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Mindfulness in Cultural and Wildlife Tourism in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this article were to explore the mindfulness of tourists visiting cultural and wildlife attractions and to establish the role of on-site interpretation in stimulating mindfulness. This was a qualitative study that used grounded theory methodology and reflexivity as an interpretive and critical mode of enquiry. The study was informed by focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews with group members, participant observations and a detailed daily journal recording of the critical instances of 100 tourists visiting cultural and wildlife tourism attractions in two southern African countries over a three-year period. Well-developed on-site interpretation resulted in tourist's mindfulness in both wildlife and cultural settings visited within South Africa. However, on-site interpretation was lacking for Lesotho, resulting in mindlessness among the tourists. A change of mindset is required for on-site interpretation in Lesotho. Qualified and trained tour guides should be at the forefront of interpretation of cultural encounters in Lesotho, to enable cultural tourism to become a meaningful economic driver.

KEYWORDS
Interpretation; grounded theory; reflexivity; sustainable tourism, Mindfulness, southern Africa

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Introduction

It is claimed that tourism is the world's largest economic activity, contributing around 9.8% of global gross domestic product, an estimated USD7.2 trillion, and also creating around 284 million jobs (World Travel &Tourism Council, 2016). Tourism has therefore attracted the attention of many governments especially in developing countries including southern African countries such as Lesotho and South Africa. These countries are promoting tourism as a means of generating income and a source of foreign exchange as

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well as alleviating poverty which is prevalent in these countries (Lesotho Government, 2006; Government of South Africa, 1996).

Since tourism is an experience, it relies heavily on word-of mouth advertising whereby if a tourist has a memorable experience, she/he can share such experience with family and friends resulting in more tourists visiting a destination (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). This calls for measures to ensure sustainability of the industry by attracting tourists who are mindful, that is, tourists who are satisfied with the experience and are also open to new experiences (Frauman & Norman, 2004; Lengyel, 2015; Ganesan, Noor & Jaafar, 2014).

Moscardo (1996: 380 citing Langer, 1993:44) defined mindfulness as a state of mind that results from drawing novel distinctions, examining information from new perspectives, and being sensitive to context. . . . When we are mindful we recognize that there is not a single optimal perspective, but many possible perspectives on the same situation.

Mindful behaviour has also been differentiated from mindless behaviour. Mindless behaviour has been defined as

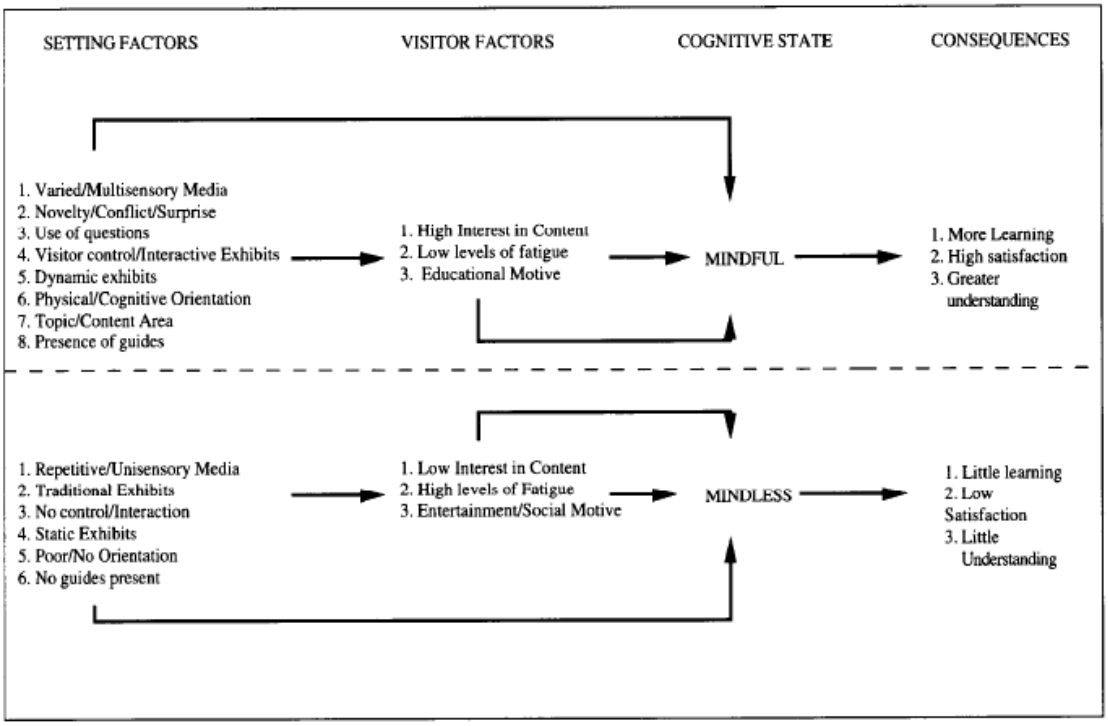
Behaviour that is overdetermined by the past, ….when mindless, one relies on categories and distinctions derived in the past. Mindlessness is single-minded reliance on information without an active awareness of alternative perspectives or alternative uses to which the information could be put. When mindless, the individual relies on structures that have been appropriated from another source (Langer et al., 1989: 140, cited in Moscardo, 1996: 380).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: - the next section briefly reviews the literature whereby the conceptual framework of the study developed by Moscardo (1995) is outlined and the relevant literature is then discussed to highlight the importance of mindfulness in tourist experience. Part three of the paper presents the study sites which describe the route taken by tourists in Lesotho and South Africa. Part four presents the results, discussions. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in part five of the paper.

