

Rebranding of the Greater St Lucia Wetlands Park in South Africa: Reflections on Benefits and Challenges for the Former of St Lucia

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ABSTRACT Post-apartheid South Africa has witnessed an explosion of both national and international ecotourism given its many years of restrictions on the movement of people in the past. Much of its biodiversity has been commodified through branding and re-branding in order to capture a fair share of the international ecotourism market. The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, located in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal, was the centre of land claim contestations by the local inhabitants who have been removed from the park due to colonial occupation and later apartheid segregation policies. Locals who have been victims of forced removals from the Park staked a claim to be co-consumers of development and financial benefits accruing from this natural asset. Despite many unfinished challenges facing the politics of the Park, in 2007 the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park was re-branded as the iSimangaliso Wetland Park (iSWP) to market it as an indigenous and local product. One of the rationales for re-branding was the assumption that its previous name competed against another international tourist destination located in the Caribbean. Given the multi-faceted nature of the Wetland Park as a place product, the paper tests out the extent to which this re-branding from a globalised to a localised ecotourism name destination has reproduced itself in terms of benefits, both tangibles and intangibles in the all White town of St Lucia.

INTRODUCTION

In the tourism sphere, branding has come to be known as a powerful tool for marketing travel destinations, especially in light of increasing competition, product parity and substitutability. All leading tourist destinations in the world are known to offer excellent accommodation and site attraction packages. Hence service and facilities are no longer important differentiators for tourism choice. However, what is important is that every country claims unique tourist sites, culture and heritage, making the need for destinations to portray a unique identity and a more critical and strategic consideration than before. In the context of global competition for a fair share of the tourist market and especially in light of ten major destinations attracting 70 percent of the world tourism share, branding and re-branding for nation states is of strategic importance if they wish to remain in the tourism market. Given this context, the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park in South Africa historically was a hallmark for the apartheid government to capitalise on this natural asset through the patronage of predominantly White tourists and capital. The adjacent all White town of St Lucia surrounded by a pristine estuary, coastal sea and majestic dunes accommodated a diverse number of holiday resorts, leisure, recreational and outdoor

tourism businesses houses. With democracy in 1994 and subsequent declaration of the area as a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1999 it provided new opportunities to rebrand the wetland park primarily for the reason that the name St Lucia was already in conflict with an existing World Heritage site in the Caribbean. With the democratic government undertaking many policy reforms to reposition tourism as an anchor for post-apartheid reconstruction and development the rebranding of this site was politically opportune to provide it with a localised brand name in keeping with the indigenous history of the locality. It was in this context that the name of the wetland park was rebranded to Isimangaliso Wetland Park (iSWP) in 2007 meaning the “*land of miracles*” given its natural and diverse beauty.

The paper is an exploratory study which aims to examine the impact of the name change on the formerly all White town of St Lucia and some of the challenges it poses. As an exploratory study, the paper does not purport to provide an in-depth analysis of the rebranding of the wetland park in terms of the multifaceted aspects of the tourism industry. What it seeks to achieve, is to provide insight into the perceptions of the town folks, both Black, whom are all workers and informal traders, and White, who are business

owners and residents, on the impact that the name change has had on the predominantly White town of St Lucia. The paper draws on perceptions of a select few respondents undertaken through semi-structured interviews in the town centre. The parameters of this exploratory study was restricted due to the lack of access to insights on the workings of the iSimangaliso Wetland Parks Authority, the governing body responsible for the enforcement of environmental regulations on how it promotes development in the area and markets the new brand name and the strengths and weakness of the newly rebranded tourist product. Nonetheless, the value of this paper founded on exploratory research design principles through the voices of the town folks provides an important baseline for the formulation of more concrete hypothesis to inspire future research on the impact of the rebranding of the wetland park on the different facets of the tourism industry in the locality.

The paper commences by an engagement with the concepts of branding and rebranding tourism spaces through a select scan of international literature followed by an insight on the states rationale through national policy for re-imagining the tourism sector in the country to capture the global share of the tourism market. Thereafter, a socio-historical profile of the rebranded town of St Lucia in the wetland park is presented which provides the context for the analysis of field work data. Finally, the paper concludes by providing some preliminary reflections on the key observations made through this study on the impact of rebranding on the former town of St Lucia.

BRANDING AND REBRANDING TOURISM SPACES: SOME CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

With competition for global markets, there is an increasing need for nation states to brand and rebrand tourism destinations as unique sites in order to differentiate themselves from their competitors. In pursuit of gaining an edge on the tourism brand it is not atypical to find that spaces are marketed as destinations to have spectacular scenery, superb attractions, friendly people, and a unique culture and heritage. Underlying such branding rationale is the objective of reducing substitutability of the tourism destination site and as such marketers of

such sites appeal to the emotions of potential travellers by focusing on their tourism experience which has a multiplier effect of attracting more and more tourists to such sites (Hudson and Ritchie 2009: 217). Hence, it comes as little surprise that destination branding is emerging as one of the most powerful marketing tools available to contemporary tourism marketers.

