mediating role of interpretation acted as a glue which brought two sides (place/site and tourist) of the experiential paradigm together into a new form of tourist experience as a *gestalt phenomenon* (Beeho & Prentice, 1997). This still unexplored approach to tourist experience is perceived as a wholeness (or experience flow) of cognitive (learning) and affective (emotions) responses to a product. The tourist experience as a gestalt phenomenon therefore integrates three paradigms, namely product, interpretation and experience.

This paper represents a contribution to South African cultural tourism discourse as it conceptualises the model of tourist experience as a gestalt phenomenon pertinent to consumption of cultural heritage products. It employs telling or/and/is selling marketing philosophy to highlight the main paradigm shifts from production, to consumption, to experience economy respectively, whereby

each shift brought the changes to the nature of tourist consumption and delivery of tourism products in general, and cultural heritage products in particular. The specific aim of the paper is to present a theoretical overview of three paradigms (product, interpretation and experience), as well as to provide the rationale for their integration into the new form of tourist experience seen as a gestalt phenomenon. In particular, by critically analysing South African tourism strategy documents (SAT, 2003, 2004, 2008) and selected data from Annual Tourism Reports (SAT, 2009, 2010a, 2011, 2012) and Global Competitiveness Studies (SAT, DEAT & DTI, 2004, 2005) the paper demonstrates that a delay in South Africa's response to a major paradigm shifts directly affected the experiential performance of the country's cultural heritage products. It will also present an overview of the attitude of the industry towards cultural heritage product development which together with national strategic weaknesses contributed to the current low experiential value of country's culture and heritage.

Methodology

This paper involves the analysis of two sets of sources. A theoretical framework for the study is derived from the secondary sources which underpin the nature of experience arising from consumption of cultural heritage. The second set of sources draws on existing South African national tourism data. Both sets of data are integrated and cross referenced to reveal the causes of low experiential value of South African cultural heritage.

The paper is structured in two sections. The first section provides a theoretical overview of the three paradigms which inform the proposed model of tourist experience related to a consumption of destination's cultural heritage. It further provides an insight into the role of mediation in creating tourist experience as a gestalt phenomenon. These theoretical concepts are contrasted with the national Tourism Growth Strategies and the statistical data presented in the second section in order to provide an answer to the question this paper aims on answering: Are the tourists getting what they want?

Telling is selling: The paradigm leap

In the context of new experience economy not the attractions but the tourist experiences emerged as the new commodities and the new differentiating factor between destinations. In this new context the tourist experience cannot exist independently of the place since place has a meaning only in so far as the visitor interacts with it (Ryan, 2000:122). The place is "a locus of selected meanings" and tourist is "the agent of seeing, being, experience, cultural invention and knowing" (Ryan, 2000:121). Evidently, tourists visiting heritage sites seek different levels of insight and depth of experience, so they "differ in their interpretation preferences" (Poria, Reichel & Biran, 2007:123). Interpretation

and presentation can appeal to each tourist individually only through a process of co-creating the tourist experience. They co-create experience through a mediated process of *encoding/decoding* by selecting and mixing only those elements of the story they are interested in. In this context it is argued that the widespread “monolithic interpretation and a single standardized product [are] the antithesis of this approach” (Beeho & Prentice, 1997:76).

The simple statement “Tourism is selling the experience” embodies the essence of the paradigm leap from consumerist to experiential economy. In experience economy the experiential value of cultural heritage is embedded in genuineness and authenticity of the site/object, and triggered by means of (mindful and insightful) interpretation which is the only point of sale for cultural heritage tourism. It is evident that interpretation of cultural heritage holds the key to meaningful tourists’ experiences. It entails a process of creation of meanings, an *experience flow* which stems from the cognitive and effective experiential qualities of the site. A proposed framework for tourist experience at cultural heritage sites should therefore integrate three interconnected paradigms: authenticity and uniqueness of cultural heritage products (sites, places) tourist experience as a gestalt phenomenon and a mediating role of interpretation which converge on two sides of production and consumption resulting in individualised tourist experience. The resultant tourist experience represent a paradigm leap from telling *and* selling dichotomy associated with consumer segmentation to new tourist experience engineered through a process of telling *is* selling. The three paradigms making up the new experiential framework are further explained in more detail.