Literature Review

Mindfulness has been widely researched in tourism studies (Barber & Deale, 2014; Frauman & Norman, 2004; Trinha & Ryan, 2016; Lengyel, 2015). Mindfulness is a growing field of research among tourism researchers, requiring further exploration to understand its importance in sustainability literature (Barber & Deale, 2014). One of the pioneers in applying mindlessness to tourism is Moscardo (1996) who developed a model to illustrate mindfulness and mindlessness in built heritage sites. According to this model whether visitors are mindful or mindless is influenced by a combination of setting and visitor factors (see Figure 1). The setting factors include interpretation, nature of exhibits or displays, tour guiding, etc. the visitor factors include motivation to visit, interest in the content, activities. For this study most of the setting factors would not apply as they relate to build heritage. The focus is on the guided tour. In particular, it examines the role of tour guides in the interpretation of either the wildlife or the cultural encounters and the visitors' factors.

Figure 1: Mindfulness Model of visitor behaviour



Source: Moscardo (1996: 383)

The literature has confirmed that mindful tourists have a deeper understanding of their encounter, they value places visited and behave in a responsible manner (Choe et al., 2014; Walker &Moscardo, 2014; Dutt & Ninov, 2016). In terms of cultural resources, tour guides, especially indigenous tour guides and destination managers can foster mindfulness in tourists by ensuring that tourists respect and develop an understanding of host communities and their culture, and refrain from commoditising the host culture (Walker & Moscardo, 2016). In wildlife areas, mindfulness is attributed to sustainable behaviour whereby tourists do not influence changes in wildlife behaviour (Ballantyne et al., 2011).

Several studies have linked interpretation with mindfulness, and it is argued that interpretation can be instrumental in stimulating mindfulness in tourist behaviour (Weiler et al., 2016). The literature shows that interpretation leads to greater learning, satisfaction and appropriate behaviour in natural and heritage settings (Gelbman & Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Moscardo, 2014). Most studies on interpretation and its role in stimulating mindfulness have been based in Western, developed countries, and carried out by Western scholars. Findings from such studies are not generalisable to non-Western, developing countries such as Lesotho and South Africa (Barre, 2013; Huang et al., 2015; Weiler et al., 2016). While there is a growing interest in interpretation in South Africa, the focus has mainly been on the different types of interpretation

(Ivanovic & Saayman, 2013; Botha et al., 2016). In this study, the role of on-site interpretation in stimulating mindfulness is explored.