Tourism destination branding can take the form of a name, symbol, logo, word, graphic or visual representation that both identifies and differentiates the destination as a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination (Kerr 2005: 276-277; Hudson and Ritchie 2009). Since the underlying principle of promoting national tourism is centered on economic motives, nation states have followed on the footsteps of corporate branding strategies incorporating a portfolio for leisure, investment and business tourism, and stakeholder and citizen welfare products. Tourism destinations similar to their corporate counterparts are subject to increasing market complexity and volatility spurred by globalization influences, internal and external government policies, foreign exchange fluctuations and natural environment limitations and challenges resulting in an increase in marketing costs warranting a corporate branding approach (Balakrishnan 2009: 613).

One of the key successes of branding tourist spaces is the way that 'place' and 'people' are produced and presented in tourist image(s). Evidence suggests that tourists tend to exercise some discretion in how they internalize, accept or modify visual, cultural and political messages about particular destinations. According to Urry (1990) cited in Cornelissen (2005) asserts that the way in which people travel through a destination is highly structured. This is largely due to the 'tourist gaze' that constructs the way in which people view places and people that they visit. Sociologically, the manner in which tourists engage with places, objects and societies they visit, is imbued with certain values and based on power discrepancies between hosts and visitors (Cornelissen 2005: 677-679).

The type of tourist perception of space and the way in which they are constructed is largely dependent on how a successful destination conveys the expectations or promise of a memorable travel experience that is distinctively associated with the destination. To this end, Hudson

and Ritchie (2009: 219-21) provide a four-step conceptual model for building a destination brand experience which includes a need to assess the destination's current situation, develop a brand identity and promise, communicate that promise, and then measure the brand's effectiveness.

In so far as rebranding is concerned, its primary goal is to reflect a change in the organization and/or to foster a new image for the future. Rebranding may be conceptualized as a change in an organisation's self-identity and/or an attempt to change perceptions of the image among external stakeholders. It aims at enhancing, regaining, transferring and/or recreating the corporate brand equity. Rebranding has both positive and negative effects on the organisations aims and objectives. It can stimulate new markets and opportunities for the organisation. On the other hand, since the underlying value of a brand name is its set of associations, rebranding involving a name change could theoretically wipe out the positive mental images that the brand usually stimulates.

The concept of rebranding according to Daly and Moloney (2004: 30) and Cornelissen (2005: 678) and Truman et al. (2004: 319) consists of what may be termed tangible (the physical expression of the brand) and intangible (values, image, and feelings) elements and the exercise of rebranding may consist of changing some or all of those elements. The word "rebrand" is a neologism which suggests that the action or process of branding is done a second time (Muzellic and Lambkin 2006: 805; Gotsi and Andriopoulos 2007: 342). Hence the process of rebranding entails the creation of a new name, term, symbol, design or a combination of them on established brand with the purpose of developing a differentiated or new position in the mind of stakeholders and competitors. Muzellic and Lambkin (2006: 819) assert that it can occur at various levels of the organisations hierarchy with interactions among the different levels of the organisational structure. They identify four broad categories of changes that can trigger rebranding: a change in ownership structure, in corporate strategy, in competitive conditions, or in the external environment.

Since changes in marketing aesthetics (that is, name change) can be quite subtle and difficult to apprehend, the name change variable is often used as an indicator of rebranding (Mu-

zellec and Lambkin 2006: 805). Rebranding in the corporate world usually involves changing the company's name, targeting and positioning in order to assign new meaning to the corporate brand and communicate new benefits to its stakeholders. The process requires changes to the labels associated with the corporate brand (for example, logo, values), but also assigning new meanings that need to underline these labels (Gotsi and Andriopoulos 2007: 342-344).

In launching a new name in the rebranding process, it is expected that the old name has to be abandoned; nullifying years of branding effort in creating awareness amongst the different stakeholders. Hence rebranding is not only an expensive exercise, but also risk the danger of potentially nullifying years of marketing effort in building the equity of the brand (Gotsi and Andriopoulos 2007: 342). Considering that name awareness is a key component of brand equity, such an action is likely to further damage the equity of the brand especially when the name is known to be the anchor for brand equity. In this respect, Keller (2003: 101-102) asserts that customer-based brand equity emerges when the consumer has a high level of awareness and familiarity with the brand and holds some strong, favourable, and unique brand associations through memory.

In the rebranding process Muzellic and Lambkin (2006: 806-808) identify two distinct paths that can be pursued, that is, either evolutionary or revolutionary. In the evolutionary rebranding process a fairly minor development occurs in the company's positioning and aesthetics. It is so gradual that it is hardly noticeable to outside observers. On the other hand, in revolutionary rebranding a major, identifiable change in positioning and aesthetics takes place that redefines the organisational objectives and its character. It is usually symbolized by a change in name which is used as an identifier of the organisation.

