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## Why it is not enough to have beautiful rock art sites to attract tourists? Challenges facing cultural heritage tourism in a remote area, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

Starting from the observation that having exceptional rock art sites is not enough on its own to attract tourists, we used a case of study in the Makgabeng to analyse the challenges many remote areas face when trying to develop rock art tourism. Several initiatives to attract tourists to cultural heritage sites in the province have been launched since the late 2000s, without producing the anticipated growth in visitor numbers. The study combines empirical and qualitative analyses of data obtained from field observations, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews, all conducted in 2019. In addition, grey literature (i.e. reports, tourist guides' feedback, etc.), and tourism websites were used to investigate whether comparative research from the uKhahlamba Drakensberg mountains could be applied to address visitor numbers in the Makgabeng. In terms of practical applications, identifying obstacles to development and the sustainability of initiatives, our results may help stakeholders orientate their actions. From a methodological perspective, our study shows the value of using a systemic and

multiscale approach to analyse factors that impact a given place, and the interactive and evolving dynamics linking these factors on different spatial levels. This type of analysis provides a synoptic and holistic assessment of the challenges facing tourist development projects in remote areas.

Keywords: rock art, heritage tourism, remote area, community project, Makgabeng, South Africa.

## **INTRODUCTION**

“Why is it not enough to have beautiful rock art sites to attract tourists?” wondered a community tour guide in the Makgabeng region of Limpopo Province during a 2018 discussion on tourism. The question arose because, while noting tourism initiatives implemented in the area with a strong focus on rock art, these initiatives were yielding slow and low returns. The anticipated increase in visitor numbers was not significant. The community tour guide was talking to the Franco-South African multidisciplinary research team under the Sustainability of Rock Art Tourism (SORAT) project funded by the National Research Foundation of South Africa and French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. The objectives of SORAT were twofold: firstly, following previous research in the Makgabeng (Namono 2018a, b), to identify the challenges faced when developing rock art tourism and propose possible solutions; secondly, to compare the results of the Makgabeng study with those carried out in the uKhahlamba Drakensberg mountains (Duval & Smith 2013, 2014; Duval *et al.* 2018; Duval, Smith *et al.* 2019) and to propose a model to develop sustainable rock art tourism.

Both the uKhahlamba Drakensberg mountains (uDM) and the Makgabeng have several hundred rock art sites (Eastwood *et al.* 2002; Mazel 1984). Although these windows to the past are potential tourism resources (Duval, Gauchon *et al.* 2019), the Makgabeng receives far fewer visitors who are interested in natural or cultural tourism. This lack of tourists in the Makgabeng may be due to a combination of factors, such as how tourism has developed in the country and the province at large (see Mafunzwaini & Hugo 2005), challenges regarding strategies to develop tourism, and the insufficient tourism infrastructure. These factors will be discussed later in this article. Due to its remote location outside the main economic and tourist circuits, Makgabeng illustrates the challenge of developing tourism in such locations (Gauché 2010; Harwood 2010). Thus, our study was designed to identify key obstacles to community rock art tourism in the Makgabeng – and thereby answer the tourist guide’s question while also proposing possible solutions to develop tourism in remote areas (Hall 2007a, b; Singgalen *et al.* 2018).

We agree with Doris Carson (2018, 740-741) when she raises methodological issues about the studies of tourism in rural areas: “Case study research appears to have become somewhat disregarded or discredited in recent years (for being too descriptive, not generalizable, not advancing theory), and many leading journals (in tourism and other geography fields) seem to have turned towards more theory- or methodology-oriented papers instead (often with a focus on quantitative methods, big data, and regional/spatial modelling approaches). I think there is a need to re-discover the role of case studies in geography research, and also re-appreciate the value of ‘methodological pluralism’, making

use of alternative approaches including immersive and ethnographic methods, thick description, community-based and participative 'dirt research', narratives and historical accounts, media analysis and so forth". Accordingly, we adopted a multiscale and systemic approach to analyse the different spatial scales in which a locality exists, and the interactive and changing dynamics that connect these levels of analysis. Study methodologies must enable scholars to consider an area's complexity to produce reliable results and thus avoid building unrealistic expectations by overstating a project's potential benefits (Chirikure *et al.* 2010). This is particularly the case in remote areas which are characterised by high levels of unemployment (Carson & Harwood 2007a; Namono 2018a; Prideaux 2002).

Drawing on research conducted in the uDM (Duval & Smith 2013, 2014; Duval *et al.* 2018; Duval, Smith *et al.* 2019) and the Makgabeng (Mcperson 2020; Moremoholo 2014; Radebe 2017; Namono 2018a, b; Van der Byl 2019), our aim was to identify obstacles to sustainable rock art tourism in the Makgabeng. To this end, we evaluated the present situation and previous tourism initiatives in the area, while considering interactions between local, provincial, and national initiatives (Carson 2018). As part of this synchronic/diachronic, multiscale approach, we combined data from various sources, such as field surveys conducted in 2019 which included selected interviews, informal discussions, observations (referred to as field notes), grey literature (reports), tourism brochures and travel guides, studies of rock art sites open to tourists, studies of stakeholder values, perceptions and priorities, and analyses of tourism promotion practices in the Makgabeng and the Limpopo Province at large.

We begin by reviewing research into tourism development in remote areas, community heritage tourism, and then describe the main characteristics of the Makgabeng, focusing on various tourism development initiatives and the stakeholders involved. We then analyse issues concerning heritage tourism in the Makgabeng area. The conclusion outlines possible actions stakeholders may take and considerations for future sustainable heritage tourism projects.

## **REMOTE AREAS AND THEIR TOURISM ISSUES**

Our study is intended to contribute to research on tourism development in remote areas. Compared with similar terms, such as peripherality, marginality, and otherness (Müller & Jansson 2007), we concur with Boller *et al.* (2010) that the concept of remoteness better expresses space and time distance, as well as other factors that contribute to perceived isolation. The concept is related to areas and/or populations that are far removed from neighbouring environments by a combination of factors, such as poor or non-existent access to amenities like electricity and water, access routes, cellphone coverage, internet, health facilities, education, and trade services.

The relative weight of each factor depends on the area. Remote areas in developing countries are further characterised by a very low level of integration into major financial and commercial flows (Raballand 2005). They have small but widely scattered populations which are often in decline, with young people moving to more prosperous areas with better opportunities (Rieutort 2007). This geographical isolation can be mitigated by public policies to improve infrastructure, such as roads and

access to the internet. Decisions about whether or not to implement such policies are eminently political (Gauché 2010) and are based on economic, demographic and health considerations.

However, besides its potential negativity, remoteness can be an asset for tourism because of its association with a perceived authenticity and exoticism (Carson & Harwood 2007b), in turn allowing isolated places to be promoted as restorative and as sources of unforgettable experiences involving sharing in the culture of local people and/or communing with nature (Sinclair 2003; Nepal 2005; Boller *et al.* 2010; Carr *et al.* 2016). The populations of remote areas also tend to welcome tourism development because they expect it to bring in much-needed income – through the sale of services such as guided visits, traditional meals, and local crafts. Such income may lead to improvements in infrastructure and public services (Snyder & Sulle 2011). The success and longevity of tourism projects in remote areas depends on achieving an ever-changing balance between improving facilities and services, and preserving the sense of place that attracts visitors, while respecting the local communities' values and perceptions of development (Buhalis 1999; Brown & Hall 2000; Hall & Boyd 2005).