Overwhelmingly, studies on mindfulness have been based in World Heritage Sites (Ababneh, 2016) or natural/wildlife areas (Weiler et al., 2016), and there is an underrepresentation of cultural context in rural remote areas (Barre, 2013). Another apparent gap in the literature is the paucity of research comparing destinations with different product offerings (Dutt & Ninov, 2016). The study reported in this paper compares two southern African countries (Lesotho and South Africa), the former offering exclusively cultural tourism and latter offering a combination of cultural and wildlife tourism products.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

1. to explore mindfulness of tourists visiting cultural and wildlife attractions in two southern African countries (Lesotho and South Africa)
2. to establish the role of on-site interpretation in stimulating mindfulness.

Study Sites

The study focused on the sections of the tour that took tourists to Lesotho and South Africa. Lesotho is completely surrounded by South Africa which makes it easy for tourists to travel from South Africa to Lesotho and vice versa. Lesotho tourism is reliant mostly on its wilderness and cultural tourism. South Africa on the other hand has a diversified tourism industry made up of wilderness and wildlife, cultural and heritage, sea and sand attractions, events, festivals and conferences. The route that is the focus of this study exposed tourists to cultural tourism (Lesotho) and cultural and wildlife- based tourism (South Africa).

Places visited in South Africa

The tourists' first destination was Cape Town where they visited Robben Island. This destination symbolises a built heritage, is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site symbolising people's resistance to the apartheid system and is where Nelson Mandela, the first president of the democratic South Africa, was incarcerated for 18 years. The second visit was to the city of Durban where the tourists visited the *muti* (traditional medicine) market, and Shakaland cultural site with its recreated Zulu village outside the town of Eshowe in the Zululand region. This site was created for the filming, in the 1980s, of the TV series 'Shaka Zulu', written by William Faure with Henry Cele in the lead role of the Zulu King Shaka ka Senzangakhona. The site consists of the original royal house and several small conical huts in which guests from other groups may stay. Wildlife encounters in South Africa involved visits to two destinations, the Hluhluwe–Mfolozi Park in the province of KwaZulu–Natal and the Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga province.

Lesotho tour

From Durban, tourists were taken to Lesotho through the Sani mountain pass. This is a one-day trip where the tourists leave Durban early in the morning and return late evening. The day was spent sampling the village life

and observing how the traditional Mosotho (people from Lesotho) live. The two villages visited were Thaba-Phatsoa and Masenkeng. The villagers' livelihood is based on crop and animal farming. The people live traditional lives in traditional huts.

Methodology

Study design

This was an exploratory qualitative study which used grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is useful in interpreting and explaining complex phenomena such as mindfulness. As noted by Daengbuppha et al. (2006), grounded theory requires a researcher to immerse themselves in the field to gain insight and in-depth understanding of complex social issues; in this case, mindfulness in cultural and wildlife encounters is explored. Triangulation of the data sources, which are outlined in the following paragraphs, assists in ensuring internal validity of the research (Daengbuppha et al., 2006). Tourism research, as Tribe (2005) notes, is still battling to develop theories and adopt or extend theories from other disciplines. This calls for more innovative ways of generating theory, including the involvement of practitioners in interpretation who use site-specific action research (Moscardo, 2014). Reflectivity was the philosophical underpinning of the study, whereby the researchers bring their own biases and values into the research, which affects the choice of topic, data analysis and interpretation of findings (Mkono, 2016; Freshwater, 2001). One of the merits of reflexivity is that it promotes the ability to expose complexities, gaps and negotiations between the researcher and the researched (Rose, 1997; Feighery, 2006; Mkono, 2016). The researchers in this study were employed as cultural tour guides for the trips under discussion. They were responsible for interpretation at the hotel where the tourists were staying and up to the point at the destinations where local on-site tour guides took over interpretation. The on-site interpretation was the focus of this study. As accredited and practising tour guides, the researchers were able to reflect, as part of the tour group, on how the group reacted to cultural and wildlife encounters.