Whilst branding and rebranding of tourist sites may appear as ideal opportunities to capture a sizeable share of the tourist markets Tom Buncl (2009) the author of the *Handbook on Tourism Destination Branding* for the European Travel Commission (ETC) and United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) asserts that for most destinations, rebranding is out of the question. This, he highlights especially in light of the fact that they neither own nor have

control over the destination's main assets – its heritage, culture, scenery, natural environment, people and character – in the way that a manufacturing company has over its products. They are generally therefore not in a position to change the product, with some significant exceptions such as Las Vegas and Dubai. Refreshing a destination brand, on the other hand according to Buncle (2009) is much more of an evolutionary process and an essential weapon in a destination's marketing arsenal. Rebranding a destination is possible when there is a radical transformation in the country's DNA, such as after a revolution, economic crisis, major and widespread physical redevelopment, or a fundamental change in the nation's character (for example, Russia and eastern European countries after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, post-apartheid South Africa under Nelson Mandela). But, unless a radical transformation in the country's tourism offer and infrastructure is planned, it is usually more instructive to think in terms of *refreshing* a destination brand, rather than *rebranding* it (Web 1).

RE-IMAGING SOUTH AFRICA'S TOURISM SECTOR

Since the advent of democracy, tourism has come to occupy a central position in the policy agenda of the post-apartheid government. It has firstly, been identified as a key catalyst for the economic growth that the government would like to attain to meet the country's development imperatives. Given the country's natural wealth and range of attractions, tourism is also seen as an effective means through which South Africa could successfully enter and compete in the international economic system. The international tourist market in South Africa consists of two main segments—arrivals from the rest of the African continent, and overseas arrivals. While the former is by far the larger (it makes up three-quarters of all international arrivals), the travel and spending patterns of the latter is known to be more lucrative as it has a higher currency yielding capacity. Notwithstanding these differences, in general overseas tourists are the focus of South Africa's international marketing campaigns. Such marketing campaigns are largely built on its wildlife and natural environment and to some extent on its social features and the diverse nature of its offering (Cornelissen 2005: 680-681).

Over the past number of years, the South African government has set out to transform the tourist sector by reshaping the various institutions that govern tourism. A key aspect of the government's policy imperatives focused on redrafting and extending the country's tourist image to be more representative and inclusive of the diverse South African population. This was an attempt to break away from the past practice under apartheid led tourism industry which provided very little access to the Black population to participate in this sector as producers. It was based on an image that was highly exclusionary (DEAT 1996; Koch and Massyn 2001, in Cornelissen 2005: 683).

To illustrate the position of the state to drive policy initiatives for the rebranding of tourism spaces in South Africa a study undertaken by Forster in 2001 cited in Cornelissen (2005: 685a) is most interesting. A content analysis of tourist brochures of Dutch and British operators who promote South Africa as a destination revealed that representation in these brochures both stemmed from colonial and neo-colonial discourses, which perpetuated neo-colonial relationships between South Africa and its former colonial powers. This was largely undertaken through the use of various images of landscapes and peoples that expressed exoticism, excitement and exploration. Cornelissen (2005) asserts that Foster's study provides a useful analysis of the nature and ideological context of South Africa's representation in foreign markets. A further analysis of the way that the country was represented in Germany and the United Kingdom, the two most important markets for overseas tourists, and very important sources of tourism revenue found that all the brochures widely featured animals with prominence given to the "Big Five" (elephants, lions, buffalo, leopards and rhinoceros). There was also a strong focus on nature in the form of images of landscape and to a lesser extent, countrysides. The most important type of activity that was depicted, and one that consistently featured in brochures, was game driving or game viewing. Wildlife and safari tours were clearly the focus of the brochures. (Cornelissen 2005: 685-686). Hence the exotic and aesthetic aspects of the country were widely portrayed in the tourist brochures.

In so far as peoples of the land were concerned, there featured less prominently in the brochures. When photographs of people did

appear, they were mainly in relation to wildlife or nature consumption in which people were pictured part-taking in game viewing, hiking or bathing. Significantly, the vast majority of these photographs portrayed White individuals or families. Black people of all persuasion in the country hardly featured in these brochures as both consumers and participants in leisure time activities in tourism spaces. Black, 'Coloured' or Indian South Africans were generally portrayed as cultural products. For instance Ndebele women were pictured as displayers and sellers of arts and crafts; isiZulu speaking Africans as dancers; a Bushman woman pictured in the Kalahari; or 'Coloured' people as participating in the annual Coon Carnival troop parade in Cape Town during New Years festivities organised in the city. Hence a major inference that can be drawn from this study is that social representation of Black people in tourism brochures and other paraphernalia ignored their culture and civilisation at the expense of showcasing the exotic aesthetics of nature and wild life in their respective communities even though they were excluded from appreciating such beauty of their natural surrounds due to political exclusion.

