Cultural tourism and indigenous languages: fostering economic development in Polokwane Local Municipality

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the potential role of indigenous languages in fostering local economic development through cultural-tourism within the Polokwane Local Municipality. As a region rich in cultural diversity and indigenous heritage, Polokwane presents a unique opportunity to leverage its linguistic and cultural assets for sustainable economic growth. This paper discusses how the incorporation of indigenous languages can contribute to various aspects of local economic development, including tourism, entrepreneurship, cultural preservation, and community engagement. Therefore, this conceptual paper uses a traditional literature review and secondary data analysis techniques to discuss trends of research on the relationship between indigenous language, cultural tourism and local economic development.

**Introduction**

In an era of globalization and rapid urbanization, local communities around the world face multifaceted challenges in preserving their cultural heritage and fostering sustainable development (Labadi, Gliberto, Rosetti, Shetabi, & Yildirim, 2021). Moreover, people are lured to opt for globalisation without enabling them to communicate with local and the proximate. This is when globalisation becomes an active agent of cultural destruction (McCarty, 2003.). Caidi and Allard (2005) postulate that language is an essential component of culture; and plays a pivotal role in shaping identities by transmitting knowledge, and facilitating social cohesion. Therefore, in this context, indigenous languages hold a unique significance, embodying the wisdom and traditions of generations while offering a distinctive lens through which to view the world.

The Polokwane Local Municipality is a Category B as determined by the Municipal Demarcation Act, 1998 in terms of Section 4 of the Municipal Structures Act, 1998. The municipality is located in the Capricorn District Municipality, situated in the most northern region of South Africa, in the Limpopo province (Polokwane Annual Report, 2020-2021). The municipality offices are located in Polokwane city, which is the capital city of the Limpopo Province. The Polokwane economic hub is at the centre of the area, which comprises the Central Business District (CBD), industrial area, and a range of social services and well-established formal urban areas servicing the more affluent residents of Polokwane (Chipu, 2011). The municipality encompasses the city of Polokwane and its surrounding areas. The municipal spatial pattern reflects that of the historic apartheid city model, characterised by segregated settlement (Donaldson & Kotze, 2006). Polokwane Local Municipality is known for its diverse cultural heritage, natural attractions, and economic activities. The City of Polokwane (formerly known as Pietersburg, originally established as a rural service centre in 1886) had become a constantly evolving and complex for over the past decades; experiencing phenomenal growth and prosperity in the last century (Donaldson, 2005). Additionally, the city has acquired a striking urban gloss, as a result of the rapidly rising new
middle class and their need for luxury goods (Donaldson, Marais & Nel, E., 2020). However, the city has a huge task to build better local economies, improve local public services, building of a united & non-racial community, promotion of public participation; and the creation of an accountable local government.

Against the backdrop of globalization, urban development, and shifting economic paradigms; indigenous languages in Polokwane Local Municipality are facing unprecedented challenges. This paper delves into the intricate relationship between indigenous languages, cultural tourism, and local economic development within the context of the Polokwane Local Municipality. While economic development has the potential to uplift communities and improve livelihoods, it must be approached with sensitivity to the cultural fabric that defines a community's identity. In this regard, the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages are often overlooked aspects that can greatly influence the trajectory of development initiatives. The paper is conceptual and it uses traditional literature review and secondary data analysis techniques to discuss trends of research on the relationship between indigenous language, cultural tourism and local economic development.

**Literature Review**

**Conceptual and Theoretical Background**

**Defining Indigenous Language in the Context of Polokwane Local Municipality**

Any language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people is indigenous language. Indigenous languages are not only methods of communication, but also extensive and complex systems of knowledge that have developed over millennia (Barnhardt, 2014; Chiswick, Patrinos & Hurst, 2000). Neokleous, Krujalatz and Farely (2020) simply define indigenous language as a language that is spoken regionally by a group of indigenous people. In the context of Polokwane Local Municipality, indigenous languages are the languages spoken by particular ethnic groups in Polokwane City and the surrounding areas and they are distinct in communities of Limpopo province that has been existence over the generations.

