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FACTORS INFLUENCING COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE IN THE TOURISM SECTOR: STAKEHOLDER REFLECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the factors influencing collaborative governance between the public and private sectors in tourism. Employing an explorative qualitative research approach, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders in the tourism sector to explore participants' experiences and insights regarding the barriers to effective collective governance. The data were analysed thematically to extract key concepts aligned with the study objectives. The findings suggest that lack of transformation in tourism and hospitality, corrupt practices, legal and regulatory bottlenecks, divergent interests, and a lack of trust among stakeholders inhibit effective collaborative governance in the tourism industry. The study makes a modest contribution to the discourse surrounding collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors of tourism within emerging economy contexts.

Keywords: collaborative governance, South Africa, stakeholder engagement, sustainable rural development, tourism



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AZ EGYÜTTMŰKÖDÉSES IRÁNYÍTÁST BEFOLYÁSOLÓ TÉNYEZŐK A TURISZTIKAI ÁGAZBAN: AZ ÉRDEKELT SZEREPLŐK REFLEXIÓI

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ABSZTRAKT

A tanulmány az állami és a magánszektor közötti együttműködést befolyásoló tényezőket vizsgálja a turisztikai ágazatban. Feltáró jellegű kvalitatív kutatási megközelítést alkalmazva, mélyreható, félig strukturált interjúk készültek a turisztikai ágazat érdekelt szereplőivel, hogy megismerjük az érintettek tapasztalatait és meglátásait a hatékony kollektív irányítás előtt álló akadályok terén. Az adatokat tematikusan elemeztük, hogy feltárjuk a tanulmány céljaival összhangban álló kulcstényezőket. Az eredmények arra utalnak, hogy a turizmus és a vendéglátás területén tapasztalható átalakulás hiánya, a korrump gyakorlatok, a jogi és szabályozási szűk keresztmetszetek, az eltérő érdekek és az érdekelt felek közötti bizalom hiánya gátolja a hatékony együttműködésen alapuló menedzsmentet a turisztikai ágazatban. A tanulmány szerény mértékben hozzá kíván járulni a turizmus állami és magánszektorai közötti együttműködési erőfeszítéseket övező diskurzustól a feltörekvő gazdaságok kontextusában.

Kulcsszavak: együttműködésen alapuló irányítás, Dél-Afrika, érdekelt felek bevonása, fenntartható vidékfejlesztés, turizmus

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1. Introduction

The multifaceted nature of the tourism industry renders it a complex phenomenon for analysis, as it is characterised by links to the social, political, cultural, and economic aspects of a destination (Bunghez, 2016). Despite these complications, tourism has become a vital component of local governance, particularly in the areas of economic growth, employment creation, cultural exchange, and global connectivity (Negassa, 2024; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024). Many local governments have recognised tourism as a key driver of economic development, viewing it as a sector facilitating rapid infrastructural advancement and making substantial contributions to environmental management, among other benefits (Negassa, 2024). However, for these benefits to materialise, emphasis must be placed on fostering effective multi-stakeholder interactions aimed at sustainable local tourism development.

Worku & Tessema (2018) emphasise the importance of purposeful collaboration between the public and private sectors, guided by shared visions for the future, to achieve tourism development objectives. They argue that only through such collaboration can the industry reach its potential, enhance the visitor experience, and generate lasting, positive impacts on local economies.

The World Bank (2019) similarly underscores the significance of collaboration between the public and private sectors, noting that such partnerships often lead to sustainable development and growth of tourist regions. Effective collaboration facilitates the pooling of resources and expertise, as well as shared knowledge from both sectors, which can lead to more effective and efficient solutions to complex societal challenges (Ongaro & Massey, 2016). From the perspective of developing countries, local economic development is often centred on tourism as a means to address pressing socio-economic needs (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018).

This study explored the factors that either hinder or promote collaborative governance between the public and private sectors of tourism in South Africa. The argument is that the tourism industry frequently struggles to align the varied interests of stakeholders, with this diversity often limiting collaborative governance. Addressing these challenges requires synergy between the two sectors to produce inclusive and sustainable solutions that support tourism development at the local level (Kwesiga & Le Roux, 2015).

In the existing literature, rigid institutional frameworks and governance structures are frequently cited as major barriers to collaborative governance in tourism (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018). Another key obstacle is the misalignment of interests and objectives between the sectors. While the public sector focuses on delivering public goods and services, implementing relevant policies, and ensuring regulatory compliance, the private sector is predominantly driven by profit motives and market competitiveness. These differing priorities often result in a misalignment of tourism development goals, making it difficult to find common ground for collaboration. This dilemma necessitates empirical inquiry into the drivers and inhibitors of collaborative governance, with the aim of proposing lasting solutions to stimulate local economic

development through tourism. On the basis of this, the following two research questions are formulated for this study:

Q1: What are the key barriers to effective collaborative governance between public and private sector stakeholders in the tourism industry of emerging economies?