At the same time, developing tourism in remote areas raises similar issues as community-based tourism, including local community empowerment (Cole 2006; Timothy 2007; Chirikure & Pwiti 2008; Snyman 2012; Moswete & Lacey 2015). It is often a challenge to ensure that benefits accruing from such tourism initiatives are felt locally (Lovelock & Robinson 2005; Hall 2007a; Stoeckl 2008; Lapeyre 2010; Koot 2016; Kalvelage *et al.* 2020), including deciding which types of partnership to set up (Wearing & McDonald 2002; Buultjens *et al.* 2010; Erskine & Meyer 2012) as well as how profits should be shared (Spenceley & Meyer 2012; Spenceley *et al.* 2017; Snyman & Bricker 2019).

Developing tourism in remote areas also relies on the identification of resources that will attract both domestic and international tourists who are drawn by the trilogy of otherness, exoticism and authenticity, as well as the desire for something unique (Ryan & Huyton 2000; Olsen 2002; Tremblay 2007). In heritage tourism, uniqueness centres on specific resources linked to the history and culture of an area that cannot be relocated (Waite 2000; Carson *et al.* 2009; Park 2014; Timothy 2014). In countries with a colonial past such as South Africa, politicians are keen to develop this type of resource as a way of redressing past socio-economic inequalities and redistributing wealth (Pastor 1997; Saarinen & Rogerson 2015; Viljoen & Henama 2017), while at the same time serving a 'nation-building' agenda (Duval & Smith 2013).

Rock art sites lie at the intersection between two registers. First, because rock art sites belong in a time and a landscape, and convey various meanings, historical or symbolic, that provide tourists with glimpses into the history of a specific area. Such glimpses serve to highlight the culture of the local population and their connections to the land. Simultaneously, rock art sites are a region-specific resource that helps characterise a destination (Duval & Smith 2014). Second, rock art sites provide an opportunity to associate local people with tourism development (Parkington 2005; Smith 2006). In return, these forms of engagement help build and transmit heritage values and promote their long-term preservation (Deacon 2006).

This brief overview shows the complex challenges facing tourism development in remote areas. After this general characterisation of remote areas, we focus next on the specifics of the Makgabeng.

### **THE MAKGABENG: REMOTE IN MANY WAYS**

The Makgabeng is a semi-arid landscape located in the mountainous areas of Limpopo Province, northern South Africa (Fig. 1). The landscape, underlain by a geology of sandstone and conglomerate, is covered by mixed bushveld vegetation, and crossed by several ephemeral streams that have cut gorges of varying depths (Bradfield *et al.* 2009). Wind and rain combine to carve a ruiniform landscape (Fig. 2), with rock shelters bearing depictions attributed to three cultures. Surveys carried out during the 20th century and the early 2000s located over 600 sites containing rock art from three traditions (Eastwood *et al.* 2002; Eastwood 2003; Namono & Eastwood 2005; Eastwood *et al.* 2010). These include San hunter-gatherer mono/bi-chrome brush paintings, mostly made in red pigments, with occasional additions of white and black (Fig. 3); Khoekhoen herder finger paintings, largely composed of red and white geometric shapes (Fig. 4); and Northern Sotho finger paintings (Fig. 5). These last are frequently characterised by white anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and geometric designs associated with male and female initiation, and by images of trains and wagons linked to the colonial period (Eastwood *et al.* 2002; Namono & Eastwood 2005). The Makgabeng/Blouberg Heritage Tourism Management Conservation Plan (hereafter MBHTMCP) was developed to chart visits to these rock art sites and related heritage in the Makgabeng/Blouberg area (Rock Art Research Institute & Van Schalkwyk 2009a). We discuss this plan in the following sections.

**FIG. 1.** Localisation map of the Makgabeng and the main tourism resources in Limpopo Province, M. Duval

**FIG. 2.** View across the ruiniform landscape of the Makgabeng to Thabananhlanga mountain. Thabananhlanga village lies at the foot of the mountain. April 2019, M. Duval

**FIG. 3.** The Too Late shelter, also called Medicine Dance shelter, is a San rock art site. March 2020, C. Namono

**FIG. 4.** The Khoi Paintings shelter, is a Khoekhoen rock art site. April 2019, M. Duval

**FIG. 5.** The Great Train shelter is a northern Sotho rock art site. March 2020, C. Namono

### **AN ISOLATED AREA**

Makgabeng is administered by Blouberg Local Municipality, one of the four municipalities that comprise the Capricorn District Municipality. Limpopo Province has five districts in total (Fig. 1). Blouberg Local Municipality is a mostly rural area with few towns and a scattering of villages. One of the towns is Senwabarwana, which was previously called Bochum. Like most names that have been changed under the democratic government in South Africa, local people still use both names interchangeably, with each person having their own preference. The official name of the local municipality remains Blouberg. In this article, we decided to use the official names: Senwabarwana for the town, and Blouberg for the local municipality. The municipal area is about 9248 km<sup>2</sup> and has a

population of 162 629. According to the 2011 Census (Statistics South Africa 2012), the population density is 17.5 people per km<sup>2</sup>. The Makgabeng is home to several villages, but here we focus on only two, Thabananhlana and Nieuwe Jerusalem, which are also part of the Bahananwa Traditional Authority extending to the Blouberg mountains (Koelble & Li Puma 2011; Namono 2018a). These two villages are at the focal point of the community rock art tourism project and hence the main focus areas of this article.

Thabananhlana village, located at the foot of the Thabananhlana mountain (see Figs 2 and 6), comprises around 13 households where most of the approximately 80 inhabitants are related to one another (<https://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/969101>). In contrast, the neighbouring Nieuwe Jerusalem village (Fig. 7) has around 1000 members who live in 200 households. Children from these two villages generally attend the same schools. Other aspects that bring villagers from Thabananhlana and Nieuwe Jerusalem together include being members of the same burial society – a community fund that helps members with funeral costs (Namono 2018a, b). Thabananhlana is remotely located and is particularly characterised by a poor road network. For example, the nearest access route, the Lebalaleng road, is a mixture of sand, gravel and rocks of various sizes (Fig. 7). As a result, it is challenging for a standard passenger car to drive here, although community members familiar with the route usually manage it. The best option is to have a four-wheel drive vehicle. During the SORAT expedition, it took approximately 75 minutes from Thabananhlana to Senwabarwana in a four-wheel drive vehicle, a distance of about 40 kilometres, illustrating the accessibility challenge. In addition, the summer heat between the months of December and March is associated with violent thunderstorms that often further erode and damage the existing poor roads. Due to its remoteness and scant road signage, it is difficult for newcomers to the area to find their way to Thabananhlana without the aid of a guide. There is only one signpost on the main road turn-off at Ga-Monyebodi. We noted too during our SORAT field trip that this sign was partially defaced and difficult to read (Fig. 8).