The cultural heritage (product) paradigm

Contrary to culture which refers to all cultural elements available in a destination, heritage is defined as an inheritance and encompasses three categories: natural, cultural and mixed heritage (cultural landscapes). Cultural heritage and cultural landscapes are the most prevalent and the most consumed classes of tourism products in destinations worldwide. They form a resource base for cultural heritage tourism described as tourism centred on what we have inherited in which the past is portrayed in the present (Nuryanti, 1996:250). An inheritance as a past can include anything from history, art, science, lifestyles, architecture to nostalgia which represents a commodity resulting from manipulation of the past. Therefore the main role of cultural heritage in tourism is learning about the past. As cultural heritage attractions cannot ‘speak’ for themselves somebody must provide an insight into the past by speaking on their behalf. It immediately raises the following questions: Whose past, and who is to tell the story? What from our past we do want to reveal and what to withhold? In an answer to these questions some classes of cultural heritage attractions can be contested (two competing views coming from two cultural or political groups) or

marginalised (the heritage of minorities), seen as dark (heritage associated with wars, crimes against humanity, oppression and other maladies), and most interestingly become dissonant. As an illustration, dark and dissonant heritage are the most interesting concepts for South African tourism landscape as the former depicts the South African struggle history whereas the latter is applicable to Afrikaner heritage.

The discussion so far leads to the contentious issue of selecting the past which is the most representative of the particular cultural heritage site. What the tourists learn can only be derived from the history which is selected and presented to them. Since history can never be “an objective recall of the past but always a selective interpretation” (Tivers, 2002:187) it raises a dilemma as to which of multiple historical realities is considered the most authentic representation of any cultural heritage site/attraction. Since heritage is about preserving and recreating the past, Ashworth (2008:27) contends that the past can neither be preserved nor created; heritage is about now, not then, and heritage which is not activated in the present does not exist. It can only be re-made or recreated for the use in the present, hence can only be experienced through the contemporary senses and values which are shaped by the present tastes, current political standpoints and by dominant worldviews. Arising from the above is the conclusion that heritage cannot possess any universal, eternal, and inalienable values therefore it cannot be objectively authenticated, which directly contradicts the reliance on authenticity of the products or objective authenticity (Graham, Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000).

Finally, cultural heritage represents a curious case of tourist attractions which completely rely on the provision of mediating services in order to be understood and experienced. Even more curiously not the past and historical importance nor the objective authenticity and uniqueness of cultural heritage but the quality of mediation provided by heritage interpretation and presentation becomes the only determinant of the quality of tourist experience. Therefore ““attractions managers become engineers of experience through the provision of context” (Beeho & Prentice, 1997:76). Ample evidence exist that many of those in charge of engineering the experience have no basic understanding of what the experience is and how it is formed. A widespread provision of *edutainment* at cultural heritage sites is one such proof. Edutainment not only contradicts the underlying principles of serious leisure tourism, but is counterproductive in creating a desired depth of experience preferred by new cultural tourists.

The experience paradigm

Although experience has been well researched in psychology, anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines, Wang (2006:65) maintains that “the literature on the tourist experience as a *gestalt* phenomenon has still been understudied”.

The reasons can be found in the prevalence of the consumer focused studies of the tourist experience which for long dominated the tourism discourse, as well as in the fact that “the nature, context, and possibility of ‘authentic experiences’ remains contested” (McCabe, 2009:28). Scholars tend to agree that subject of feeling cannot be divorced as being separate from that which is stimuli for feeling (Ryan, 2000:122), which is the heritage site. Arguably, as the experience discourse is broad, multidisciplinary and complex, the discussion will narrow to examine the selected theory of the tourist experience as a *gestalt phenomenon* which fits the purpose of this paper. The tourist experience as a *gestalt phenomenon* explores the wholeness of the experience and the main principles of perception. It is operationalised through the constructs of mindfulness and insightfulness explored in relation to the cognitive (rational) or affective (emotional) dimensions of the tourist experience respectively.