Q2: How do stakeholder perceptions and experiences shape the dynamics of public–private collaboration in the tourism sector in rural contexts?

In terms of structure, the next section presents a detailed literature review and theoretical justification for the research. This is followed by a description and justification of the research methods used. The subsequent section presents the study’s findings and offers a discussion thereof. Finally, the conclusion is drawn, accompanied by relevant recommendations and contributions of the research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Overview of tourism

Promoting tourism has been a key strategy for economic upliftment, community development, and poverty alleviation in developing destinations of the Global South (Binns & Nel, 2002; Rogerson & Sixaba, 2021). This is based on tourism’s broad economic, social, and environmental implications, which can generate numerous positive outcomes for host destinations (Mhlabane et al., 2023; Mazibuko et al., 2024). Many scholars have contended that the tourism industry delivers essential socio-economic benefits to host destinations, particularly in developing regions (Khayrulloevna, 2020; Mazibuko et al., 2024). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO] (2020), one of tourism’s major economic contributions is job creation. The organisation reported that in 2019, the tourism sector contributed approximately 10% of global GDP and supported one in ten jobs worldwide, underlining its importance as a significant employer.

Tourism also yields socio-cultural benefits, such as fostering cross-cultural exchange, enhancing community development, and promoting cultural preservation (Mazibuko et al., 2024). Richards (2018) posits that tourism serves as a bridge between cultures, promoting mutual understanding and tolerance among people from different backgrounds, thereby enriching local experiences. This cultural engagement not only enhances visitor experiences but also provides local communities with opportunities to showcase their traditions, heritage, and way of life, fostering a sense of pride and identity (Timothy, 2011).

In addition to economic and socio-cultural impacts, tourism affects the environment both positively and negatively. A direct consequence of tourism is the consumption of natural resources—both renewable and non-renewable—used in the development of tourism infrastructure (Gazta, 2018). On the positive side, tourism can support environmental management by promoting the establishment of protected areas such as national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and marine reserves (Chinhanga et al., 2024). For example, many tourism destinations have designated conservation zones to attract eco-tourists, thereby protecting biodiversity (Honey, 1999; Chinhanga et al., 2024).

Despite its potential, tourism in the Global South has often failed to fulfil its promise due to limited or ineffective collaboration. Worku & Tessema (2018) argue that tourism can only serve as a driver of socio-economic development when collaboration between public and private sectors forms the foundation of tourism planning and implementation. Effective stakeholder collaboration is thus essential for achieving economic growth, environmental sustainability, social equity, and inclusive development at the destination level.

2.2. Collaborative governance theory in context

This study is grounded in the theoretical construct of collaborative governance in tourism development. The concept of collaborative governance was first introduced by Donahue of Harvard University in 2004 and was later revisited in 2008 with Zeckhauser in relation to public-private collaboration. It refers to the engagement of one or more public agencies that directly involve non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative, focusing on the making or implementation of public policies or the management of public programmes or assets (Sun, 2017; Wang & Ran, 2023). Emerson et al. (2012) define collaborative governance as the processes and structures of public policy decision-making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and the public, private, and civic spheres to achieve a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished. In this regard, collaboration represents broader acceptance of a policy or decision (Worku & Tessema, 2018; Ramukumba, 2025). The key strength of collaborative governance lies in its capacity to leverage diverse expertise and resources by combining stakeholders with varying perspectives and interests, driving innovation and enhancing policy implementation, particularly in tourism development (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Ramukumba, 2025).

In the pursuit of sustainable tourism development, collaboration among the public sector, private sector, and local communities ensures that economic growth aligns with environmental sustainability and social equity, as enshrined in the principles of sustainability for tourism development (Chinhanga et al., 2024; Ramukumba, 2025). It is evident that public organisations act as initiators of collaboration, not only among themselves but also in bridging the public-private divide. Voets et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of a genuine joint decision-making process across all sectoral divides, wherein all stakeholders strive to reach consensus. However, in tourism, successful collaborative governance requires trust, effective communication, and a shared vision among stakeholders, with trust-building being a gradual process essential for meaningful cooperation and the avoidance of conflict (Vangen & Huxham, 2003; Wang & Ran, 2023). As tourism continues to grow globally, collaborative governance provides a framework for balancing its economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Ramukumba (2025) asserts that this process leads to improved solutions to problems, while effectively engaging multiple interested and affected parties in tourism development. He argues that, due to its

integrative nature, collaborative governance in tourism provides a sustainable alternative to traditional development approaches, particularly as it draws upon comprehensive and strategic planning. Therefore, this study argues that collaborative governance is a critical mechanism for achieving effective and sustainable tourism development.