The dominant indigenous languages spoken in Polokwane City and the surrounding areas are Sepedi, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. However, there are other indigenous languages spoken in Polokwane local Municipality including Setswana, Isindebele, Siiswati and Shona (Thobejane & Thaba-Nkadimene, 2017). During apartheid, Sepedi was the dominating indigenous language spoken in Polokwane City and the surrounding areas. The dawn of democracy in 1994 brought forth amalgamation of three former homelands namely: Gazankulu (Xitsonga speaking), Venda (Tshivenda speaking) and Lebowa (Sepedi speaking) into one Limpopo provincial government, with Polokwane City as the capital city. Most former administrators from the above mentioned homelands relocated to Polokwane City to form part of the Limpopo provincial government. Hence, Polokwane Local Municipality is rich in cultural diversity.

**Cultural Significance of Indigenous Languages**

“For indigenous peoples, languages not only identify their origin or membership in a community, they also carry the ethical values of their ancestors – the indigenous knowledge systems that make them one with the land and are crucial to their survival and to the hopes and aspirations of their youth” (Degawan, 2019).

Language is a fundamental expression of culture. It is one of the ways people strengthen their community wellbeing, reaffirm their sense of belonging, express their culture, and sustain family connections and communities’ place in society (Thorpe & Galassi, 2014). McCarty (2003) denotes that every language is a living museum and a monument to every culture it has been a vehicle to. Hence, linguistic scientist Frantz Boas consider that culture would not exist without language because language preserves our history and knowledge (Lucy, 2016). Culture is a simultaneous reflection of language, as it influence and shape language (Imai, Kanero & Masuda, 2016; Jiang, 2000). Our way of being and how we see the world is effectively expressed by language usage. The language or languages we use to communicate reflect our cultural background, upbringing, and personal affiliations (Tseng & Fuligni, 2000). Indigenous languages serve as carriers of unique cultural values, stories, and worldviews (Ali, Buergelt, Maypilama, Paton, Smith, & Jehan, 2022). They also help with facilitating intergenerational transmission of knowledge and foster a sense of belonging among community members (Fernández-Llamaraz & Cabeza, 2018). Therefore, indigenous languages are intrinsic to the expression of culture and they preserve culture in a unique way. People’s values, beliefs and customs are communicated distinctively by indigenous languages. In Polokwane Local Municipality, diverse cultures can be conveyed and preserved through the usage of existing indigenous languages.

**Language and Identity**

Indigenous languages carry cultural traditions from one generation to the other (Ergashev & Farxodjonova, 2020). As Polokwane Local Municipality is in the process of undergoing urbanization and modernization, the younger generation's inclination towards dominant languages and cultures poses challenges to the continued vigour of indigenous languages. There is an inseparable and intricate relationship shared between language and identity, noting that language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a powerful vehicle for expressing and shaping one's identity (Tabouret-Keller, 2017). Rabiah (2018) maintains that human beings connect with their roots through language, communicate their thoughts, emotions, and experiences; and they establish bonds.
with others who share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This implies that people identify well with those they share the same language and culture with.

Shared stories, traditions, and values have language serving as their repository by providing a sense of belonging and continuity across generations. Whether it's the accent, dialect, or specific words we use, language contribute to our unique identity tapestry (Noaim & Alnaim, 2023). Additionally, the complexity of our identities is emphasised by the ability to switch between languages, known as code-switching. The complexity of our identities allow us to navigate different social contexts and bridge diverse communities (Chung, 2006). In this way, language not only shapes how we perceive ourselves but also how others perceive and interact with us, ultimately playing an indispensable role in the identity.

**Local Economic Development in the South African context**

Local Economic Development (LED) is a place-based multi-dimensional approach to stimulate economic growth and improve the overall quality of life within a specific geographic area, typically at the municipal or regional level. LED aim to enhance the economic well-being of a community by leveraging its existing assets, resources, and potential while addressing challenges and fostering sustainability (Kamara, 2017; Misener & Schullenkopf, 2016). Helmsing (2003) describes LED as a partnership establishment process between local governments, community-based groups and the private sector to manage existing resources in order to stimulate the economy of a well-defined territory. LED puts more emphasis on local control, using the potentials of human, institutional and physical resources.