Mindfulness

A social theory of mindfulness provides a framework for understanding “the way in which people think and learn in an everyday setting” (Moscardo, 1996:380). It is argued that the mindfulness theory can provide a strong foundation for the development of a theory of tourist experience. Moscardo’s (1996:383) mindfulness model contains two sets of factors, namely setting factors (exhibits and displays, guided tours, signage, maps and other elements) with emphasis on authenticity of the object, and visitor factors (familiarity with the place itself and the historical meaning of the place, motivation for visit, and companions), which influence visitors’ behaviour and cognition at built heritage sites (Moscardo, 1996:382). People bring into any situation or setting their own characteristics which then interact with both the characteristics of the setting and the role they play in that setting, to create either a mindful or mindless state of cognitive functioning and response to the setting.

Mindfulness refers to a state of mind which is sensitive to the context and therefore able to process the information from different perspectives and make novel distinctions between different contexts (Moscardo, 1996:381). Mindful visitors not only actively process the information but also control and influence their own experience. Mindful visitors would most likely learn more, understand more, will be more appreciative of the heritage site, will behave in a more appropriate manner and be more satisfied with their experience. On the contrary, the mindless response to setting factors is triggered by repetitive and traditional exhibits, uninventive use of interpretive media, bad signage, and predictable route design. The visitor factors that create a mindless response to cultural heritage are low interest in content, lack of educational motive and high level of fatigue (Moscardo, 1996:383). Mindless visitors will not learn much, will have little understanding and appreciation for the site, are most likely to behave in an inappropriate manner, and will not be satisfied with their experience.

Insightfulness

McIntosh and Prentice (1999:607) argue that mindfulness as a cognitive concept precedes insightfulness. Moscardo (1996) concedes that mindfulness alone does not guarantee that the experience will be positive or that it will elicit changes in tourist knowledge or awareness. Since tourists are more than cognitive in their response to cultural heritage contexts, McIntosh and Prentice (1999:607) further propose insightfulness as a much broader concept which includes the affective dimension of the tourist experience. The authors define the insightfulness as the search for authenticity, perception and insight. Insightfulness represents “the attainment of emotionally-charged and value-laden personal insights and associations” (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999:608) achieved by each tourist individually.

Both theories of mindfulness and the concept of insightfulness made a valuable theoretical contribution in unpacking the tourist experience as a *gestalt* phenomenon.

The interpretation paradigm

Since heritage attractions cannot ‘speak’ for themselves they rely on the mediating role of mindful (Moscardo, 1996) and insightful (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999) interpretation to unlock the intrinsic meaning and the historical value of cultural heritage. The process of mediation is described as an interrelationship between producers and consumers through more or less continuous activity of engagement and disengagement. It extends beyond the simple provision of information (Tilden, 1997) and its effectiveness is measured against the tourist experience (Macdonald, 2006:124). It is facilitated by a process of *encoding/decoding* which entails “considering the meanings or ‘preferred readings’ that producers attempt to ‘encode’ into cultural products and the meanings that audiences extrapolate or ‘decode’ from this” (Macdonald, 2006:123). The producers try to encode the ‘preferred readings’ of the ‘written-in’ meanings of cultural heritage products and through a process of active engagement influence a desired ‘read-offs’ by visitors (consumers). This theory is central to understanding the process of visitors’ engagement with the site and the role of interpretation in facilitating learning by ensuring that the ‘written in’ core meanings are correctly understood while enhancing mindful tourist experiences beyond the core message. Moscardo (1996:386) proposed the four key principles of mindful interpretation at cultural heritage sites from which the end product should be mindful visitors. These are: it should consist of a variety of experiences; visitors must have control over their experience; interpretation must make connection on a personal level; and, that interpretation needs to challenge visitors.

Evidently, the role of interpretive media is not only to reveal the meaning but to challenge visitors and provoke the emotional responses. Interpretation is “not simply about cognition, but is fundamentally a transformative praxis in which visitors come to re-experience nature or history in a holistic manner” (Ablett & Dyer, 2009:213). Effective heritage interpretation should influence both aspects of tourist experience, namely cognitive (learning, understanding) and affective (empathy, life-changing experience). These two influences of heritage interpretation on visitor’s experience are formulated in revelation and provocation known as Tilden’s (1977) principles of heritage interpretation.