2.3. Barriers to collaboration

Despite the potential of tourism when collaborative governance is central to developmental initiatives, several factors continue to pose significant challenges to its realisation. Identifying and understanding these barriers is essential for developing strategies that promote successful collaboration. Research has shown that the primary challenge is the conflicting objectives and priorities of stakeholders, which can obstruct collaboration and hinder the attainment of mutually beneficial outcomes (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). Moreover, differences in organisational cultures, values, and decision-making processes can impede effective collaboration in tourism (Kapucu, 2006; Ramukumba, 2025). Institutional constraints – including insufficient financial and human resources – present another barrier to effective collaboration and governance (Rhodes et al., 2015).

A lack of trust and communication between the public and private sectors has been pointed out as being particularly influential in obstructing collaborative efforts in tourism (Nyikana et al., 2021). Building trust among stakeholders is vital for fostering cooperation and enhancing information-sharing, which, in turn, supports more progressive developmental pathways (Forrer, 2016). Furthermore, power dynamics and political factors can hinder collaboration. In this regard, organisational politics, competition for influence, and power imbalances can inhibit the formation of mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborative initiatives (Meijer, 2015). Azizpour & Fathizadeh (2016) argue that weak legal frameworks and deficiencies in the policy-making process represent significant challenges to collaboration in the tourism sector. Similarly, Tshehla (2018) found that the effectiveness of public–private partnerships (PPPs) in the tourism sector is undermined by poor planning, skills shortages, lack of stakeholder participation, imbalanced risk allocation, and impractical PPP policies. Furthermore, Worku & Tessema (2018) identified a lack of government commitment, financial limitations, and insufficient workforce capacity as challenges contributing to the weak collaboration between the public and private tourism sectors.

Wanner & Pröbstl-Haider (2019) assert that stakeholder participation in collaborative governance in the tourism sector is constrained by socio-cultural factors (such as centralised processes, limited coordination, and restricted information-sharing), structural factors (such as regulatory limitations and lack of expertise), and conflicting interests. Xu et al. (2023) found that corruption has a negative impact on tourism development and represents a significant challenge that must be addressed. Conversely, Dube & Nhamo (2024) observed that technological shifts in meetings and conferences, as well as concerns around employee mental health, also impede collaboration in the tourism sector. Lekgau

et al. (2024) highlighted the lack of resources as a central challenge affecting PPPs in relation to inclusive tourism development in Global South countries. Dias et al. (2024) echoed this concern, arguing that many obstacles persist in achieving sustainable tourism development. They pointed specifically to a lack of long-term vision and poor integration of the private sector's practical experience into public policy. Similarly, Rogerson & Sixaba (2021) noted that, in the South African context, the legacy of apartheid continues to shape tourism development, with policies often formulated without sufficient consultation, inclusivity, or representation. Thus, there is a clear need to strengthen collaborative governance through deliberate actions aimed at fostering a conducive environment for partnership between the public and private sectors.

2.4. Drivers of collaboration in the tourism sector

A key driver of collaboration is the recognition of interdependence and shared goals between the public and private sectors (Ahn et al., 2020). Studies have shown that when stakeholders recognise their mutual dependence and the need for collective action, collaboration becomes more likely and meaningful progress is achieved in tourism development (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Another important driver of collaboration is the potential for resource leveraging and enhanced efficiency through optimal use of assets (Nyikana et al., 2021). Collaboration allows organisations to pool their resources, expertise, and capabilities to attain outcomes that would be difficult to achieve independently (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). This synergy can result in cost savings and improved efficiency in delivering public services and executing development projects, including in the tourism domain.

The drive for innovation and improved outcomes also motivates collaboration. Engaging in joint initiatives enables the public and private sectors to draw from diverse perspectives, knowledge bases, and expertise, thereby fostering innovative solutions and enhanced service delivery (Bryson et al., 2006; Ramukumba, 2025). As such, collaboration supports learning, experimentation, and the adoption of best practices to address complex challenges within tourism development.

Hodge et al. (2010) posit that the need for shared accountability and risk-sharing also encourages collaborative efforts. In sectors such as infrastructure or environmental conservation – where risks and responsibilities are commonly shared between public and private actors – collaboration facilitates coordinated risk management and collective accountability. The expectation is that this would similarly benefit tourism and its development processes. Additionally, political support and favourable policy frameworks are identified as enablers of collaboration. When governments promote collaborative cultures through supportive legislation, capacity-building, and incentives, stakeholders are more inclined to engage in such initiatives (Huxham & Vangen, 2005).

