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Using contingency valuation approaches to assess sustainable cultural heritage tourism use and conservation of the outstanding universal values (OUV) at Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Sustainable cultural heritage tourism is correlated to conservation use and tourism usage. The case study examines the tourism use of Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site (GZWH) using the contingency valuation method. It assesses whether there is enough input from tourism use directed towards the conservation of outstanding universal values (OUV). The tourism use is unsustainable, where tourism use is less than conservation use, at the property. The findings demonstrate that the plan used to maintain a balance between conservation and use at GZWH were inadequate and unresponsive to the micro-environment in which it exists. Recommendations for a shift in conservation strategy are made.

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Key words : Conservation; Sustainability; Contingency valuation; Tourism use. Outstanding universal value

1. Introduction

Cultural heritage as part of the cultural economy is recognized for its economic value as an important source of revenue generation through tourism. The World Commission on Culture and Development (WCCD) recognises that “...*Tourism is fast becoming one of the biggest industries in the world and cultural heritage provide much of its life-blood*” (WCCD, 1995). That is supported by Irina Bokova (2011) the Director General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), who points out that cultural heritage sites especially those listed as World Heritage sites generate a lot of revenue. There is a need to ensure that, cultural heritage and tourism assume a symbiotic relationship to achieve sustainability of the resource. The exploitation of heritage

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resources brings about as many pitfalls as benefits. Hence, there is a need to adopt sustainable tourism practices when dealing with heritage assets.

Tourism can contribute to the protection and restoration efforts if the right balance is struck between economic gain and negative impacts. In practice, the reality may be elusive (Pederson, 2000:7). Using contingency valuation approaches, this study investigated how the balance between sustainable cultural heritage tourism use and conservation of the outstanding universal values (OUV) at Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site (GZHS) in Zimbabwe.

1.1 Contextual background

In the past the relationship involving economics, development and heritage was one that was regarded as anatomic. These three components were viewed as irreconcilable as the latter was regarded as deficient on matters of conservation of the cultural resource (Bandarin, 2011:16). Many cultural heritage sites are under threat as a result of development targeted at promoting or enhancing cultural heritage tourism products. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa Robben Island in South Africa and the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe were threatened by uncontrolled tourism infrastructural development and the effects of mass tourism (Bourges, 2011:8). Thus the introduction of sustainable cultural heritage tourism which seeks to balance the adverse effects of tourism on the cultural heritage and its sustainability cannot be underestimated. The notion of sustainable tourism takes full account of the current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. Sustainable tourism can be summarized by the equation: Sustainable Tourism = Tourism Use = Conservation Use”.

Cultural heritage tourists are becoming more interested in environmental protection so that cultural resources are utilised in a sustainable way. They are increasingly considering environmental quality as well as the quality of services as factors in their selection of tourist destinations. They favour environmental conservation coupled with simple, efficient and pleasant service. It appears that many tourists now prefer unspoiled and uncrowded destinations (Pederson, 2002). That makes sustainable cultural heritage management important. Great Zimbabwe WHS thus its management and conservation is guided by the World Heritage Centre [WHC] (1972) which underscores a need for the sustainable use of heritage resources and the principle of intergenerational equity.

Great Zimbabwe WHS has a relatively pristine and serene natural environment in terms of a variety and quantity of flora and fauna as compared to the surrounding region. It is the largest and most impressive of the more than 300 Zimbabwe-type dry-stone walled structures scattered all over the southern African region. In comparison, Great Zimbabwe was probably the largest settlement in sub-Saharan Africa and certainly the largest built up area before the advent of colonization at the turn of 19th century (Ngoro, 2005). The architectural components of Great Zimbabwe have been divided into four main zones, namely the Hill Complex, Great Enclosure, Valley Ruins and the Peripheral settlements. The property was given world heritage status in 1986.

While the dry stone walls are the most characteristic features of the monument, they occur together with other structural remains. Dhaka floors are an integral feature of almost all the enclosures at Great Zimbabwe. Common features of the house floors include low benches, fire places. Great Zimbabwe is ascribed as a ‘living heritage’ this is because the leadership of spirit mediums and local chiefs, the practice of the African traditional religion of the Mwari belief system at Great Zimbabwe which demonstrates the sacredness of the site in contemporary times. Other Christian sects also patronize the place for spiritual empowerment (Great Zimbabwe Management Plan, 2012; Ngoro, 2004). The presence of caves, tunnels, huge natural boulders in association with mythical stone carvings of stone birds, snakes and crocodiles at Great Zimbabwe are tangible or physical expressions of the deep-seated spirituality and sacredness of the site.

The natural environment within and around the Great Zimbabwe Estate is important for the survival of the archaeological remains and the understanding of the relationship between the built environment and its setting (Great Zimbabwe Management Plan 2012:39). The natural fauna has to a large extent been eliminated by poaching and other means. Although the flora is not much different from the surrounding areas, it needs to be kept under control, particularly from the invasive lantana camara and guava species (Great Zimbabwe Management Plan

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