In the South African context, Local Economic Development refers to a comprehensive and participatory approach aimed at stimulating economic growth, improving living conditions, and reducing poverty at the local level (Patterson, 2008; Rogerson, 2018). Rodriguez-Pose (2008) describes LED as an integrated approach to development rather than a "one size fits all" solution, with its core purpose being mobilising the local economic potential by bringing innovation to all its growth dimensions. The economic growth dimension ranges from infrastructure, to local Small & Medium Enterprises (SME’s) and their skills, to attracting foreign direct investment, fostering territorial competitiveness, strengthening local institutions, better management of the development process and internalising local resources.

Given South Africa's history of apartheid and socio-economic inequalities, LED plays a vital role in addressing these challenges by fostering sustainable development, job creation, and equitable distribution of resources within municipalities and regions (Sewell, Desai, Mutsaa & Lottering, 2019). Hence, post-apartheid South Africa has pursued LED as a means to empower historically marginalized communities, promote inclusive economic activities, and enhance the overall quality of life (Rogerson, 2018). This is observed by the collaboration the government has with the private sector stakeholders, civil society organizations, and local communities. The collaboration has an aim to design and implement strategies that leverage the unique strengths and potential of each locality. By focusing on sectors that align with local assets and market demands, such as agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, and services, LED strives to create jobs, uplift incomes, and encourage entrepreneurship. Moreover, the participatory nature of LED in South Africa ensures that community members take part in the decision-making processes, enabling them to have a say in shaping their economic futures (Tosun, 2000). This approach ensures that genuine aspirations or needs are attended to. However, there are challenges associated with implementing LED plans including, capacity constraints, institutional coordination, and disparities in access to resources (Deininger, 1999). As South Africa seeks to navigate its complex socio-economic landscape, Local Economic Development remains a pivotal strategy in driving inclusive growth and creating a more just and equitable society.

In South Africa, the LED framework is pro-poor and since the inception of the democratic South Africa LED has been a growing feature of development planning. However, the major direction taken by LED planning in South Africa’s cities evidence a strong pro-growth bias (Rogerson, 2006; Rogerson, 2010). Abrahams (2018) suggest that one of the objectives of the national government’s promotion of LED in South Africa is to create sustainable local economies. Hence, the South African policy development experience of LED and applied practices is distinguished by the emphasis on local-authority-driven processes. For local governments to achieve economic growth and poverty eradication, the 2006 DPLG policy framework provide necessary guidance by introducing notions of local competitive advantage (Rogerson, 2010). However, in its quest for inclusive economic growth, Local Economic Development is implemented by the South African government to mitigate unemployment and increase tax bases within the jurisdiction of municipalities (Mashabela, 2020).

**Indigenous languages and local economic development in Polokwane Local Municipality**

Indigenous languages can play a crucial role in the cultural and social fabric of communities, and their preservation. The promotion of indigenous languages can have a positive impact on local economic development through cultural tourism.

**Cultural Tourism and Heritage Preservation**

Tourism has a vital role to play in the development of different destinations all around the world. Visitors taking part in various activities including living cultures that involves contemporary art or music for cultural fulfilment and enjoyment is termed as cultural tourism (Mousavi, Doratli, Mousavi & Moradijahari, 2016). However, cultural tourism can be domestic or international, and can include other elements of modern culture (Ryan & Aicken, 2005). Jordan and Jolliffe (2013) describe cultural tourism as movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as performing arts, cultural tours, cultural festivals & other cultural events, visits
to sites & monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art, and many other cultural activities. United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2011) further explain that heritage or culture can be categorised into resources such as natural areas, buildings or museums, archives and documents; and the tourism influenced by visiting the above mentioned also represent cultural tourism. Hence, tangible and intangible products, such as cultural performances, theatres, cultural concerts, festivals and local cuisine also constitute cultural tourism (Horaira & Devi, 2021; Richards, 2018). Mbaiwa (2005) argues that cultural tourism can be a strong force for local economic development in South Africa and cites examples such as Cape Town’s Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA) which attracts thousands of tourists a year. The economic spinoffs do not only arise from cultural tourism or cultural programs, but also on spending for other commodities and services including accommodation, health spars, cousins, night clubs, etc.