Social representation in apartheid tourism, according to Goudie et al. (1999) in Cornelissen (2005: 683) was of a nature where 'Black cultures were ignored or repressed, at best they became stereotyped and trivialized commodities in the tourism economy'. In its efforts to transform tourism, and realize its potential as an economic catalyst, the South African government therefore embarked on policy to develop a more inclusive tourism brand (DEAT 1996 in Cornelissen 2005: 683). The dual-faceted use of tourism is reflected in the following two policy statements of South African National Parks (the statutory body that manages the country's wildlife assets) and South African Tourism:

The transformation mission of the South African National Parks is to transform an established system for managing the natural environment to one which encompasses cultural resources, and which engage all sections of the community (South African National Parks 2000, in Cornelissen 2005: 684).

Overtime, the South African Tourism sector has reformulated its position and objectives in the context of social and political transformations taking place in the country and which is attested to by the following policy statement:

South Africa is a country undergoing transformation. The result is that we are exploring our image. In the process our country's unique selling points are becoming increasingly clearer. The old Satour (the former name of South African Tourism) slogan, A World in One Country, is more relevant now than ever (DEAT 1999/2000, in Cornelissen 2005: 683).

One of the most significant in-roads that the government has made was to re-image, re-brand and re-position South Africa internationally. As government's major branding programme 'Brand South Africa' which was launched in 2000 as a marketing agency in cooperation with state departments and some of the country's largest corporations sets out to promote a favourable image of the country, both to domestic and international tourists. Adopting the slogan, 'South Africa.... Alive with possibilities', it seeks to convey the geographical, historical and social distinctiveness of the country, the relative success of its recent political transition, and, as a consequence to woo investors to the tourism sector. The brand is summarized as:

(South Africa), in global terms a middling nation at the foot of a maligned continent, has the ability to inspire the world to new ways of doing things. Our unique historical heritage and population make-up, our creative approach and boundless optimism, all come together and find expression in the essence of a brand, 'South Africa ... Alive with possibilities'.

SOCIO-HISTORICAL PROFILE OF THE REBRANDED TOWN OF ST LUCIA IN THE WETLAND PARK

The town of St Lucia is entirely surrounded by the iSimangaliso Wetland Park (iSWP), with Lake St Lucia and the Indian Ocean forming its western and southern boundaries (Picard 2002). Lake St Lucia is the largest estuary in Africa (Impey 2002: 10), is about 40km long and flows into the sea at its southern end. The mixed landscape of the St Lucia area, now known as the iSWP attracts people for diverse forms of recreation. A rich cultural priority is associated with the place (Kruger et al. 1997: 23- 24). In the town of St Lucia, itself, there are approximately 500 permanent residents with the population increasing by about twelve times during the holiday season (Dominy 1993 cited in Picard 2002). De-

spite the town's proximity to the Black-populated areas of Khula Village and Dukuduku Forest, it is almost entirely composed of White South Africans. Tourism is the foundation of the town's economy and employs much of the population. About 20% of St Lucia's permanent residents are retired. Economically speaking, the town is a holiday-based village with various time-share flats and cottages. Fishing boat hire-facilities are readily available. St Lucia is a popular wilderness and fishing destination for White South Africans from the interior of the country (Zingel 1993 cited in Picard 2002: 183-184). Hence, the closure of the estuary mouth means that the recreational demands of fishermen, who require the mouth to be permanently open, are not met. This has resulted in the interests of the fishermen being in conflict with the interests of the conservation of nature (Wright et al. 1993: 241). However, this is not the only potential conflict for the peoples that occupy this region of KwaZulu-Natal. In the late 1800s, Lake St Lucia began to feature on British maps drawn with disregard for the interest of the local people whom were the original custodians of the land. The historical dispossession of land means that the St Lucia region is currently characterised by some of the least developed districts in South Africa. Whilst it is also home to people who are extremely poor, it is at the same time blessed, by nature, by an abundance of attractive plant and animal life (CSIR 1993: xv).

On 2nd October 1986 the St Lucia system was declared a wetland of international importance in terms of the Ramsar Convention. The village of St Lucia is also the gateway to the eastern shores of the recently declared World Heritage Site (Restaurant Menu Information, Tuesday 19th July 2011). Comprising five inextricably linked ecosystems (Chapman et al. 2003), the iSWP was among the first three to be inscribed as World Heritage Sites in South Africa, along with Robben Island and the Cradle of Humankind in December 1999 (Wetlands Wire 2005). The declaration, as a World Heritage Site, was primarily owing to its unique ecosystems and its spectacular natural beauty. The Park lies to the east of KwaZulu-Natal and is South Africa's third largest (Aylward and Lutz 2003). It is approximately 325 000 hectares in size with 220 km of coastline extending from the border of Mozambique south to Cape St Lucia. The iSWP lies approximately 240 km north of the city of