The presence of strong leadership and champions of collaboration further catalyses cooperative action. Visionary leaders who advocate for collaboration and involve stakeholders can inspire joint action and cultivate a collaborative ethos (Gray, 1989). These

leaders can mobilise resources, build trust, and generate opportunities for collaboration in tourism, effectively overcoming barriers to partnership. Lekgau et al. (2024) argue that while PPPs have played a pivotal role in promoting inclusive tourism growth, these partnerships must be aligned with destination development priorities. The following section of the paper outlines and justifies the research methodology employed in this study.

3. Methodology

3.1. Background to the study area

This study was conducted in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa, which is characterised by both a diverse economic landscape and significant development needs (Mhlabane et al., 2023). Mpumalanga is renowned for being part of the world-famous Kruger National Park and for its wide array of other natural attractions within its borders, resulting in its designation as a leading ecotourism destination globally (Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency, 2020). While Mpumalanga possesses immense potential, it also faces several socio-economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to basic services, especially in the rural areas (National Planning Commission, 2011; Mhlabane et al., 2023). Addressing these challenges necessitates effective collaboration and synergy between the public and private sectors to provide solutions that are inclusive, sustainable, and impactful (Kwesiga & Le Roux, 2015). However, bureaucratic hurdles, complex legal frameworks, and unclear roles and responsibilities in Mpumalanga may impede effective collaboration in tourism (Mthombathi, 2018). Therefore, this study sought to explore the factors that influence effective collaborative governance in the province.

3.2. Research design, data collection and analysis

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research approach to address the research aim. Face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders (n=12) in tourism were conducted. This approach enabled deeper insights into participants' feelings, ideas, and experiences related to tourism development and collaborative governance. Using a purposive sampling strategy, key stakeholders directly engaged in collaborative initiatives, such as government officials, private sector representatives, and community leaders, were identified and invited to participate in the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect the data from the 12 participants. Interviews were concluded with 12 participants, as data saturation had been reached at 10, with no new information emerging. These participants were selected based on their in-depth knowledge, involvement, experience, and exposure to tourism and its development (Table 1). The interviews were conducted face-to-face, with each interview lasting on average 45 minutes. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study before the interview, and all agreed to be recorded. The thematic focus of the interviews, based on

gaps in the literature reviewed and the research questions included: key factors that affect collaboration between the public and private sectors of tourism in rural areas, the role of collaborative governance in addressing social ills such as youth unemployment and poverty in rural areas, challenges in achieving collaborative governance in rural tourism development, strategies for achieving collaborative governance, as well as stakeholder roles in collaborative governance in rural tourism development. A general interview guide with these themes was used, but where necessary, follow-up questions were asked, based on the responses. These follow-up questions allowed for exploration of specific examples and detailed explanations of the responses.

Table 1: Description of the research participants

Participant Codes	Description
PAT1	a female involved in community development, forming part of the community leadership group
PAT2	a male owner of an accommodation establishment, representing the private sector group
PAT3	a male in middle management at a government tourism agency, representing the government officials
PAT4	a male employee at a government tourism agency, representing the government officials
PAT5	a female community development representative, representing the community leadership group
PAT6	a male in a management position of a government tourism agency, representing government officials
PAT7	a male in middle management of a government tourism agency, representing government officials
PAT8	a female in a lower-level management position at a government tourism agency, representing government officials
PAT9	a male in a top management position of a hotel, representing the private sector group
PAT10	a male in middle management of a tour operating company, representing the private sector
PAT11	a male in a middle management position at a government tourism agency
PAT12	a male in a middle management position at a government tourism agency

Source: edited by the authors.

The data collected through qualitative interviews was analysed using NVivo software (version 14.0) to identify, organise, and report the themes that emerged. Thematic analysis was further employed to search for, generate, and report the main and sub-themes that form the basis of the research findings. The transcripts were read and re-read to become familiar with the results and emergent themes, and initial codes were generated to capture key concepts and ideas in line with the study objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thereafter,

codes were organised into themes and sub-themes, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the qualitative data. The themes were reviewed and refined through iterative data analysis to ensure accuracy and reliability. The ideas and main and sub-themes (i.e., local community, youth, job creation, skills development, poverty alleviation, collaboration, service delivery, and funding) that emerged from the dataset were visually presented using mind-mapping.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic profile

This section describes the results of the demographic profiles of participants, illustrated by Table 2. The results showed that a significant majority of the respondents (7) occupied middle management positions, followed by three who were in lower management and general worker roles, one in top management, and the remaining participant occupying other positions. The diverse nature of employees within an organisation helps to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the collaborative dynamics across different organisational levels. The majority of the respondents (9) were male, while the remaining three were female. As the study received a majority of male respondents, this may suggest that the organisation employs more males than females. This may reflect gender distribution across the organisation, with a bias towards male employees. An article published by Stats SA (2022) on equality in the labour market reported that women occupied fewer strategic positions compared to their male counterparts, who were more often represented in top management roles.