**FIG. 6.** Members of the research team relaxing with community members at the foot of Thabananhlana mountain. April 2019, M. Duval

**FIG. 7.** Map showing accessibility and tourism projects involving the Makgabeng's rock art sites, M. Duval

**FIG. 8.** Partially defaced tourist sign to the Makgabeng on the main road from Senwabarwana. April 2019, A. Nivart

The lack of signage is further exacerbated by very poor mobile phone coverage, which makes it difficult to obtain a GPS signal or to call for directions. In fact, it is only from a few hilltops that one can get a phone signal that is good enough for making calls, sending text messages, or using messaging apps. One has to go to Senwabarwana to have reliable access to the internet. Remoteness also takes the form of an absence of local services, such as shops, post offices, and medical facilities. For access to these facilities, one needs to go to Senwabarwana, or Blouberg hospital for medical attention.

In terms of amenities, and according to the 2016 report from the Blouberg Local Municipality, there are still homesteads that are not connected to the electricity grid. This is even though initiatives to electrify all households date back to 2005 (Makgabeng was connected in 2009). The major challenge is that some families cannot afford electricity. In addition to available electrification, the municipality has a water distribution network in which houses are located not more than 500 m from a source of drinking water. A scattering of wells complements this water distribution network. Like many rural municipal areas, garbage collection is mainly focused around Senwabarwana and even here it is slow and in need of improvement. While the municipality is part of the Capricorn District Integrated Waste Management Plan, the implementation of solid waste collection in rural areas is limited owing to restricted available resources. Unemployment levels in the Blouberg Municipality are very high, with statistics indicating that about 24% of youth and women are the most affected (Blouberg Local Municipality 2020).

The effects of these various forms of remoteness can be seen in the structure of the local population (Table 1). Most people over the age of 20 leave Makgabeng to find work in towns and cities. Among these urban centres are Polokwane, and Pretoria and Johannesburg, both in neighbouring Gauteng Province. Our field observations in 2019 confirm the age distribution recorded in 2011. We found that it is mainly men who leave for better opportunities in urban areas, with women, children and the elderly staying at home.

**TABLE 1.** Age distribution of the population of Ward 3, which includes the Makgabeng (source: Blouberg Local Municipality 2016).

0–9 years old	10–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70–79	80 and older	Total
2011	2045	895	518	476	364	405	271	154	7116

The area is now threatened by mining and related developments in the area (Namono 2018a, b). The plan is to exploit a huge deposit of platinum and iron ore containing up to 300 years’ worth of reserves (B., personal communication, field notes, 19 August 2019). While it is important to consider initiatives that may be complementary to tourism, mining is not the ideal industry. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 has also demonstrated the extent to which territories mainly organised around the tourism sector become vulnerable in the event of a crisis affecting global tourism dynamics (Gössling *et al.* 2021). In this respect, diversifying regional development and avoiding mono-development is essential to escape the dependence on world markets with their fluctuations and the disasters that may disrupt them.



### **REMOTENESS ACCENTUATED BY REGIONAL TOURIST DYNAMICS**

In terms of tourism, the multifaceted remoteness of the Makgabeng is exacerbated by the fact that Limpopo Province is generally outside the circuits used by international tourists (Mafunzwaini & Hugo 2005). Although Limpopo previously benefited from Pan-African tourism dynamics characterised by offering tours linking South Africa and Zimbabwe, this is no longer possible due to a series of disastrous reforms in Zimbabwe, beginning in 2000. These reforms resulted in an unprecedented economic and social crisis (Compagnon 2008), leading to the collapse of international tourism in the province. A severe knock-on effect of this collapse is that international visitors to South Africa preferred other geographical regions in the country such as Mpumalanga Province, rather than Limpopo.

The current lowly position of Limpopo on the South African tourism landscape is reflected in the sparse attention it gets in international guidebooks. The publications of Lonely Planet and the Rough Guide series contain only a few pages on Limpopo, while none of the itineraries in the Footprint guide include Limpopo, and the French-language Routard guide mentions Limpopo only in the section on Kruger National Park (2019 editions).

According to figures produced by Limpopo's Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET 2018), the sector responsible for developing tourism in Limpopo Province, and by South African Tourism (SAT 2019), the province attracts around 200 000 international visitors a year. These are pre-Covid-19 figures, accounting for only 8% of the international tourists who visit South Africa. Comparatively, the province accounts for approximately 350 000 domestic tourists. This figure does not include South Africans who visit Limpopo to see family members, receive health care, or attend any specific family gatherings. These 550 000 international and domestic tourists stay for a total of just over two million bed-nights, that is, an average of 3.8 bed-nights per stay. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, South Africa annually attracted 10.4 million foreign visitors (SAT 2019). However, data provided by South African Tourism do not differentiate between foreign holidaymakers and visitors from neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Botswana. Close reading of the data suggests that non-African tourists account for about 25% of foreign visitors, that is, approximately 2.5 million people. The 2019 South African Tourism Annual Report breaks down the provenance of these non-African tourists as follows: 58.5% (approximately 1.5 million people) from Europe, 17.7% from North America, 12.4% from Asia, 5% from Oceania, 4.6% from Central and South America, and 1.8% from the Middle East. On average, international tourists visit two provinces during their stay (mean duration 17 nights). They base their stays around South Africa's main tourism resources: i) wildlife – especially in protected areas; ii) wine tourism; iii) beaches; and iv) business tourism. Many of their bed-nights are spent in the provinces of Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Mpumalanga.

Historically, most international visitors to Limpopo come to see wildlife in the northern part of Kruger National Park (Phalaborwa Gate) and in other protected areas (Mafunzwaini & Hugo 2005), whether these are managed publicly (e.g. Marakele and Mapungubwe National Parks, Masebe Nature Reserve, or privately (e.g. Madikela Private Game Reserve) (Fig. 1). Hunting tourism is also well-

established in Limpopo Province. Companies have been offering hunting trips in private reserves, mostly in the Waterberg district and around Vivo, for two to three decades. Around two-thirds of international tourist bed-nights in Limpopo are associated with visits to wildlife areas and for hunting purposes. Watching or hunting wildlife are also major attractions for domestic tourists who also come, among other purposes, to enjoy the Bela-Bela hot springs (Fig. 1).

Although 20% of international and domestic tourists to Limpopo claim to be interested in local culture (LEDET 2018), very few visit cultural heritage sites. As a result, cultural tourism in the province remains largely overshadowed by wildlife tourism. In addition to Bakone Malapa Open-Air Museum in Polokwane, which covers the history, culture, food and lifeways of people living in the province today, cultural tourism has developed mostly in a triangle formed by Makhado, Giyani and Thohoyandou. The latter is part of the Soutpansberg mountains and is home to the BaVenda culture (Fig. 1). Cultural aspects are also emphasised at archaeological sites found in the province, especially Makapans Caves and Mapungubwe, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List for their rich culture and history. Makapans Caves were inscribed by UNESCO in 2005 as part of the 'Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa' serial nomination. The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape was inscribed on the list in 2003 (Ndlovu 2016a, b).