Research Instruments

Semi-structured interviews with group members were carried out, participant observations as part of the tour group were made, and detailed daily journal entries were kept. Journal entries included the daily recording of participants' emotional reactions to cultural encounters, their facial expressions, and their spoken and unspoken reactions to cultural and wildlife encounters (Curtin, 2009; Gelbman & Collins-Kreiner, 2016). In-depth discussions and focus group discussions were also held each evening with the group to encourage them to share their responses to their daily encounters.

Population and unit of analysis

The study was conducted with tourists from the United States of America who visited tourist destinations in two southern African countries (Lesotho and South Africa) in 2011, 2012 and 2014 on package tours. The destinations in Lesotho and South were pre-arranged as part and parcel of the itinerary. Each group who visited during the three-year period consisted of around 100 people.

The groups were heterogeneous in terms of demographics, ranging from retirees to couples with children and students on a gap year. The ages of the adults in the groups ranged from early 20s to over 70 years old.

Data analysis

In grounded theory, data analysis happens simultaneously with the presentation of results. The data obtained from unstructured interviews, discussions, field notes and recorded observations were translated into themes using Moscardo (1996) model discussed earlier. Discussions were also held with the tourists to clarify some of the observations that were recorded. Transcripts of records were reviewed by each of the researchers to facilitate agreement on the interpretation of the results. This was to guard against bias from any one researcher in interpreting the results (Stake, 2010).

Results

Level of and quality of interpretation

The South African encounters differed from those in Lesotho in that the South African on-site tour guides were trained and experienced. In addition, they were accredited by the *Culture Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sports Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA), the body responsible for certification of tour guides in South Africa. The* South African site tour guides *had also attained a formal qualification from the South African* National Qualification Framework (level 4). In contrast, the Lesotho tourist guides had only been trained as drivers. Their command of English was limited, which limited their communication with the tourists.

Cultural and wildlife encounters in South Africa

The visits to Robben Island generated mixed reactions from the tourists. Some of the tourists realised and appreciated the cruelty of the apartheid system. Others expressed uneasiness with the whole encounter. One of the tourists summed up their experience in the following terms:

'I did not feel comfortable entering a prison cell. I came here to have fun. The place has an uncomfortable history. I really did not enjoy the tour. I do not enjoy listening to how people suffered during the apartheid era. It really makes one sad.'

During discussions after the visit to the *muti* market, the tourists expressed disbelief, shock, uneasiness and ambiguity in their reactions. Tension and anxiety were sensed among the tourists, most of who stated they wanted to return to the hotel as they were not enjoying themselves. They expressed discomfort with witchcraft and myths associated with it. At the Zulu village at Shakaland, once guests are announced they are led by a village crier, and a local guide fluent in English who explains different aspects of traditional Zulu culture, supplemented with enactment by actors. Although this is a staged act, the tourists seemed to enjoy the façade. They recalled the TV series and their previous perceptions of Zulu culture. They spoke favourably of the encounter and recounted the characters they had seen on television. According to the tourists, the wildlife encounters were the climax of the trip to southern Africa. They all expressed excitement and the fulfilment of their dream to have a close

encounter with African wildlife, especially the 'Big Five' mammals – buffalo, elephant, leopard, lion and rhinoceros. The evening conversations centred on these safari trips, the wildlife and wilderness, and the photography and various animals seen. The tourists happily shared the pictures they had been able to capture during the encounters and their impressions of the animals seen in the wild.

Lesotho cultural encounter

This part of the trip was led by local guides, most of whom spoke very little English. There was no interaction between the tourists and the local host villagers. The tourists were observed to simply gaze at the villagers (Urry, 1990) and they did not interpret the Basotho way of life while they were there. Later discussions focused on their observations and interpretations of the Basotho way of life. According to the tourists, the village life they observed was characterised by extreme poverty and struggles with daily existence. As expressed by one of the tourists:

'The visit to this country [Lesotho] certainly made me realise how privileged and lucky I am to have been born in the US and enjoy the quality of life that I enjoy. It is difficult for me to understand how these people (Basotho) can survive under such difficult conditions. I had never witnessed people living under such extreme poverty.'