Table 2: Demographic profile

	Bio-data	Frequency
Positions	General employees	1
	Lower management	2
	Middle management	7
	Top management	1
	Others	1
Gender	Female	3
	Male	9

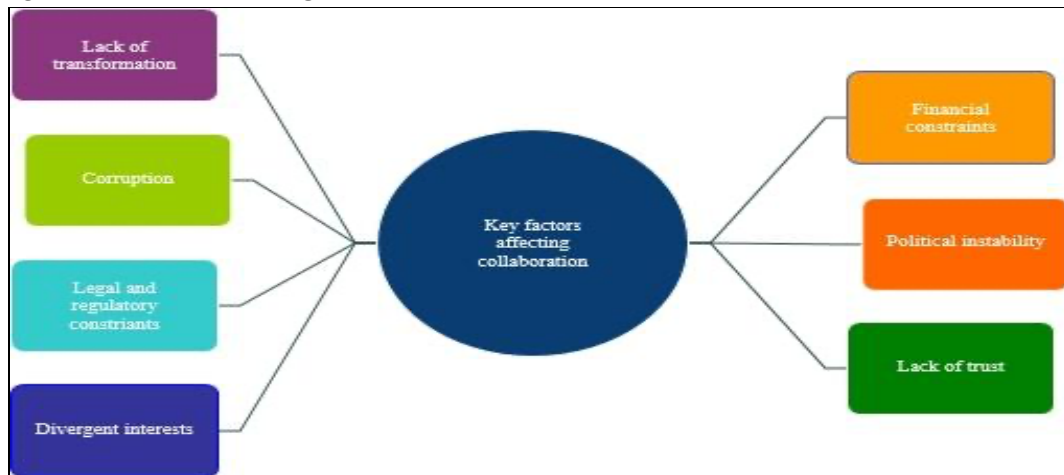
Source: edited by the authors.

4.2. Factors affecting the collaboration process between the public and private sectors

After 30 years of democracy, South Africa has yet to achieve the transformation agenda in the tourism sector. Dias et al. (2024) argue that the sector faces a range of challenges, such as a lack of long-term vision and integration into government policy. Rogerson & Sixaba (2021) similarly assert that, since the end of apartheid, its legacy continues to influence the South African tourism sector. The current study assessed the factors that affect

collaboration processes between the public and private sectors. Responses sourced from participants through interviews revealed seven key themes, including lack of transformation, corruption, legal and regulatory constraints, political instability, divergent interests, financial constraints, and lack of trust. These were identified as factors sapping collaboration between stakeholders in government and the private sector and formed the basis of the findings, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Factors affecting the collaboration process between public and private sectors



Source: edited by the authors.

4.3. Lack of transformation

Following the 1994 elections, the South African government initiated several reforms aimed at transforming the economy and addressing the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty, and inequality. On numerous occasions, the Finance Minister, Enoch Godongwana, has reiterated the government's commitment to a comprehensive transformation agenda (South African Government, 2020). However, 30 years since the collapse of the apartheid government, the transformation process within the tourism sector has been slow when compared to other sectors of the South African economy. Participants expressed that one of the challenges affecting collaboration processes in the tourism sector is the lack of transformation. In connection with this, one of the respondents stated:

"One problem affecting collaboration is the issue of transformation in business processes from the private sector to public sector. The BBEE [Broad-based Black Economy Empowerment] process is not working at all." (PAT2).

Another respondent concurred by saying:

"A lack of investment and transformation from the corporate/private sector a problem affecting the collaboration process between the public and private tourism sectors." (PAT3).

From the interviews, it is evident that, even after three decades of democratic governance, South Africa has yet to fully realise the transformation agenda within the tourism sector.

4.4. Corruption

Corruption remains one of the key challenges affecting all aspects of South African society, particularly within the public sector. These findings are consistent with Xu et al. (2023), who argue that the effect of corruption on tourism development is both negative and statistically significant. Participants in this study also confirmed that corruption is a barrier currently impacting the collaboration processes within the tourism sector in Mpumalanga province. One respondent stated:

“Corruption by Government Officials and Politicians is at the highest level.” (PAT5).

In support of the above statement, another participant mentioned:

“Corruption, for example, the supply chain, it’s a mess. From the people awarding tenders or projects to the incompetent receivers.” (PAT10).