Polokwane Local Municipality provides a perfect setting for cultural tourism to thrive due to its rich cultural heritage. Polokwane Local Municipality is sort a melting-pot of Limpopo province with diverse cultures, since it is housing the capital city of Limpopo province, Polokwane city.

Below is a table with the list of 10 countries known for their cultural tourism. The countries were chosen because of their rankings and popularity globally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Cultural Tourism the country is renowned for</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Italy is renowned for its rich history, art, architecture, and cultural heritage. Cities like Rome, Florence, and Venice are major cultural hubs (Bhattacharyya, 2023).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>France boasts a diverse cultural scene, with iconic landmarks such as the Louvre Museum, Eiffel Tower, and the Palace of Versailles (Boukabou, 2019).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Spain is famous for its festivals, historic cities like Barcelona and Madrid, and its vibrant and diverse culture (Yashoaa, Noori, Alsiliq &amp; Khurrufa, 2023).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Japan offers a unique blend of ancient traditions and modern innovation, with attractions like Kyoto's temples and Tokyo's pop culture (Milner, 2022).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Greece is known for its ancient history, archaeological sites, and picturesque islands like Santorini and Mykonos (Xandona &amp; Marhabo, 2023).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>India's rich cultural diversity includes historical monuments like the Taj Mahal, spiritual centres, and a vibrant arts scene (Purohit, 2021).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>China's cultural tourism is highlighted by its ancient history, the Great Wall, Terracotta Army, and traditional arts (Zhang &amp; Long, 2023).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Egypt's ancient civilization, with the Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx, attracts cultural enthusiasts from around the world (Ivashov, Bechtel, Razevig, Capineri &amp; Inagaki, 2021).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico offers a vibrant culture, with ancient Mayan and Aztec ruins, colonial architecture, and colourful traditions (Urrutia, 2022).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Turkey bridges the gap between Europe and Asia, offering a unique blend of cultures, historical sites like Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, and stunning landscapes (Kula &amp; Karaca, 2023).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linking Indigenous Language with Cultural Tourism for Economic Development

Indigenous language can play a significant role in the intersection of cultural tourism and economic development for Polokwane Local Municipality. The mix of cultural tourism with indigenous language can contribute to economic growth in the following ways:

Unique Selling Point

The unique selling point of indigenous language is that they are an integral part of cultural identity. Incorporating indigenous language into cultural tourism sets the tourism experiences apart from generic tourist attractions. Visitors are often drawn to authentic and unique encounters. Moreover, the presence of indigenous languages can enhance the overall appeal of the tourism offerings (Apostolakis, 2017). Indigenous languages possess a captivating allure that can serve as a powerful catalyst for cultural tourism within the Polokwane Local Municipality. The rich tapestry of distinct indigenous languages spoken in Polokwane Local Municipality (sePedi, tshiVenda, isiNdebele, seTswana, siSwati and xiTsonga), makes this region to become a treasure trove for travellers seeking authentic and immersive cultural experiences (Mohale, 2020).

Indigenous languages reflect the area's historical roots and also encapsulate the vibrant traditions, beliefs, and stories of the local communities (Michel, 2012). Moreover, visitors have the remarkable opportunity to engage with local residents in their native tongues, forging meaningful connections that transcend mere tourism and delve into the heart of the Polokwane Local Municipality's cultural essence. Consequently, this linguistic diversity becomes a unique selling point, offering a chance to learn indigenous
languages, partake in traditional rituals, and comprehend the nuances of folklore that have been passed down through generations. As linguistic diversity faces the challenges of globalization, promoting these indigenous languages in the context of cultural tourism becomes an avenue for their preservation and revival (Lo Bianco, 2014). The use of native languages in guided tours, storytelling sessions, and workshops fosters a sense of pride among local communities, spurring interest in language revitalization efforts.