Nevertheless, a field trip in August 2019 revealed differences in how cultural resources have been marketed. While various tourist products such as guided visits, craft centres, tourist trails (e.g. Ribola Art Road) and homestay accommodation are gradually helping to create a 'Venda culture' destination, products associated with archaeological sites are struggling to carve their place in tourism. Makapans Caves are in a state of neglect and are unknown to local tourist organisations (i.e. tourism offices/centres, accommodation providers in Mokopane), making it a tourist wasteland. Most visitors come to Mapungubwe for the scenery and wildlife even though a good number do book the guided tour to Mapungubwe Hill, the core of Mapungubwe World Heritage Site. The production of cultural activities such as guided visits to historic sites, museums and villages depends on a combination of factors that vary from place to place. These factors include the stakeholders involved, how actors at different levels of government (municipal, provincial, national) work together, what strategies aimed at promoting tourism are in place, the training offered to tourists guides, the level of remoteness and general accessibility at different scales. Rock art tourism in the Makgabeng revealed the complexity of these factors and the benefits of multiscale analyses to ensure realistic measures for cultural heritage tourism in remote areas.

### **A TOURISM INITIATIVE BY MAKGABENG STAKEHOLDERS**

Since the end of apartheid, tourism was identified as a key economic sector able to correct the imbalances of the past and promote the emancipation of previously disadvantaged segments of the population (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism [DEAT] 1996, 1997; Allen & Brennan 2004; Rogerson & Visser 2004). The 1996 White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa (Ndlovu 2016b), the 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which was government policy between 1994 and 1996, and the 1996 Growth, Employment and

Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, all significantly promoted tourism. Historically, the tourism sector had been developed predominantly 'for whites, by whites' (Soni 1997; Visser 2003). A common objective of the White Paper, RDP, and GEAR was to transfer capital and skills to previously disadvantaged segments of the population to help rebalance socio-economic dynamics (Nel & Binns 2002; Rogerson 2013). The country's provinces introduced several tourism initiatives with dedicated sources of funding (DEAT 2004; Rogerson 2013, 2015). In this context, cultural heritage was seen as having the potential to contribute to the construction of the 'rainbow nation' and encouraging the African Renaissance (DEAT 1996, 2004; Mtshali 1997; Marschall 2005; Meskell 2012). All these tourism initiatives were aimed at attracting new markets (Ivanovic 2008). However, what has been evident over the years is that the promotion of cultural tourism varies greatly from one province to another.

The analysis of tourism policies implemented over the last 20 years in Limpopo Province shows that the 'cultural heritage' entry point has mainly been approached from the perspective of developing crafts skills and cultural experiences. This was part of a general policy to develop rural tourism (Mafunzwaini & Hugo 2005). To this end, several training programmes were offered between 2000 and 2010, and implemented with funding from the national government. Craft-themed tourist trails, such as the Ribola Art Route south-east of Louis Trichardt, were created (<https://www.ribolaartroute.com/>). Around the same time, initiatives were taken to link existing wildlife and scenery-based tourism dynamics with local communities, creating associated cultural products. Most notably, the African Ivory Route, a network of eight camps across the province was established (Boonzaaier & Wels 2018; Sathiyah 2019). Launched at the beginning of the 2000s by LEDET, the marketing of the African Ivory Route became the responsibility of Transfrontier Parks Destinations in 2012. This is a private consortium whose responsibilities include persuading tour operators to include the African Ivory Route in their South African itineraries (Boonzaaier & Wels 2018). In Blouberg's camp (Fig. 7), the itinerary includes exploring the local countryside, bathing in natural pools, visiting the village, as well as sharing a traditional meal and an evening with the community. Since 2017, the interest to develop cultural tourism has become more emphasised in the tourism strategy for the Limpopo Province (LEDET 2018), a point to which we will return below.

#### COMMUNITY HERITAGE TOURISM WITHIN THE MAKGABENG /BLOUBERG AREA

Within the Blouberg Local Municipality, tourism is mostly centred around wildlife and scenery, and, to a lesser extent, hunting around the town of Alldays (Figs 1 & 7). According to the official list of accommodation providers provided by the Blouberg Tourism Composite Guide (<http://www.blouberg.gov.za/>), there are seven lodges, four motels, and three guest houses within the municipality. In addition, there are six campsites and about 20 non-declared accommodation providers. It is impossible to know how many beds these service providers have. With specific reference to the Makgabeng, there are seven accommodation providers (Fig. 7). These service providers mainly cater for business travellers and families attending weddings or funerals. The Blouberg Camp, which is part of the African Ivory Route, provides tented and rondavel accommodation. Campsites in the Blouberg Nature Reserve, in the northern part of the Blouberg mountains (Fig. 7), are about an hour and half's drive away from Senwabarwana. Despite being seen

as a potential driver of local development in Limpopo Province since the 2000s, tourism promotion in the Blouberg Local Municipality remains limited. The region is mainly visited by domestic tourists and the few international tourists brought in by the African Ivory Route (Mafunzwaini & Hugo 2005).

The Blouberg Local Municipality received government funding in 2008 to help boost tourism potential in the area prior to the hosting of Africa's first soccer World Cup in 2010. Part of this funding was used to launch cultural tourism in the Makgabeng and Blouberg areas. A heritage tourism management conservation plan (MBHTMCP, referred to earlier), a tourism feasibility assessment and development plan (MBHTFADP) and a heritage tourism plan (MBHTP) were developed (Rock Art Research Institute [RARI] & Van Schalkwyk 2009a, b). The MBHTMCP considered all cultural resources, with a strong focus on rock art (RARI & Van Schalkwyk 2009a). This initiative has counterparts at Game Pass Shelter and Didima in the uDM (Smith 2006; Ndlovu 2012), in Wildebeest Kuil near Kimberley (Morris 2003), and Clanwilliam in the Cederberg (Parkington 1999). Those earlier projects were influential in the decision to evaluate the feasibility of tourism development in the Makgabeng and, in 2009, the preparation of the MBHTMCP for the development of cultural heritage tourism.

One of the objectives highlighted in these plans was to increase visitor numbers to rock art sites. These sites had attracted small numbers of visitors since the turn of the 21st century. Local people, who picked up their knowledge from their contact with archaeologists, acted as guides, a profession that was generationally handed down (Namono 2018b). For example, B. is a 45-year-old local tour guide who has followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps (field notes, 15 April 2019) (informants have been assigned arbitrary capital letters for confidentiality). One of the recommendations of the MBHTMCP was to create four heritage trails: i) the Thabananthlana Route; ii) the Gorge Route; iii) the Millbank Route; and iv) the Leipzig Route). Each of these heritage trails was to provide tourists with different aspects of local heritage (Fig. 7).