Based on the quotes above, it is evident that corruption is a serious problem in South Africa, particularly in the tourism sector, and it significantly impedes the collaboration process. Given the multi-faceted nature of tourism and the involvement of multiple stakeholders in the development process, it is evident that room is created for corrupt practices, which may inhibit the effective collaboration process for tourism, particularly in developing countries. This is further emphasised by Xu et al. (2023) who point to corruption as having a very negative impact on tourism development for destinations worldwide.

4.5. Legal and regulatory constraints

Legal and regulatory constraints have been identified as another major challenge affecting the collaboration processes in the tourism sector. Meijer (2015) notes that organisational politics, competition for influence, and power imbalances can hinder the establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborative initiatives. Similarly, Dias et al. (2024) argue that collaboration in the tourism sector is hampered by numerous challenges, including a lack of integration into government policy and excessive bureaucracy. According to Azizpour & Fathizadeh (2016), weak legal structures and shortcomings in the policy-making system pose a significant challenge to collaboration agreements within the tourism sector. This study found that legal and regulatory constraints continue to affect collaboration processes in Mpumalanga’s tourism destinations. Participants shared similar sentiments, stating that such constraints can disrupt collaboration and diminish continuity.

One participant argued:

“Legal and regulatory constraints can disrupt collaboration processes and undermine continuity.” (PAT8).

In addition, another participant indicated:

“Rigid and unprogressive legislation can stifle the collaboration process and render fruitless.” (PAT9).

A deeper reflection on the interview quotes suggests that legal and regulatory frameworks act as constraints to collaboration within the tourism sector. For many destinations that have identified tourism as a tool for economic growth and development,

a key consideration should be to strengthen the legal frameworks, such that they are conducive to collaboration between the government and the private sector. Only when this is done effectively will tourism be optimally used to address socioeconomic challenges.

4.6. Divergent interests

The findings revealed that divergent interests are a notable barrier to collaboration between the government and the private sector. These findings are supported by the literature, which suggests that conflicting objectives and priorities can impede collaboration and prevent the achievement of mutually beneficial outcomes (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). Participants argued that the parties involved in collaborations often have differing interests. Furthermore, they noted that differences in implementation processes present a challenge, with the private sector typically able to act quickly, while the public sector is often delayed due to bureaucratic approval systems. In light of these findings, one participant said:

“Collaboration between the two will always be affected by the implementing processes that are different. Private can quickly implement while public processes are long to get approval.” (PAT2).

Another participant noted:

“Divergent interests can disrupt collaboration processes and undermine continuity.” (PAT8).

These quotes suggest that stakeholder interests can undermine collaboration efforts in the tourism sector. A need exists for better collaboration, driven by aligned interests amongst the different stakeholders. This can be achieved through a better effort for progressive dialogue and common goals for tourism development.

4.7. Financial constraints

Resource constraints, both financial and human, constitute another barrier to collaboration (Rhodes et al., 2015). This study discovered that financial constraints are among the challenges currently impeding collaboration processes in the tourism sector. Rantsatsi et al. (2020) confirmed that limited resources represent a critical success factor influencing collaboration in the tourism industry. Participants asserted that such constraints can disrupt collaboration and hinder continuity, with one alleging,

“Resource constraints can also disrupt collaboration processes and undermine continuity.” (PAT8).

An interviewee also noted:

“I think limited financial resources also affect the collaboration process between the public and private tourism sectors. There is a lack of funding to support most of the collaboration process between the two entities.” (PAT10).

In reference to the above quotes, it is evident that collaboration within the tourism sector is impeded by limited access to finance. While this may be a general constraint

across many sectors, tourism in developing countries tends to be typified by informal businesses, which are in desperate need of financial support (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2024).

4.8. Lack of trust

Lack of trust has also been identified as a factor affecting collaboration processes in the tourism sector. According to Forrer (2016), building trust among stakeholders is essential for fostering cooperation and enhancing information sharing. Interviews with participants revealed a prevailing sense of mistrust between stakeholders in the tourism sector, thereby impeding collaboration. One participant mentioned:

“Lack of trust can disrupt collaboration processes and undermine continuity.” (PAT8).

In addition, another participant also emphasised:

“Mistrust can also affect the collaborative process, leading to conflict and poor performance.” (PAT11).

Based on the quotes presented above, it is clear that a lack of trust hinders collaborative processes between the government and the private sector.

4.9. Political instability

The study identified political instability as one of the factors impeding collaboration between public and private organisations within the tourism industry. These findings align with a study by Meijer (2015), who asserts that organisational politics, competition for influence, and power imbalances can hinder the formation of mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborative initiatives. Political changes and shifts in leadership were also found to disrupt ongoing collaboration efforts, leading to discontinuity. During an interview, one participant said:

“Political instability, including changes in government leadership or policy direction, can disrupt collaboration processes and undermine continuity.” (PAT8).