**Cultural Events and Festivals**

Indigenous language can be a central theme in cultural events and festivals, offering opportunities for language-cantered performances, ceremonies, and activities (Whitney & Dunn, 2014). These events can attract larger numbers of tourists, thus boosting local economies through increased tourism-related spending. Indigenous language cultural events and festivals play a pivotal role in bolstering cultural tourism within the Polokwane Local Municipality. These vibrant cultural events showcase the richness of the Limpopo languages spoken in Polokwane Local Municipality, and they offer visitors a unique window into the heart of the local culture.

Through traditional music, dance, storytelling, and performances conducted in these languages, tourists are granted an immersive experience that goes beyond mere observation, allowing them to actively engage and connect with the indigenous heritage (Phipps & Slater, 2010). Wahyuningtyas, Kusuma, Febrianita and Achmad (2021) indicate that cultural events serve as platforms for preserving linguistic traditions and also foster a sense of unity and pride among the local communities. The visitors of Polokwane Local Municipality for cultural events become part of a shared celebration, deepening their appreciation for the languages and customs that define the municipality's identity. Additionally, the exposure to these indigenous languages through cultural events contributes to a broader understanding of the cultural nuances and historical narratives of the region. In essence, indigenous language cultural events and festivals stand as captivating gateways for tourists to unravel the authentic cultural mosaic of the Polokwane Local Municipality.

Polokwane City is known for hosting the annual Mapungubwe Cultural Festival with various programs ranging from carnival festival, comedy festival, youth festival and jazz festival. Stalls are always set up to sell cultural artifacts and many other indigenous products. Secondly, the city holds the annual Limpopo Music Awards; a project with the aim of showcasing Limpopo’s talents and promoting Limpopo’s indigenous languages. The project also unite the community by bringing together music lovers, artists, industry stakeholders, and sponsors to foster a sense of unity and support within the local music community. Furthermore, the awards celebrate and promote Limpopo's unique cultural heritage through music, encouraging artists to draw inspiration from their roots. Polokwane Local Municipality still needs to host many other indigenous language propelled cultural events due to the cultural diversity in the city and the surrounding areas. These events have the potential to boost local economic development and they inject a sum of funds to other business sectors (Hospitality, Restaurant, Casino, Clothing etc).

**Cultural Products and Artisan Goods**

Indigenous language is the foundation in the creation of cultural products and artisan goods that contribute to the flourishing cultural tourism scene within the Polokwane Local Municipality (Landry, 2012). Bendix (2009) indicates that indigenous languages can be incorporated into the creation of cultural products, such as traditional crafts, artworks, and literature. These products can boost local economy when sold to tourists as souvenirs, providing a source of income for local artisans and entrepreneurs. The languages spoken in Polokwane Local Municipality infuse a distinct and authentic essence into a range of handicrafts, artworks, and merchandise. Skilled local artisans can skilfully incorporate indigenous language elements into their creations, resulting in products that are not only visually appealing but also deeply rooted in the area's cultural heritage.

Tourists have the opportunity to explore bustling markets and craft fairs that showcase an array of products adorned with indigenous language motifs, patterns, and texts (Gupta, 2021). These can range from intricately woven textiles to intricately carved wooden sculptures, these items offer visitors tangible connections to the linguistic and cultural traditions of the municipality. Beyond their visual appeal, these cultural products also carry stories, beliefs, and histories that are shared through the indigenous languages they feature.