The MBHTMCP made three further recommendations: first, the recruitment of a tourism officer and additional six guides to bolster the ad hoc community guiding structure; second, the establishment of three interpretation/orientation centres to provide background information about the heritage in the area and within the trails; and third, the utilisation of the Senwabarwana Tourism Office as the tourism information centre to receive and orientate visitors to places of interests and put them in touch with a guide. This building belongs to the Blouberg Local Municipality and has, since 2019, been the office of the tourism officer in the municipality. However, poor funding and stakeholder consultation have slowed the pace of implementing many of the proposed strategies. While it is in existence, the tourism office is neither immediately recognisable from the outside as a tourist information centre nor well designed to inform tourists. This is being addressed in an ongoing project. In addition, a related attempt to bring together members of the tourism sector (accommodation providers, service providers, etc.) within a loosely formed Blouberg Local Tourism Association quickly ran out of steam due to a lack of interest from these stakeholders. This was alluded to by one of the tour guides we interviewed on 15 April 2019, who argued that "It was exhausting to travel the whole week visiting [stakeholders] establishment by establishment. And at the end, they don't come to the kick-off meeting. They had their own activities hidden in the bush, not all of them are registered, they

prefer to operate in isolation". Nevertheless, progress was made in 2018 when the municipality produced its first tourist brochure promoting the area (<http://www.blouberg.gov.za/>). Budgetary restrictions prevented the brochure from being widely distributed, with only a few copies printed. At the time of our 2019 field study, the brochure was still available in digital format from the municipality's website, but there was no way of tracking how often it was viewed or downloaded.

Step-by-step, in conjunction with work done by archaeologists and the visits organised by Makgabeng Farm Lodge (see following section), the MBHTMCP became centred on rock art sites with the aim of strengthening community tourism following the MBHTFADP and MBHTP. This was a sensible move because of the limited number of areas from where visitors can appreciate rock art in Limpopo Province (Fig. 1). The only opportunities offered nearby to tourists wanting to visit rock art are by community tour guides living close to Masebe Nature Reserve (Fig. 1, field notes, 8 August 2019).

Inspired by the 2017 tourism strategy of Limpopo Province, a new idea of creating clusters was initiated (LEDET 2018). As part of this new initiative, Makgabeng community heritage tourism was listed as one of the top five community projects to be supported, as highlighted by D., a LEDET official:

The development of cultural tourism is now one of the main thrusts of Limpopo's tourism development policy, in line with the desire to develop community tourism. Helping communities to develop cultural tourism allows both to diversify the image of Limpopo as a destination, which is better known for its landscapes and wildlife, and at the same time to integrate communities into the tourism sector, to make them partners (interviewed 15 April 2019).

### **ROCK ART TOURISM IN THE MAKGABENG: A SYNCHRONIC AND EMPIRICAL APPROACH**

During our 2019 field visit, we noted that tourists can visit the Makgabeng mainly through privately owned and independently run tour operators, Makgabeng Farm Lodge, or through the Blouberg tourism office. Both methods need community tour guides from Thabananhlana and/or Nieuwe Jerusalem. On a few occasions, tour operators from outside Blouberg have brought visitors to the Makgabeng rock art sites (G., tourism service provider, field notes, 12 April 2019).

The Makgabeng Farm Lodge (<https://makgabenglodge.co.za/>) was officially opened in 2010. It came into existence after its owners realised a shortage of accommodation in the area targeting business travellers and civil servants. As indicated during an April 2019 interview, the lodge serves both domestic and international tourists, while also including a range of possible excursions that visitors can choose from. By 2019, Makgabeng Farm Lodge had expanded its offering to cover three main products: i) day hikes to see the flora and fauna of the Makgabeng and Blouberg mountains; ii) four-wheel drive excursions and short hikes to discover the history of the region, including the Leipzig German Mission (see Leipzig Route in Fig. 7); and iii) day hikes to explore rock art sites within the Makgabeng. We were unable to access the lodge's visitor register to assess their reviews of the lodge. However, judging from the 2016 infrastructural extensions that added four rooms to the existing 16, it would seem that Makgabeng Farm Lodge was doing good business in the area. There are five staff members employed

at the facilities (field observation, April 2019). This is a far cry from 2010 when the lodge first came into existence, as suggested by E. (Service provider, field notes, 12 April 2019) that,

[T]he biggest challenge that we have had was to create an enticing package. Remember, when we started here there was nothing. We started everything from scratch. Tourism there was not so much. People were not going to the Makgabeng. We had a challenge of packaging it, selling it, having people come.

Rock art day excursions were not initially part of the packages offered at the lodge. They were added in 2012, apparently inspired by the MBHTMCP. Rock art, as argued by E. (Service provider, field notes, 12 April 2019), is

one of the things you may experience in this area, it is unique to Makgabeng. So, we have started to incorporate some rock art designs into our place. So that when people go there, they can start having a feel of the rock art here you know before they go to the actual rock art sites.

It appears that tourists like rock art tours. We could not ascertain how many people have been taken to rock art sites by Makgabeng Farm Lodge since 2012. However, indications are there have been about 30 rock art days per each calendar year. The cost charged for these rock art tours is R600 per person, which amounts to about US\$39 (15 January 2022 exchange rates). The fee includes a four-wheel drive vehicle provided by the lodge, refreshments and lunch.

Visits to the rock art shelters are led either by the lodge owner, a staff member and/or one or both of the two community tour guides still working from the six guides who were initially trained (a point we return to later). The owner mentioned it is not always possible to use a local guide due to poor mobile phone coverage, making it difficult for the guides to be easily contactable. It is also a reality that some of the visits are often impromptu, further making it difficult for the community tour guides to make themselves available. Such difficulties from cellular network challenges were confirmed by one of the community tour guides we engaged with in April 2019 (C., field notes, 18 April 2019).

The other option for visitors to the Makgabeng rock art site is through contacting guides. This occurs mainly through referrals, word of mouth, or return visits, largely because Makgabeng is not a well-known tourist area and the existing difficulties with the network connection. Consequently, visits to rock art sites organised by tourists directly engaging with guides are not easily accessed for further information. The only source of information we were able to find was a single post on the Tripadvisor website (<https://www.tripadvisor.co.za>), where a tourist preparing a fourth trip to South Africa asked whether anyone knew how to contact the guides at Makgabeng. While the 2018 brochure produced by the Blouberg Local Municipality briefly mentions the possibility of hiring a local guide, it is only available on the municipality's website, a source very few tourists would think of consulting. The brochure lists several guides, without providing their contact details. It is up to visitors to realise that they have to contact the municipality to get this information. The assumption is that tourists would

contact the guides through the Blouberg Tourism Office, especially since not all guides have phones. We note here that when developing a tourism product, it is important to create awareness among potential visitors, to kindle a desire among them to visit a specific area (Lorton Consulting 2009; Ramkissoo & Uysal 2011; Van der Byl 2019; Mcpherson 2020). Leaving it up to visitors to find their own guides is clearly missing the mark of promoting interest in local rock art.