Another interviewee affirmed:

“The most serious challenge likely to affect the collaboration between the public and private tourism sector is a change in government or an unstable political environment. For example, when there is a change in government, the whole institutional arrangement can be disrupted.” (PAT11).

It is believed that organisational politics, competition for influence, and power imbalances hinder the establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborative initiatives.

4.10. Collaboration between the public and private sectors as a tool for poverty alleviation

Besides unemployment, poverty remains another major challenge facing the world, including South Africa (Francis & Webster, 2019; Bundy, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this situation, as many people lost jobs or sources of income due to lockdowns and restrictive measures (Mokofe, 2022; Schotte & Zizzamia, 2023). This study

discovered that one of the reasons for initiating employment opportunities in the Mpumalanga province was to help alleviate poverty. An interviewee said:

“Yes, because it decreases unemployment in the province. It also alleviates poverty.” (PAT1).

Additionally, a respondent opined:

“Yes, these initiatives can alleviate local poverty and contribute to economic empowerment and skills development.” (PAT4).

Furthermore, this study suggests that addressing poverty requires collaboration and synergy between the public and private sectors to develop solutions that are inclusive, sustainable, and impactful (Kwesiga & Le Roux, 2015). Similarly, Mhlabane et al. (2023) concur that addressing challenges associated with poverty and youth unemployment in the province requires collaboration between the public and private tourism sectors and is thus considered crucial. In South Africa and other parts of the world, pro-poor tourism policies aim to address the needs of those with low incomes during tourism development and to build a strong link between tourism and poverty alleviation (Toerien, 2020; Lagos & Wang, 2023).

According to Bianchi et al. (2021), there is a common consensus among policymakers and stakeholders worldwide that collaboration between the public and private sectors leads to more robust and inventive solutions. It is also suggested that collaboration between public and private entities creates more effective public and private services and products. For this reason, participants recommended the need for a collaborative agreement between the public and private sectors to help reduce unemployment and poverty in the Mpumalanga province. They argued that the state should foster collaboration between the public and private sectors, including implementing targeted employment programmes. Below are two quotes from the interviews that support the findings:

“Foster collaboration between the public and private sectors, including implementing targeted employment programmes.” (PAT8).

Another interviewee concurred with the above by stating:

“I think if the public and private tourism sectors can effectively collaborate, more jobs will be created, ultimately leading to a reduction in the poverty level.” (PAT11).

The South African national government, through organisations such as the National Treasury and the Department of Public Works, has been promoting collaboration through the PPP framework (Mthombathi, 2018). These policies have helped form partnerships between government entities and private sector organisations in Mpumalanga. In a similar study, Taufik et al. (2023) argued that collaboration in the tourism sector could accelerate the growth of the tourism industry and create new jobs.

4.11. Strategies to create collaborations

4.11.1. Skills development

The study found that opportunities for skills development constituted an important strategy for fostering more collaborations in the Mpumalanga province. Participants agreed that creating opportunities for skills development would encourage collaboration in the province. For example, a respondent explained:

“Allow capable people the opportunity to use their skills, experience and the willingness to assist to lead.” (PAT4).

Another respondent supported the view by stating:

“Foster a culture of experimentation, learning, and continuous improvement in collaboration efforts.” (PAT8).

Building the capacity of stakeholders, particularly officials at the local government level, community representatives, and private sector leaders, equips them with the skills and knowledge required to actively participate in collaborative processes (Bingham et al., 2005). Capacity-building efforts may include training programmes, workshops, and mentoring activities. This could be extended to regular training on aspects such as quality service, innovation in tourism, and the effective use of technology to grow tourism.

4.11.2. Stakeholder engagement

The study further found that stakeholder engagement is crucial in fostering more collaborations. Participants expressed that there should be a platform to encourage stakeholders to collaborate and that the private sector should contribute to the public sector by creating access for the public to make enquiries. During the interview, one participant remarked:

“There should be a platform to encourage stakeholders to collaborate and also encourage the private sector to contribute to the public sector by opening doors for the public to come and inquire.” (PAT2).

Another respondent made a similar suggestion by saying:

“Government alone may not be able to combat the continuous increase in youth unemployment. It is, therefore, advisable to collaborate with private stakeholders to create jobs for the youth.” (PAT4).

Research on stakeholder engagement emphasises the importance of early and continuous involvement of stakeholders throughout the collaboration process (Bingham et al., 2005). Engaging stakeholders from the outset helps build trust, ensures transparency, and allows for their input and concerns to be taken into account. This engagement can be achieved through consultation workshops, stakeholder forums, and focus groups. The literature reveals that, in Mpumalanga, there is value in engagement between local communities and NGOs as key stakeholders in collaborative efforts (Assefa et al., 2016). Taufik et al. (2023) argued that stakeholder engagement and participation in tourism development through collaboration can increase local empowerment and ensure

that community interests are directly involved. Setting up regional tourism councils could play an important role in this regard. Such councils should be representative of every stakeholder involved in tourism, and frequent meetings and information-sharing sessions should be organised. This would go a long way in promoting a transparent environment for stakeholder interactions and collaboration in tourism.