Tilden’s principles of heritage interpretation

The principle of revelation stimulates the cognitive experience of visitors as it states that the main goal of interpretation is to reveal the larger truth lying behind any statement of fact (Tilden, 1977:8). Interpretation is not about dissemination of facts but about creating understanding which relates to visitors’ personal context. The principle of provocation stimulates tourists’ mental engagement (Goulding, 2000:263) while the experiential value of the interpretation is realized through emotional and sensory engagement. It relates to the affective dimension of the tourist experience as it contends that the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction but provocation (Tilden, 1977:9). Interpretation should provoke thinking, learning, and emotional connection to heritage (Ivanovic, 2008). The emotional engagement (affective experience) coupled with an understanding (cognitive experience) derived from learning is expected to result in revelation. By facilitating learning about the core meaning of cultural heritage and inducing emotional response to it, interpretation also “aims to stimulate, facilitate and extend people’s understanding of place so that empathy towards heritage, conservation, culture and landscape can be developed” (Stewart, Hayward, Devlin & Kirby, 1998:257). By doing so, interpretation plays an important role in preservation and conservation of the nation’s cultural heritage by ensuring its sustainability.

The role of tour guides in heritage interpretation

It is worth mentioning that the tour guides play a central role in mediating between tourists and the past of heritage attractions by instilling the preferred meaning and desired read-offs from cultural heritage. Ap and Wang (2001) differentiate between two interpretive functions of tour guides, mediating and cultural broking. While the former refers to “moving beyond telling tourists how to think and feel about their experience” (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006:483), the latter entails encoding the past into a tourist frame of reference through skilful and knowledgeable interpretation. The main role of tour guides is to transform the tourist visits from tours into experiences while their interpretive skills can enhance the quality of tourist experience (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006:483). The

mediating and transformatory role of tour guides in creating insightful tourist experience and resulting in mindful tourists is well researched topic internationally. This said, in South Africa research on tour guides in the experiential context is lacking and there is no available data to facilitate any assessment regarding the effectiveness of interpretation in informing the tourist experiences derived from our cultural heritage products.

The South African paradigm

It is instructive to analyse how South Africa's key tourism stakeholders responded to the main paradigm shifts in the world tourism economy and in turn how that affected the experiential value of our cultural heritage. At the outset, when South Africa re-entered the global tourism market in 1994 it was already in a state of flux with an amalgamation of SITs, consumerism, and a rising experience economy. Tourism in South Africa became an instant success and 'darling' of the world. Driven by a 'goodwill impact' (SAT, 2004:14) the number of tourists between 1994 and 1998 increased from 3.63 million to 5.73 million. By 1998, however, the democracy dividends was eroded (SAT, 2003:24) and the South African government unable to translate the initial success of tourism into a long term strategic vision. The essential order of the day was the "generic spray and pray marketing and increased commoditisation of the offerings by channels, resulted in averaging and low results" (SAT, 2008:44; SAT, 2010b:48). It revealed that South African product development succumbed to a serial reproduction of culture at the time already prevalent in Europe. By 2001 the South African government did not have a growth strategy or annual reports which resulted in four years of persistent tourist stagnation from 1998 to 2001. Arguably, South Africa's product development was driven by a supply mantra: "build it, and they will come" (SAT, 2010b:46).

In 2003 the South African Tourism (SAT) revealed the country's first Tourism Growth Strategy for 2002-2004. It also declared a long overdue shift from production to consumption, stating that: "Consumer segmentation allows South Africa to develop a consumer focused strategy, instead of its previous product driven strategy" (SAT, 2010b:70). Overall, it was evident that SAT "decided to market South Africa as an experience rather than a destination" (Steyn & Spencer, 2011:191). Unfortunately, however, at the moment when SAT switched to its consumption orientated marketing philosophy, the global tourism market was already adapting to the requirements of the experience economy. As South African tourism was reaching the end of the introductory phase of Tourism Industry Life Cycle it warranted an activation of specific strategies appropriate for the stage. One of the recommended actions appropriate for marketing strategy was (and still is) 'Shout': get as many (tourists) as you can (SAT, 2003:63; SAT, 2010b:52). At the same time came a realisation that the country needed to "move away from pushing what we like about South Africa to delivering to consumers

what they want” (SAT, 2010b:48). And what they want is simply “to have a unique experience” (Steyn, Saayman & Nienaber, 2004:97). Evidently South Africa is shouting, tourists are coming, but the question remains: Are we delivering what the tourists want?