We further noted that the brochure does not inform tourists that they can book a traditional meal, even though this possibility has been available since 2017. This offering was initially only available to large groups and through advance client requests. These meals are offered in tandem with visits to rock art sites, and were made possible by the income generated from tour guiding activities from which women in Makgabeng were able to purchase essentials needed to prepare traditional meals. Only three such meals have been served between 2017 and 2019. In addition to traditional meals, during the 2009 MBHTMCP community meetings, the provision of homestays was considered, but only one person offered her home for this venture. Homestays were again revisited in March 2019 during a field visit for another ongoing project where it was agreed that the homestay idea needs to be developed further with experts. Homestays were again discussed during the SORAT field trip. When asked about homestays, responses ranged from “My house is not good enough for tourists” to “Anyway, I don’t speak English well enough to receive tourists.” These remarks show that community members lack confidence to host tourists in their homes, yet this could potentially provide a unique tourist experience (Paulauskaite *et al.* 2017). The Makgabeng case study echoes the question of the legitimacy for tourism actors in other fields (Timothy 2000; Buultjens *et al.* 2010). Similar challenges have been observed throughout Limpopo Province (Mafunzwaini & Hugo 2005), and in other remote areas (Moscardo 2008). The challenges in the Makgabeng reflect a need for rural tourism awareness programmes in the province.

In an extremely competitive tourism market, lack of information in promotional materials has greatly restricted awareness and the growth of the Makgabeng community tourism initiative. As a result, visitors are few and far between, amounting to around a dozen a year. Lassitude is creeping in and guides have been looking for other opportunities, although tour guiding was never meant to be a full-time activity. One of the community tour guides, highlighting the frustration they experience, indicated that they “... sometimes spend a lot of time without having any tourists. You just sit and wait [for when] tourists are coming. Just sit and do nothing, it is like a waste of time.” (C., interviewed 12 April 2019).

Low visitor numbers to the rock art sites is currently of little economic benefit to the community. In the case of visits booked through Makgabeng Farm Lodge, benefits for the community and tour guides depend on the tips visitors give, over and above the R600 they would already have paid to the lodge. Visitor generosity is also a key factor for visits booked directly with community tour guides as currently there is no predefined rate. Although this system can be advantageous, its effects are limited by the tiny number of visits. In all cases, all the income generated by guides is paid into a community fund managed by the Tourism Committee. The Tourism Committee has five members from Thabananhlanga, chosen for their interest in developing community tourism. This structure is

responsible for clearing branches from the road and for organising activities for tourists, such as traditional meals. Members of this committee are also responsible for record keeping. Funds generated from tour guiding activities and traditional meals are entrusted to one of the committee members for safekeeping.

Guides do not receive any remuneration for their services unless the community decides to pay them something. Asked about this system, one of the local guides replied: “I’m doing this for my own benefit, like coming to a point where I get knowledge from different people ... Regardless of the money I just love doing this”. The guide emphasised that he is aware that their business offering is still in the infancy stages, limiting the opportunity to make an income. His focus was on acquiring knowledge rather than money (C., field notes, 18 April 2019). This non-payment system explains why most of the guides who were trained in the early stages have left to look for other jobs elsewhere. This also means that the remaining community guides need to secure other ways of earning a living. This has an impact on the availability of the community guides as they cannot always be easily available at short notice to serve tourists. This problem is not unique to Makgabeng, as the same experience has been recorded at Kamberg Rock Art Centre in the uDM (Duval & Smith 2013; Ndlovu 2012).

To support heritage tourism in the Makgabeng, tourism initiatives have been listed among the five-year projects for the Capricorn District. According to LEDET, these five-year projects are meant to run from 2017 to 2022. The main objectives are to ensure that the projects are fully sustainable within five years, allowing them to be adequately managed by the community. LEDET aims to provide technical support to Makgabeng once the project is fully operational after the five years. Currently, there are two such projects underway. The idea of opening a campsite in Thabanantlana (Fig. 7), originally recommended in the MBHTMCP, is currently underway. It is hoped that this site will enable tourists to stay close to the community and rock art sites. Its location will increase the amount of time visitors spend in the area, which will have direct spin-offs in terms of increasing economic benefits for the community. According to one of the community tour guides, having a campsite rather than other types of accommodation “... is less work in terms of maintenance ... all we have to do is to make sure that there is water in the water tank” (B., field notes, 20 April 2019). After the installation of a borehole in 2016 to serve the needs of the community and foster tourism development (Namono 2018a), four tents were donated. Once the campsite is operational, camping gear will be rented to visitors. Prior to that happening, provision of adequate storage facilities close to the camp and finalising legal aspects governing the renting of such equipment is being attended to. The future of Makgabeng community tourism depends mainly on the pursuit of collaborations with researchers in the framework of partnership established for many years (Namono 2018a, b), and on the availability of LEDET funding.

### **OBSTACLES TO DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE ROCK ART TOURISM IN THE MAKGABENG**

There is much merit in hosting tourists on site and ensuring that the local community benefits from heritage tourism. However, our study highlighted a series of obstacles that stakeholders need to overcome. Our results, presented in this section, are intended to serve as a starting point towards



building sustainable heritage tourism in the Makgabeng. Put into perspective with research conducted on rock art sites in the uDM (Duval & Smith 2013, 2014; Duval *et al.* 2018; Duval, Smith *et al.* 2019), the results of this case study feed into a regional reflection on the challenges involved in developing sustainable rock art tourism (Ndlovu 2016b). It is up to the community to pick from among the proposals what best suits their needs and expectations (Namono 2018a). Indeed, as Chirikure *et al.* (2010) indicate, one cannot be overly prescriptive given that, especially in rural contexts, the local situation ideally determines the nature of participation and/or levels of engagement required for sustainability.

### **DIFFICULT ACCESS AND INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT FROM PUBLIC BODIES**

Ensuring that roads are accessible, clear signposting, and widespread coverage for mobile phones must be part of every tourism development strategy in remote areas (Hall 2007b). Indeed, for remoteness to be an asset in attracting tourists instead of a drawback, an area must have a certain level of infrastructure that can only be provided with support from the public authorities (Gauché 2010). It seems unlikely that the road to the Makgabeng will be upgraded in the foreseeable future even though this possibility has been under discussion for years. The low likelihood is because upgrading the road will be very expensive for the Blouberg Local Municipality. Some may argue that upgrading the road provides little political or economic benefit. The road serves no more than 250 houses and no activity on the plateau would justify the cost of such an infrastructural investment. There are efforts, however, by the Blouberg Local Municipality to keep the road in a usable condition. LEDET has recommended that the road be gravelled so it will be less susceptible to damage from water run-off even though the deep sand in many areas also makes this a challenge. Upgrading the road to make it easily drivable even for smaller vehicles would make the area accessible to tourists. Indeed, tourism products with even basic amenities tend to be more attractive to families and young professionals who are more likely to have passenger cars, rather than wealthier tourists with the means to drive four-wheel vehicles. The latter generally prefer facilities with more comfortable amenities than they would find in the Makgabeng.

Until the road is upgraded, one solution could be to strengthen partnerships with Makgabeng Farm Lodge and other tourism service providers (as recommended in the MBHTP), who often use four-wheel vehicles. Doing so could potentially increase the number of tourists visiting Makgabeng for day trips. To be sustainable, such partnerships must be equitable – all stakeholders concerned must have an equal share in the benefits (Moscardo 2005, 2008). The community should receive and manage a share of the income generated through their interventions (Lockett *et al.* 2003; Namono, 2018a, b). These questions of governance are further discussed in the next section.