5. Discussion

This study has examined the factors influencing collaborative governance between the public and private sectors in the tourism industry. It has argued that the tourism sector often struggles to align the interests of all stakeholders due to the diverse range of interests involved, which frequently hinders effective collaboration. To address complex challenges in tourism development, collaboration can foster learning, experimentation, and the adoption of best practices. Therefore, this study advocates for collaboration between the public and private sectors to help reduce unemployment and poverty in the province of Mpumalanga and other similar destinations. Additionally, it encourages the implementation of targeted employment initiatives to promote cooperation. However, several factors have been identified as influencing the collaboration processes between government and private sector stakeholders, including a lack of transformation, corruption, legal and regulatory constraints, political instability, conflicting interests, financial limitations, and a lack of trust. To overcome these challenges, collaboration and synergy between the public and private sectors are essential in developing inclusive and sustainable solutions that positively impact local tourism development (Kwesiga & Le Roux, 2015).

According to Kwesiga & Le Roux (2015), there may be discrepancies in the objectives, motivations, and priorities of the two sectors. While the private sector focuses on profit and market competitiveness, the public sector prioritises the provision of public goods and services, enforcement of regulations, and policy implementation. These conflicting goals can lead to a misalignment of priorities and difficulty in finding common ground for cooperation. Hence, strategies are needed to foster collaboration. The study suggests that one key strategy for enhancing collaboration in Mpumalanga is providing opportunities for skills development. Furthermore, the establishment of a platform that encourages public engagement and inquiry is recommended to promote collaboration among stakeholders and encourage the private sector's contribution to the public sector. This study argues that for tourism to fully realise its developmental potential, the implementation of collaborative governance mechanisms is essential. One effective strategy involves the establishment of tourism councils composed of diverse regional stakeholders. These councils must be broadly representative, encompassing actors from both the public and private sectors, as well as civil society, to reflect the multifaceted nature of the tourism industry. Such inclusive structures promote shared accountability, foster collective ownership, and ensure joint responsibility for actions aimed at advancing tourism development. Regular and structured dialogue within these councils facilitates the co-creation of strategic

planning documents that are contextually relevant and tailored to regional needs. This participatory approach supports a bottom-up policy development process, enhancing the responsiveness and legitimacy of tourism strategies while ensuring that they are grounded in the practical realities and aspirations of local stakeholders. In the context of rural tourism development, this collaborative model is particularly vital. Rural areas often face unique challenges such as limited infrastructure, workforce shortages, and underdeveloped marketing capacity. By engaging local stakeholders such as farmers, artisans, community leaders, informal tourism entrepreneurs, and small-scale tourism operators in governance structures, tourism planning can become more inclusive and reflective of rural identities and assets. This not only strengthens the socio-economic fabric of rural communities but also fosters sustainable tourism practices that are culturally and environmentally sensitive.

6. Conclusion

Several factors, including a lack of transformation, corruption, legal and regulatory constraints, political instability, divergent interests, financial limitations, and a lack of trust, impacted the collaboration process in Mpumalanga's tourism industry. The findings have highlighted two primary factors influencing collaboration between the public and private sectors in the province: skills development and stakeholder engagement. Despite some limitations, the study was conducted at the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency in Mbombela, within Mpumalanga province, South Africa. The implication is that the findings are primarily applicable to public and private entities in Mbombela. Therefore, the study's findings are context-specific to Mpumalanga and may not fully reflect collaborative governance dynamics in other provinces, regions, or countries. Due to the relatively small, purposively selected sample, the results cannot be statistically generalised to the broader tourism sector or to other emerging economy contexts. Another limitation is that the study adopted a qualitative approach to address the research objectives. Critics have argued that qualitative findings cannot be verified and that qualitative studies may not be sufficiently representative. Given the qualitative nature of the study and the use of semi-structured interviews, the researchers' interpretation during data collection, coding, and thematic analysis may be influenced by personal beliefs, expectations, or prior knowledge. Steps were taken to be as objective as possible, but researcher bias is a risk that cannot be discounted in the interpretation of the data. Consequently, the study recommends that future research include more tourism agencies from other provinces. By conducting studies at multiple sites, the research findings could be generalised or transferred to other contexts. Additionally, the study recommends that future research combine qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed-methods research) to verify and expand upon the findings.

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