Building on the legacy of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup and measurable economic spin-offs from the event in 2010 SAT realised that its marketing efforts should be turned to “people who are worldly, well travelled and are interested in other cultures” (SAT, 2010b:70). For the first time SAT singled out serious leisure, cultural tourists as a preferred market for South African tourism, even though they were already around the country for more than a decade. Since serious leisure tourists are known to be experiential tourists interested in cultural heritage, the question should be asked: Are we delivering what these tourists want?

It is significant to observe that whilst the experience economy had been recognised for two decades ago, SAT made its first reference to tourist experience only in the Tourism Growth Strategy for 2011-2013. The recommendation was that international tourists and domestic travellers should be encouraged “to explore destinations outside their traditional patterns and for this to be successful new products must meet the desired experiences of the consumers” (SAT, 2010b:37). It is unclear how tourists should be encouraged to explore South Africa when in SAT own admittance “our assets are largely unclear in the consumer mind and undifferentiated from the rest of the continent” (SAT, 2010b:46). Even worse, “in the mind of consumers globally, South Africa remains, on the whole, much the same as what it was 10 to 15 years ago. South Africa is still perceived mainly as an adventurous wildlife destination with striking natural beauty” (SAT, 2010b:47). What new products are we delivering and to whom? Again, are we delivering the experiences desired by tourists?

Table 1 discloses that South Africa is failing to delivering what tourists want in respect of cultural and heritage tourism. The relationship between cultural activities and the best experience of international tourists in South Africa clearly reveals an unexpected problem. While it is evident that 39% of Europeans, 46% of tourists from Americas and 40% of Asians are participating in cultural activities the ratings of culture as the best experience is incomparably low, 5%, 7%, and 9% respectively. More worrying is the difference in ratings of international tourists between South African natural (scenic) attractions and cultural heritage as the best experience.

Table 1: Comparison between activities and experiences of international tourists in South Africa

	2008		2009		2010		2011	
Cultural, historical and heritage attractions (%)								
Exp. Act.	Exp. Act.	Exp. Act.	Exp. Act.	Exp. Act.	Exp. Act.	Exp. Act.	Exp. Act.	Exp. Act.
Europe	47	5	44	3	43	5	39	5
Americas	53	4	46	3	48	7	46	7
Asia & Australasia	43	4	35	4	37	8	40	9
Visiting natural attractions (%)								
Europe	77	53	75	60	70	66	64	64
Americas	73	56	68	60	62	62	61	63
Asia & Australasia	60	54	53	56	49	60	46	60
Wildlife attractions (%)								
Europe	62	44	58	42	52	37	50	34
Americas	65	48	57	45	53	40	53	39
Asia & Australasia	49	36	43	32	45	33	43	31

Source: SAT Annual Reports 2009-2012

How it is possible that the scenic beauty referring to natural scenery which is not differentiated from the rest of the continent is the best experience for 64% European, 63% American, and 60% Asian international tourists, while the uniquely South African culture and heritage receives unexpectedly low ratings? This anomaly should be evaluated in light of the fact that experiencing a scenic beauty does not require any kind of mediation in the form of site guides or provision of the interpretive services being the main requirement for interpretation of cultural heritage attractions. The only possible explanation is that South African cultural heritage products are standardised, are not well presented, and are not properly interpreted, and are not properly marketed and packaged.