**Community-Based Tourism Initiatives**

Indigenous communities can establish community-based tourism initiatives that are centred around their languages and cultural practices (Whitney-Squire, 2019). These initiatives can lead to job creation for community members, including tour guides, language instructors, cooks, and artisans. Indigenous languages serve as the heartbeat of community-based tourism initiatives, breathing life into cultural exploration (Whitney-Squire, Wright & Alsop, 2018). The initiatives anchored in indigenous languages spoken in the Polokwane local municipal area can empower local communities to showcase their traditions, heritage, and ways of life in an authentic manner. Community members of Polokwane Local Municipality, with the aid of indigenous languages can become proud narrators of their own stories, guide visitors through ancestral landscapes, share folklore, and partake in age-old rituals. This immersive approach not only imparts knowledge but also encourages cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect. In essence, indigenous languages are pivotal in creating an enriching platform for tourists to engage with the soul of the Polokwane Local Municipality, while empowering communities to safeguard and share their heritage.
Digital and Virtual Experiences

Considering that we are living in the digital age, indigenous languages can also be integrated into digital and virtual tourism experiences, such as mobile apps, virtual reality tours, and online language lessons (Blyth, 2018). These platforms can reach a wider audience and generate income through online streaming, downloads or subscriptions. Incorporating indigenous languages into digital and virtual experiences represents a powerful tool for enriching cultural tourism. This can enable travellers to embark on immersive journeys that transcend geographical boundaries. Liaw (2006) argue that these digital encounters not only provide insight into indigenous cultures and traditions but also offer an opportunity to learn and engage with the languages themselves. As a result, digital and virtual experiences not only contribute to the economic development of communities by attracting a broader audience but also serve as pivotal agents in the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages, ensuring that these linguistic treasures endure for generations to come.

One of the digital and virtual experience that can work for Polokwane Local Municipality is indigenous digital story telling because indigenous digital storytelling provides opportunities for indigenous peoples to control the images and structures.

“Indigenous digital storytelling has the potential to integrate indigenous artifacts, sacred places, and stories in innovative new ways undreamt of between the margins of the white page” (Iseke & Moore, 2011).

Exploring these digital and virtual platforms can generate revenue through online streaming and views in digital platforms such as Sportify, You-Tube etc whereby the more viewers lead to revenue to the content creators. This creates opportunities at the global stage for the communities of Polokwane Local municipality.

Collaborative Partnerships

Collaborating with linguists, cultural organizations, universities, and tourism agencies around Polokwane Local Municipality can lead to the development of well-designed and culturally sensitive language and cultural tourism programs. These partnerships can provide communities with expertise, resources, and access to a broader market and therefore boosting the economy. Through the convergence of indigenous communities, government bodies, cultural organizations, and tourism experts, these partnerships unlock a realm of economic opportunities. The collective knowledge, resources, and perspectives channelled through these collaborations not only amplify the economic benefits of tourism but also contribute significantly to the revitalization and preservation of indigenous languages, fostering a deeper appreciation of the rich tapestry of our world's cultural diversity.

Polokwane Local Municipality hosts University of Limpopo, Tshwane University of Technology, MANCOSA, and University of South Africa. The collaboration of these universities through research and innovation initiatives can lead to effective cultural tourism projects that can contribute to the economic development of Polokwane Local Municipality.

Conclusions

In summary, indigenous languages can serve as a valuable asset in cultural tourism, contributing to economic development by offering unique experiences, creating revenue streams, and promoting cultural preservation. However, it is crucial that these efforts are conducted in a way that respects the cultural significance of the indigenous languages and involves the active participation of the Indigenous communities involved. This paper highlights the potential benefits of incorporating indigenous languages for local economic development through cultural tourism in the Polokwane Local Municipality. It underscores the need for community-driven initiatives, collaboration, and innovative strategies to harness the power of linguistic diversity for the betterment of the local economy and the preservation of indigenous culture. The integration of indigenous languages into local government development initiatives is also a powerful way to promote cultural diversity, social inclusion, and sustainable development. By recognizing the value of indigenous languages and working in collaboration with indigenous communities, local governments can foster a more equitable and culturally rich environment that economically benefits everyone within the community. Indigenous languages are closely tied to traditional cultural practices, stories, and histories. Promoting and preserving these languages can attract tourists interested in experiencing authentic indigenous culture. This can lead to increased economic activity in terms of tourism-related services, such as guided tours, accommodations, local crafts, and more.

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