Durban. The park also has a rich heritage of ancient Zulu, Swazi, Shangaan and Tonga cultural traditions (Restaurant Menu Information, Tuesday 19th July 2011). According to Crass (1982), conservation of the iSimangaliso area dates back to 1895 when the reserves were set aside along the shores of St Lucia. Specifically, tourism activities comprised ski-boat and spear fishing, shore angling, off-road vehicle driving, scuba-diving, bait harvesting, swimming, other beach activities and infrastructure associated with the different types of land uses. Nature conservation activities comprised animal introductions, animal culling, veld-burning, alien plant removal, management of poaching and dredging. *Juncus Kraussi* (ncema), reeds and thatch were harvested by the Zulu people to use in mat making and hut construction. Land-use infrastructure comprises staff housing, offices, roads, telephone systems and jetties. According to Carruthers (2007: 293):

For many decades South Africa has been marketed as 'the world in one country' and this remains an accurate description of this multi-faceted nation. Its history, societies and politics are often referred to as 'exceptional' and indeed they are complex, paradoxical and unpredictable

The above point of view is easily applicable to the St Lucia region because of the huge disparity between the rich, whom are mainly White, and the poor, whom are mainly Black. Indigenous communities practised a sustainable engagement with the natural resources that this geographical place, could offer for hundreds of years. Enormous importance was also awarded to the sea as it was a provider for their sustainable livelihoods. The lakes provided a wide variety of marine life; the grassy plains were used for herding cattle. The fertile land on the banks of the lake was used for subsistence farming and the vegetation provided material for the construction of dwellings and a source of energy (Skelcher 2003: 762). Early history records that the British penetration of the area plundered many of the wild life in pursuit of adventure (Skelcher 2003). Soon after the Anglo-Zulu War in 1879 the local Zulu kingdom was divided into 13 independent chiefdoms and temporarily relocated to the southern part of Lake St. Lucia. From the 1920s to 1930s the first lots of the all-White holiday town of St Lucia were laid out at the estuary mouth (CRLR 1999b in Walker 2005: 4-

5). This meant that indigenous households lost access to communal lands and the estuary mouth for livelihood and other purposes. Hence, this area has long been one of controversy. By 1904 the British colonialists expropriated 40% of the land in the region and designated it as Crown land. Following on this devastating experience of colonial displacement, the promulgation of the 1913 Land Act provided the final blow by prohibiting the indigenous people from acquiring any land beyond the confines of native reserves (Walker 2005: 4). South African history records the systematic attempts by both the colonialists and the apartheid regime to ensure that land dispossession from Blacks ensured their self preservation (Ntsebeza 2000; Govender et al. 2005). In keeping with this goal of self preservation, more dispossessions in the Lake St. Lucia area occurred between 1956 and 1974 through forced removals (Skelcher 2003; Ngalwa 2004). The rationale was to ensure that Black Africans were confined strictly to native reserves under the guidance of traditional leaders (McIntosh et al. 1996: 341). Forced removals paved the way for increased commercial forestry, agricultural and irrigation projects in the region much to the detriment of the natural environment (Unterhalter 1987: 93). The political uprising from the majority of disenfranchised in the 1970s and 1980s forced a heightened military presence in the area, especially for fear of African National Congress (ANC) freedom fighters infiltrating the native reserves from neighbouring Mozambique and Angola. Consequently, the apartheid regime maintained rigid control on its borders and the movement of people from the native reserves in the region to towns and cities. Poverty, unemployment, overpopulation, low levels of social and physical infrastructure resulted in hardships among the local communities living in the native reserves. Overall, forced removals left indigenous peoples incapacitated for over 50 years as they were unable to reclaim their land and natural resources (Skelcher 2003).

In addition to biological diversity, the forested sand dunes of the iSWP also contain significant deposits of titanium ore (Adams and Haynes 1993). Prospecting mining leases were granted for the mining of richly deposited minerals in the coastal sand dunes to the Richards Bay Minerals mining company. However, attempts to mine the titanium in the dunes east of the iSWP have been a subject of great debate.