In the same vein the findings from South African Global Competitiveness Study (GPS) provide further insight into the data from SAT reports. Unexpectedly, the key players from the tourism industry did not have a high regard for the experiential value of South African cultural products. The results of the GPS point to a serious problem with the authenticity, sophistication and insightfulness of our cultural tourism products (SAT, DEAT & DTI, 2004). An inability to connect with the tourists on the emotional level and to generate empathetic response to our cultural heritage is the most worrying deficiency of cultural products on offer in South Africa. Indeed, the findings reveal that international tourists could not connect with our cultural heritage sites on a deeper emotional level as 49% of cultural tourism key players from the tourism industry ascertain that cultural tourism products are clearly underperforming despite their strong potential (SAT, DEAT & DTI, 2004:366). In addition, 49% of tourists felt that cultural tourism products lack authenticity, 46% agree that our cultural tourism products are not sophisticated enough, and 42% agree that tourists lack empathy with the cultural products. The results clearly reveal that the mediating role of

interpretation is not achieving what it is supposed to: to generate memorable, emotional and transformatory tourist experiences. This said, it is remarkable that 72% of tourism firms believe that product offerings in South Africa “meet to a great extent the expectations of the international tourists” (SAT, DEAT & DTI, 2004:171). Furthermore, a belief that “product innovation is not necessary for international consumers” (SAT, DEAT & DTI, 2005:62) is an inaccurate assessment coming from the industry which is mainly responsible for developing and packaging those products which can ensure the satisfaction of tourists.

Conclusion

This short analysis of the main characteristics of the consumption of South African culture and heritage has shown that the situation is alarming as the most authentic and unique classes of South African cultural attractions offer the poorest experiential values. Needless to say that this is happening in conditions of the experience economy which gave rise to a new class of tourists who are in search of authentic and unique as part of self-development. To provide a final answer to a recurring question: Are we delivering what tourists want, there is no doubt that the answer can only be NO.

It must be concluded that while South Africa is shouting, the tourists visiting the country are definitely not getting what they want or expect. In the future, as much as “tourism is coming to be more closely interwoven with learning” (Urry, 1990:129), demand for cultural heritage experiences will continue to dominate tourist consumption. Consequently, in instilling mindful tourist responses and insightful experiences cultural heritage sites have to offer different opportunities to a wide variety of tourists with different levels of motivation for cultural consumption and learning. This can only be achieved by provision of mindful and insightful interpretation.

In South Africa the question still remains: How much do the managers of cultural heritages sites know about the changing nature of tourist experience? As engineers of tourist experience how knowledgeable, interested and capable are they in applying the principles of heritage interpretation and enhance mindful and insightful tourist experience. In order to secure greater visitors’ participation and survive, heritage attractions should concentrate upon increasing visitor choice through versatile interpretation and instilling their offerings with novelty. This said, South African offerings are not instilled with novelty since products are not seen as authentic or sophisticated. Our interpretation does not reveal or provoke since tourists lack empathy with our cultural heritage products. Industry lacks awareness of the product deficiencies and South African government’s strategic response to the main paradigm shifts is with a lag of at least a decade. In the conditions of experience economy, a lack of understanding of the main reasons behind an unacceptably low experiential value of cultural heritage

attractions, is indefensible. Therefore it comes as no surprise that South Africa is not delivering what tourists want because the main stakeholders do not even know what is that (experience) the tourists want.

In order for South Africa to catch up with the main requirements of experience economy and to provide meaningful and insightful experience to tourists, the following actions are recommended:

- Apply the proposed model of tourist experience in research studies which can subsequently inform future national marketing strategies;
- Educate cultural heritage managers in the main principles of mindful heritage interpretation;
- Provide specialised training to site guides at key cultural heritage attractions in South Africa focusing on mindful and insightful delivery of authentic tourist experiences;
- Raise awareness among industry stakeholders about the changing nature of tourist experience which will inform future development and packaging of cultural heritage products; and
- Conduct a national study on which cultural heritage products are currently generating the lowest experiential values and why.

It must be stressed that the tourist experience is probably the most important measure of the success of any destination. In the circumstances of cut-throat competition among emerging destinations and growing evidence of specialised type of cultural heritage tourism such as creative tourism (Rogerson, 2007), South Africa cannot afford to fail on the issue of experiential nature tourist consumption which is well researched in the academic literature. Unless South African cultural heritage products are aligned with the requirements of experiential economy as a matter of urgency, the country will continue to shout but soon the tourists will stop listening.

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