Signposting is the responsibility of LEDET and there are arrangements underway to address the shortage of directional signage. Research done by Moremoholo (2014) noted that the community want signage to help improve their tourism initiative and would protect the infrastructure. In addition to signage, a map could be produced to help direct tourists to the areas of attraction within Makgabeng. Such a map could be incorporated into the Makgabeng brochure promoting rock art

tourism. The impact of such a brochure would depend on its availability and the marketing actions associated with it.

Finally, there is a need to improve the network coverage for mobile phones. It may also be of great benefit to use the Tourism Office at Senwabarwana, which has a relatively stable internet connection, to manage bookings. A dedicated budget for communication purposes could also help improve communication, thus increasing potential bookings.

### ***TOURISM TRAINING AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE***

As part of the MBHTMCP launched in 2009, six guides were provided with training in different aspects of guiding by various institutions. First, the Services and Tourism Training Institute in Johannesburg gave them general tourism and guiding training. Second, they were trained in rock art interpretation by the Rock Art Research Institute (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg). Third, they received training on how to adapt their heritage tours based on visitors' expectations. Doing so is important in creating an unforgettable tourism experience (as notably discussed by Weiler & Kim 2011; Salazar 2012; De la Barre 2013; Weiler & Black 2015).

However, when we asked a guide "How do tourists find you?", the answer was: "They just have to call the municipality of Blouberg" (C., local guide, interviewed 12 April 2019). This answer is revealing in that it is based on an assumption that tourists know: i) that Limpopo Province, which is off the main tourist circuit, is worth visiting; ii) that it is interesting for its culture and heritage, as well as its scenery and wildlife; iii) that its heritage includes rock art and that there are rock art sites in the Makgabeng; iv) that these sites are open to visitors and can provide an enriching tourist experience; and v) that they can be visited with a local guide. To top it all, the guide also assumes that tourists are prepared to overcome the access difficulties (road not signposted and in poor condition depending on when one visits, and intermittent phone signal) to get to the Makgabeng. While the guide was well aware that things needed to be further improved, they seemed to underestimate the importance, when developing tourism, of creating awareness among potential visitors and thereby kindling a desire to visit an area (Mcpherson 2020; Ramkissoo & Uysal, 2011).

One of the ways of increasing tourism knowledge among community members at Makgabeng (Sammy 2008) and building their confidence as legitimate stakeholders in the tourism process (Gard McGehee & Kline 2008), can be drawn from the villages of Makushu and Musholombi. These villages are located about 100 kilometres from Makgabeng and are characterised by similar rural settings (Fig. 1). Their tourism initiative was launched in 2016–2017 in partnership with a private tourism agency called Traditional African HomeStays South Africa (TAHS-SA). The tourism initiative experience, which combines visits to the community with homestay accommodation, quickly became popular with tourists—by August 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic, it had already received 54 group bookings for 2020, with around 10 to 15 people per group. Importantly, numerous aspects of the project such as: i) choice of houses to receive tourists; ii) training of local guides; iii) establishment of a rotation system; and iv) involvement of community members in tourist activities, all provide direct and indirect

benefits for the communities. This type of tourism product may also contribute to sustainable tourism in the Makgabeng if it can be replicated.

Implementing such a model will require several factors: i) improving roads for better access; ii) training community members in receiving tourists; iii) introducing marketing strategies; and iv) setting up appropriate partnerships. Steps would also have to be taken to ensure that the income generated is shared equitably so it benefits everyone in the community. This could be achieved by using the structures in place (Namono 2018a, b). The current Tourism Committee, set up in 2016, has few resources although its members are well-meaning. However, once officially registered as a tourism entity, its roles and structures may be more clearly defined. Resolving this issue and introducing a business model for managing and sharing funds from visitors is an essential first step to sustainability. As has been suggested, the burial society may also play a role in this context, and may even provide an interesting working model (Namono 2018a, b). At the same time, the content of the community tourism product must be carefully defined (Spenceley & Meyer 2012; Wiltshier & Clarke 2019), and community members must be trained in how to manage and run the product as a business. These issues crucially affect tourism development in all remote areas (Mafunzwaini & Hugo 2005; Moscardo 2008; Carr *et al.* 2016; Bittar Rodrigues & Prideaux 2017).

The traditional governance of land is another parameter to include in the business model. Chiefs and headmen should be kept informed of projects launched by the community and associated partnerships that are set up (see also Namono 2018a). For example, in the case of the Makushu and Musholombi homestays, the traditional leadership are involved and advised on which houses may accommodate tourists (J., service provider, interviewed on 17 August 2019). However, an approach that revolves around local politics or power structures is delicate (Koelble & Li Puma 2011). Stakeholders in the Makgabeng are currently discussing various options on how to improve homestays. The Makushu and Musholombi case study could be adapted to the specifics of Thabananhlana (Namono 2018a).

### **STAKEHOLDER PRIORITIES, MARKETING DEVELOPMENT AND PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIES**

Developing tourism requires a marketing strategy. In the case of the Makgabeng, it is important to intensively promote the heritage tourism product among potential domestic and international visitors. Existing marketing is relatively weak, with the Blouberg Local Municipality being one of the few localities where this tourism product is mentioned. Chosen marketing strategies should be effective in promoting any specific product, and the same should apply in the case of Makgabeng rock art tourism. If Makgabeng is to attract tourists for its rock art, a strong marketing strategy is needed. One of the means that could be used is social media. Facebook and Instagram accounts are easier and less onerous to manage than a website and provide a useful way of sharing information. Community members may use a project mobile phone to post content whenever they go to Senwabarwana where they should have access to an adequate network. At the same time, Blouberg Local Municipality may be persuaded to recruit a social media coordinator or, at the very least, to expand the responsibilities of the tourism officer recruited in 2009 to include posting Facebook and

Instagram content. With suitable content, it should be possible to gradually increase the Makgabeng community heritage tourism initiative and generate a snowball effect (Munar 2012; Mkwizu 2020). A crowdfunding campaign focused on a well-defined objective, besides providing funds when successful, is also a remarkably effective marketing tool to increase awareness and build a supportive community.

However, social networks are saturated with new content, and it is often difficult to gain attention in this way only. Such social media accounts should be seen as a first step in gaining a foothold in the international market (Font & McCabe 2017). Obtaining an entry in tourists' guidebooks such as Lonely Planet and the Rough Guide would also raise awareness of what Makgabeng has to offer tourists. This would require subsequent editions of these guidebooks dedicating a chapter to Limpopo Province. Provincial tourism agencies such as LEDET and LTA would have to invest heavily in raising the profile and standing of Limpopo Province as a tourist destination.