The Campaign for St Lucia, comprising of many organisations and overwhelmingly White grew rapidly into one of the largest environmental campaigns yet mounted in South Africa. *The Campaign for St Lucia*, all opposed mining but did not all agree on the optimal relationship between conservation, human rights and development' (Walker 2005: 12 – 13). In 1996, a nationally appointed independent review panel concluded that titanium mining was unsustainable, and recommended that the iSWP adopt a management plan that emphasised conservation and ecotourism in order to provide the maximum financial and other associated benefits to local communities who would have otherwise benefited from mining (Leon 1996). In March of 1996 the national ANC Cabinet finally rejected the mining option and adopted a development strategy that tied the conservation status of the then GSLWP to the promotion of eco-tourism as a spur for economic growth for the entire sub-region (Walker 2005: 4-5). Whilst, the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa provided new hope for historically disadvantaged Black South Africans, in terms of the national policy on land claims with regards to protected areas, land claimants may possess title deeds to the land but are not allowed to occupy the land. Whilst according to Groenewald (2004), previously dispossessed communities have entered into partnerships with the private sector in ecotourism business ventures, it is apt to consider the views of Picard (2002: 182), with regards to the expectations that the various contenders have of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park:

In the wake of apartheid, South African protected areas have come under increasing pressure to reconcile a wealth of natural resources with the acute social and economic needs of the Black majority. Demands for land reform, poverty alleviation and job creation have all had profound implications for the conservation and management of the nation's protected areas

Such a state of affairs may be attributed to a lack of meaningful participation, *albeit* not the only one, as is evidenced by (Kruger et al. 1997: 23-24):

The process was also designed to be inclusive of all interested parties, and to be democratic. This ought to have been reflected in the identification of I and APs. However, government bodies among the I & APs tended to lack

legitimacy, a consequence of the political dispensation of the time in South Africa. Local communities were weakly represented in this list. Only the St Lucia Town Board (representing mainly the White people of the town of St Lucia) spoke for a local community

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ST LUCIA TOWNS PEOPLE ON THE REBRANDING OF THE WETLAND PARK

In the study a diverse number of respondents were interviewed on the re-branding of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. These included respondents from White business concerns, informal traders, hotel and catering staff, tertiary level students and tourist accommodation owners. On the question of the re-branding of the wetland Park and its meaning, White respondents in general, had no idea on its meaning as compared to their African counterparts in the study. Those who had some notion of the meaning of the word could hardly make any cultural or historical connection to the name. The response of a White businessman, who was frustrated on the preoccupation with the name change and its impact on the general tourism industry in the area, best describes the re-branding project of the wetland Park, hence, alluding to the perceived negative perception of the re-branding project:

"I don't care the fuck as to what they call this area. All I care is that the name change has fucking killed business here" (Respondent No. 1)

Despite verbal frustrations on the perceived negative impact of the re-branding of the wetland Park on organised businesses, others in this sector found no major impact on their businesses. Many felt that their businesses were established over the years and as such enjoyed a historical legacy of branding spanning over three generations of family-run enterprises. Over the years, many established tourism business houses became popular for the type of tourism packages they offered and the tourism destination they specialised in. Another respondent, a family tourist operator spanning over three generations, confirmed that Cape Vidal and its surrounding destinations was marketed by her family company and focused largely on international tourists. The company established itself so well in the international tourist sector that many

international tourists buy tourism packages through her family business a year in advance. For the 2012 tourism season, the respondent confirmed that all tourism packages were sold. She concluded that in her experience, international tourists were not specifically responding to the newly branded wetland Park, but instead to the packages that her company was offering in the iSimangaliso Wetland Park area. An examination of the many marketing brochures of this respondent's company illustrated that none of them made any reference to the re-branded wetland Park, but instead made references to the specific tourism destination names in the area and the packages accompanying it.

The respondent's assertion was corroborated by an analysis of twenty two tourist brochures used by different tourist operators in the area including the Ezemvelo KZN Wild Life Commercial Operations who work in close collaboration with the iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority. This analysis revealed that only three of the tourist brochures made reference to the re-branded wetland Park locality. The remaining brochures referred to tourist sites and organised tours in the area and referred to the locality as either St Lucia or St Lucia Wetland Park. In the wetland Park town, a number of tourism business houses display colourful business signboards marketing their businesses. Observation of these signboards revealed that not one bore the name iSimangaliso. Instead many referred to the wetland Park area as either St Lucia or the St Lucia Wetland Park.

In so far as the perceptions of African respondents in the study were concerned, a vast majority were aware of the new name and its meaning. Many felt that the name-change was in keeping with the current political and social transformation taking place in post-apartheid South Africa. However, of the many, a few still preferred to refer to the area as the St Lucia Wetland Park. They felt that over the years they have become accustomed to this name and it did not matter what the name of the area was, but most importantly what this change of name had to offer in respect of their overall social-well being. A street trader who has been engaged in vending arts and crafts for fourteen years in the town of St Lucia had the following to say on the re-branding of the wetland Park.

The re-branding is good as everything in South Africa is changing, but this name change,

they say means the land of miracles. For fourteen years since I was a teenager I have not seen any miracles in the lives of African people living around the wetland Park areas. It is only the big White businesses who have established themselves stand to benefit. We street traders are all Africans and continue to struggle. However, things are changing around here in a bad way as some big businesses such as Wimpy has closed down - since the name change another family business St Peters changed ownership as the owner went bankrupt. Where is the land of miracles they talk about? In this land of miracles, only international tourists are coming and they use their credit cards to buy from the established curio shops although our goods are reasonably priced. The international tourists amuse themselves in this land of miracles but we feel like we are cursed to suffer. So this name change although it is about my culture as an African person, it has very little meaning for me in terms of my physical life style (Respondent No. 3).