Discussion

Our results revealed that tourists in cultural encounters in South Africa could be classified as having been mindful in encounters at Robben Island, and at the Zulu village at Shakaland. They developed a deeper reflection on the apartheid system in South Africa and its injustices which led to the incarceration of many political activists. The same could also be said about the visit to Shakaland where tourists were able to reconnect with the environment and relate to scenes through the recreation of the Shaka kingdom.

The *muti* market experience, however, resulted in a lack of mindfulness in the tourists, or mindlessness. We concluded that the tourists closed their minds to new information (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Choe et al., 2014). They were not prepared to look at the positive side of the traditional medicines widely used in South Africa and learn what they are used for. Similar to the *muti* market encounter, the visit to Lesotho did not yield mindfulness. There was a misunderstanding of Basotho culture and the traditional way of life of the people of Lesotho, masked by an impression of extreme poverty and hardship.

Mindfulness was strongest at the wildlife encounters. Tourists demonstrated 'greater sensitivity to one's environment; more openness to new information; the creation of new categories for structuring perceptions; and a heightened state of involvement' (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). They showed great enthusiasm in discussing what they had learned concerning the behaviour of the wildlife, and shared photos they had taken and their excitement generated by the experience. These results agree with Moscardo's (2014) proposition that motivation can be a strong driver to mindfulness. For these tourists, their main motivation to visit southern Africa was to experience a wildlife safari.

This study confirmed the important role played by tour guides in mediating social exchanges between tourists and their hosts (Ballantyne et al., 2011; Moscardo, 2014; Gelbman & Collins-Kreiner, 2016). The study also confirmed that understanding mindfulness may assist in minimising irrational tourist behaviour (Rosli et al., 2014). At Robben Island and in KwaZulu–Natal, local guides were able to communicate the importance of the sites to tourists. In common with all dark tourism, the interpretation enunciated by former prison inmates at the Robben Island museum was unpleasant but fulfilled its mission of educating the visitors about the site. Wight & Lennon (2007) point out that 'addressing the ethical and spiritual dichotomies is critical in creating meaningful interpretation at dark tourism sites, especially those with controversial political implications'.

The cultural encounters in Lesotho lacked meaningful interpretation by the tourists, hence their misunderstanding of the village way of life. There was therefore a misconception among the tourists that western benchmarks of wealth applied to African traditional settings. Traditional villagers have other resources which make their livelihoods more meaningful and can be used to measure wealth, for example, the number of cattle, goats or sheep they own is more important as measurement of wealth (Ahebwa et al., 2012; Manwa, 2012). Walker & Moscardo (2016) have suggested using local people as tour guides who are better placed to interpret the intricacies of the Basotho culture, eliminating stereotypes and thereby fostering mindfulness in tourists visiting Lesotho (Gelbman & Collins-Kreiner, 2016; Walker & Moscardo, 2016). The findings of the study confirmed that good interpretation by the tour guide encourages tourists to be more active, and tourists may be in a position to reassess the way they view the world (Rosli et al., 2014).

Conclusion

The study makes contribution to visitor studies especially the area of interpretation. In conclusion, based on the typology of mindfulness adopted for this study, we conclude that tourists to southern African cultural and wildlife destinations were both mindful and mindless. They were mindful during cultural encounters at Robben Island, Shakaland and during wildlife encounters. They were mindless in cultural encounters in Lesotho and at the *muti* market.

Recommendations

Training of tour guides is paramount in facilitating meaningful interpretation of cultural encounters. Specialised training of site guides at cultural heritage attractions focusing on mindful and insightful delivery of authentic experiences is key. In Lesotho, for example, English is the official language and there is no justification for employing tour guides who cannot communicate with tourists to facilitate meaningful cultural understanding and exchange.

Future studies

This is a context-based reflexive account. It cannot therefore be generalised to the experiences of all tour guides who offer cultural or natural tourism interpretation in southern Africa. More studies involving tourism practitioners would enhance knowledge of mindfulness in an interpretive setting

of cultural and wildlife tourism in the southern African region. Such studies could also examine the impact of gender and race on mindfulness and mindlessness. Future studies could also target true cultural tourists who visit remote rural areas, and measure their degree of mindfulness.

Disclosure statement

The Authors reported no competing financial interest.

Notes on contributors

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