One of the reasons cited for the decline in business in the St Lucia town since the re-branding of the wetlands Park was the manner in which the Park was marketed and the overall tourists travel behaviour. The aim of the wetland Park authority, as perceived by several respondents, was to attract more international tourists to the area due to its international heritage status. International tourists, according to one respondent, stay mainly in bed and breakfast accommodation where everything is found including their organised tours in the area. They do not visit the town centre and use local facilities to dine out or use local tourist's guides as all of this forms part of the tourism package. They stay for a very short period of time in the area as they are networked through organised tourist operators to visit other sites in the province and the country. This respondent felt that the marketing of the wetland Park to international tourists is a strategy by the Park authority to ensure that:

the euros, pounds and dollars flow into the hands of a few established tourist operators and to also benefit the wetland Park authority. Frankly, I care a shit about what this branding is all about. I care for what happens to the local peoples' lives and for the time I have been in this area as a business man I don't see much happening for the poor. This branding has made

some get richer whilst others are getting poorer – look at how some of the businesses are closing down in the area? Who loses their jobs! It is the locals. It is the local tourists who come with their rands and cents and stay for longer who support local businesses. These rands and cents go a long way for the ordinary people in the area as compared to the dollars, pounds and euros ... frankly, the wetland authority people got it all wrong ... you cannot talk to them as they run this thing like a business and we locals don't have much say about our future” (Respondent No. 1).

Contrary to perceptions that business in the St Lucia wetland town is declining and showing signs of turning into a ghost town, an estate agent was quite optimistic that the tourist economy shows potential signs of growth in the future. He based his arguments on the value of residential and commercial property in the wetland Park area which has held constant for many years despite dips in property prices over the years in different parts of the country. This, according to the estate agent, is due to the fact that the town is surrounded by the lake and that it cannot expand any further in the near future. Given its locked-in position within an international heritage site area, adds enormous economic value for the town as a whole. However, he had cautioned that despite the property values remaining constant, the cash economy has not benefited all in the area. Bed and Breakfast tourist operators gained the most from international tourism as compared to those engaged in self catering or bag packer forms of accommodation. The latter two appealed mostly to local tourists and it is this sector that suffered most due to a rapid decline of visitors to the area. Local tourists, he confirmed, tend to stay longer in the area and engage actively in the different eco-tourism activities offered in the area as compared to international tourists who spend lesser time in the area but travel more widely to other parts of the province and country (Respondent No. 4).

The decline in the town's economy has led to local Africans feeling despondent as to whether they are part of this wetland Park town. Several street vendors complained that local businesses were downsizing their labour force by employing more foreign migrants who offer their services at a cheaper rate. One street vendor alluded to approximately 30% of the town's la-

bour force comprising foreign migrants whom they referred to as Shangaans (people originating from the north eastern parts of Africa mainly Zimbabweans and Malawians) (Respondent No. 5). Although the vendor did not feel any animosity towards these migrants, who have already integrated into the local African community, he was concerned that over time, their presence will become more noticeable in this small town as they increase in number and this may present potential xenophobic tensions in the area. However, for now they appear to be co-existing and many have settled in Khula village with locals, an area identified for the relocation of the former Dukuduku forest community. However, although on the surface it may appear that migrants have integrated into the local community, at an economic level there appears to be contestation over local capital and markets especially for art and craft goods that originate from the neighbouring Southern African Development Community. A crafts vendor at the market informed that foreign migrants sold their craft to formal craft shops at a much cheaper price compared to the craft market stall-holder. In addition, during tourist seasons, foreign migrants tended to compete with the craft market stall-holders and sold their goods at the very same price for which the vendors bought them at. The craft market stall-holders found themselves vulnerable to negotiate prices with foreign migrants as they have not organised themselves as a collective to ensure price matching and fixing (Respondent No. 3).

The perception that the economy in the St Lucia town has declined since the re-branding has much to do with the socio-political history of the area spanning both colonial and apartheid eras and into the post-apartheid phase of democracy. Almost all respondents interviewed from the business community alluded to the St Lucia Wetland Park area as having a constant flow of local tourists. Since the banning of 4X4 vehicles on its coastal dunes and the closure of the mouth leading to the estuary, a sudden reduction in local tourists to the area was noted. In so far as the banning of the 4X4 vehicles was concerned, one respondent asserted that the present wetland authority lacked creativity and was not able to advocate on behalf of the town community to dedicate a small section of the coastal dunes for this purpose. Considering the extent of the coast line, a dedicated area for mo-

toring sports would have a negligible impact on the eco-environment (Respondent No. 4).

In-so-far as the closing of the estuary was concerned; it had an important apartheid history when the regime in this era promoted White commercial sugar cane farmers in the region by diverting the Umfolozi River which flowed into the estuary. This resulted in the closure of the mouth leading to estuary and the apartheid planners mechanically dredged to open the mouth in order to sustain the ecological balance of the estuary. The new wetland Park authority, in its term of office, has since removed the practice of mechanical dredging of the mouth on grounds that the mouth needed to open up naturally after the rainy season. However, for the past many years according to one respondent, the mouth has not opened resulting in serious ecological damage taking place in the estuary. The respondent could not understand the policy contradiction of the wetland Park authority for several reasons. The first being the lack of saline water in the estuary had caused serious ecological damage resulting in the respondent arguing that this was secondary abuse of the ecosystem. He argued that that in the apartheid era, for all of its environmental inadequacy, preserved the estuary's ecosystem through mechanical dredging whilst in the post-apartheid era, under the new wetland Park authority, such a proactive approach was removed. The respondent argued that the new wetland Park authority followed a double environmental preservation standard (Respondent No. 6).

The second point argued by the respondent was the re-diversion of the Umfolozi River back into the estuary. He argued that the new wetland authority pandered to the whim of White commercial farmers, set up in the apartheid era, and was scared to upset the status quo of these established farmers. The respondent wanted to know as to whether it was ethical to starve the estuary of this source of water in order to preserve White capitalist interests! Lastly, the respondent argued that the new wetland Park authority was fully aware that the estuary was a source of attraction and so was the 4X4 motor trailing on the coastland of the park for local tourists, but for some reason it resigned itself from advocating on behalf of the town's business community and local tourists for some concessions to be made on these two impediments that has affected local tourism and businesses in the area (Respondent No. 6).

A general observation from almost fifty per cent of the respondents was the unfavourable perception of the newly branded wetland Park authority. Whilst the respondents were not averse to social and political transformation taking place in the town, they were however concerned about the high authoritarian attitude of the newly established Park authority. They felt that the leadership was top down and the town's folk and other local communities were not represented on the authority structure to co-manage the area in a holistic and balanced way. The words of one respondent best capture the relationship between the town's people and the newly branded wetland Park authority:

What does iSimangaliso mean! St Lucia is branded already amongst the local, national and international tourists and it will always remain the same. This (iSimangaliso) is another crowd ... they want to make money but the town is dead. All they are interested in is make too many regulations and rules about the environment. As a result all local tourists go to the big town of Richards Bay to fish and have recreation. This crowd (iSimangaliso) did not check with the people before they made all of these big decisions. On the other hand Ezemvelo Wildlife does all the hard work in policing the environment, whilst this group is just interested in making money out of the environment. Basically one is a private concern and the other is a public enterprise.

From the above it becomes evident that a relationship cleavage exists between the newly branded wetlands Park and the town's community. The "them and us" syndrome for the sake of brevity raises concern on the future partnership of these two groups in their ability to capture the positive impact filtering from the rebranding process. It is quite clear, that the newly branded wetland Park seeks to brand its new name within the international tourist sector whereas at the local level, there is still support for the old brand name which is working for some and at the same time not for others. In the case of the latter, one finds enormous potential for contestation in order to take its fair share of the benefits that accrue from the re-branding of the wetland Park.

CONCLUSION

The paper highlights that the rebranding of the iSWP has had uneven and contradictory

benefits on the well being of residents in the town of St Lucia. This is primarily due to the fact that although rebranding of the area takes on a localised indigenous name; its rationale is to target international tourism. In this respect, it is the established White tourism accommodation owners that provide tourist's packages to the area with international marketing links that have benefited most. In the town center, long established eating houses and tourist sport, entertainment and recreational companies have felt a serious decline in business since the rebranding of the area. The worst felt effect of rebranding is on the local Black people of the area who felt excluded from the already ailing economy of the town due to them being confined predominantly to livelihood activities in the informal sector, seasonal and often contract forms of employment in the tourism industry. One of the important contradictions is the Parks marginalisation of domestic tourism for nature conservation reasons which prior to the rebranding process was reportedly known to have had a positive impact on the town's economy. Instead of maintaining a balance between local tourism and nature conservation principles, the Parks authority chose to trade off the former in the interest of the latter by banning all forms of recreational and sporting activities that affects the environment. In addition an important political contradiction which the study highlights is the rebranding of the Park to an indigenous name which many of the predominantly local White residents in the town do not identify with. The area continues to be passionately marketed by its previous name and the town's business community feels that this name is the brand which most tourists look for and identify with. In so far as embracing the new brand name, there appeared very little support for this amongst the White town's people. However, whilst local Blacks welcomed the transformation taking place in terms of rebranding the area with an indigenous name, they were sceptical whether any miracles as the name iSimangaliso suggests will be experienced in their life time as the global tourism focus of the Park for markets has not made any positive impacts on their lives in this tourist town.

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