There is also a need for all stakeholders to actively support all implemented strategies, and this is currently not the case with Makgabeng rock art tourism. For instance, LEDET, which is responsible for tourist infrastructure in the province, supports the Makgabeng project. However, the same cannot be said of LTA, which is less enthusiastic. As articulated by A. from the marketing department of the LTA, rock art tourism is not seen as having economic value (interviewed 12 April 2019). There is even less enthusiasm among the bodies responsible for protecting cultural sites. This became evident in the interview with one of the staff members from the Limpopo Heritage Resources Authority (LHRA) who argued that "the history of the San has been taken over by other provinces, it is promoted elsewhere. The rock art sites are not something that speaks for Limpopo" (L., interviewed 12 April 2019). This comment is in sharp contrast with the long and diverse history of rock art production in Limpopo Province, particularly in the Makgabeng (Eastwood *et al.* 2002; Eastwood 2003; Namono & Eastwood 2005; Eastwood *et al.* 2010). The staffer further lamented the lack of skills within the team responsible for heritage management in Limpopo Province. Such is the result of political pressure, which placed "... more emphasis on the liberation struggle heritage" (L., interviewed 12 April 2019). A similar situation has been described by Esterhuysen (2012) in relation to the development of other archaeological sites in South Africa. Lack of capacity to promote archaeological sites – and more particularly rock art sites – as well as implementing national initiatives, is a big challenge to rock art tourism products like the one at Makgabeng.

Creating partnerships with global tourism service providers will also help Makgabeng rock art tourism (Erskine & Meyer 2012; Spenceley & Meyer 2012). Among such providers could be travel agencies (TA) and tour operators (TO) that specialise in cultural tourism, and which are socially responsible, especially toward local communities. TA and TO can become affiliated to Fair Trade Tourism (FTT) South Africa, a not-for-profit company with the mandate to certify businesses whose operations benefit the local community in one way or another. Based on their clients' requirements and preferences, the TA or TO will organise a suitable itinerary and book activities and accommodation with a pre-established pool of service providers. Such partnerships would be valuable because most international tourists go through a TA or TO when booking their holidays, which is reassuring for tourists. Tourists generally have a high regard for working with an established agency. However, this

confines them to a predefined circuit and the schedule of booked accommodation prevents them staying anywhere for longer than planned. Most international tourists have a limited amount of time in South Africa, so they carefully plan every minute.

However, in the case of the Makgabeng, none of these measures – social media campaigns, obtaining local and provincial government support, structuring the product so it appeals to TA and TO – will have the desired effect unless the access road is improved. Although TA and TO are interested in selling “authentic cultural encounters with communities”, time is of the essence, as tourists often have a long list of things they want to see and do during their limited time in South Africa. In other words, they will not consider their trip a success unless they have seen several of the sites that have been promoted as emblematic of South Africa, such as the Kruger Park and other wildlife reserves, the wine region, monuments to the Freedom Struggle, historic townships and reconstructed traditional villages (Zulu, Xhosa, etc.). Consequently, TA and TO will not include a less ‘iconic’ site in their tours if getting there takes too long or is potentially difficult.

It is necessary therefore to find a balance between exoticism and accessibility. Exoticism, characterised by very rough roads, well ‘off the beaten track’, which contribute to the authentic experience, may seem ideal in some instances, but this is not the case at Makgabeng. Blouberg African Ivory Route Camp (Fig. 7) and Makushu and Musholombi, north of Makhado (Fig. 1), are exemplary in this respect: the journey along the gravel road takes just under 15 minutes—long enough to give a feeling of adventure but short enough to be fit into a packed itinerary. In Makgabeng’s case, the benefit of improving the road is that it would reduce access time, allowing tourists who are often have limited time to add Makgabeng to their itinerary.

The area is ideally located, within a geographical space with already well-known tourism destinations. Makgabeng is between Johannesburg and Botswana, and about halfway between Botswana and the Kruger National Park (Fig. 1). It is thus an ideal stopover. This benefit was noted in the MBHTFADP and well-articulated by a tour guide interviewed on 12 April 2019 who noted that the Blouberg area “is a very good stop for us when you come from Botswana and before to go to the Kruger. It is a nice halfway point, and we got a truly local cultural experience”.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Our case study, the Makgabeng rock art community heritage tourism initiative, shows the value of adopting a multidisciplinary approach to analysing the challenges and limits of tourism development in remote areas. Given the complexity and interdependence of the factors involved, local development projects must consider regional, national, and international tourism dynamics as well as the perceptions of different stakeholders about a specific tourism product. In this respect, our case study feeds into a more general reflection identifying resources capable of attracting rock art enthusiasts. Tourist development projects in areas with high unemployment tend to generate high expectations. It is the responsibility of researchers engaged in such local development initiatives not to unwittingly foster disillusionment among community members who hope for an improvement in

their living conditions (see MBHTP). The community are aware of their heritage (Radebe 2017; Namono 2018a, b) but need increased assurance that they have something to offer tourists.

The community tour guide whose question gave our paper its title, along with the wider community, wanted to know why having beautiful rock art sites is not enough on its own to attract tourists. Our study offers some answers to this question by highlighting existing challenges to sustainable heritage tourism in Makgabeng. Among the challenges noted were: i) poor access road and network coverage; and ii) inadequate marketing of Makgabeng rock art tourism. The value of our findings provides lessons that may be considered by other similar projects, significantly helping community projects. Our findings build on previous research (Radebe 2017; Namono 2018a, b) and feed into an ongoing NRF-funded research project led by one of us (Dr Catherine Namono). Indeed, our goal is not to impose a set of solutions but to provide stakeholders with information to draw on to make informed, collective choices following the central ethic of Namono's research for many years in this area, and in other places (Namono 2018a, b).

Given our experience of other areas that offer visits to rock art sites (uDM, Botswana, Namibia, and also the French West Indies, and mountainous areas such as the Pyrenees and the French and Italian Alps), we are convinced that there is a demand for tourist experiences combining rock art, scenery, wildlife, and encounters with local communities via visits to their home areas and/or by sharing traditional meals (Duval & Smith 2014). Tourists are looking for this type of encounter, in which different elements of the landscape (rock art, historic monuments, wildlife, etc.) combine to provide a unique experience of a different world. The archaeological and historical information provided through the MBHTMCP should be expanded to include aspects such as resources found on the landscape (i.e. geology, geomorphology, biodiversity).

The idea of homestays is worth revisiting. Organising a study trip to Makushu and Musholombi would allow the community members in our study to see what homestays involve and the types of partnerships they could set up. Likewise, a visit to Blouberg African Ivory Route Camp would enable them to observe its cooperative model (Sathiyah 2019). It is essential that these trips also lead to discussions within the community so its members can decide for themselves the shape they want their project to take. The proposed visits will add to those already undertaken in 2017, when community members visited the tourism project at Mnweni in KwaZulu-Natal. One of the community members also visited rock art sites in France in May 2019. He observed how rock art sites are managed and developed for tourism and reported back to the community. Involving community members in fact-finding initiatives is part of the empowerment process (Namono 2018a, b), and allows them to make more informed decisions than if they were simply presented with the information by government representatives, a consultant, or a research team. It is important to remember, however, that what works for one community may not necessarily work for another, at least not in the same form. This is because each project must be tailored to the area concerned.

Marketing strategies should be enhanced and must involve a greater number of stakeholders. Among such stakeholders would be the Makgabeng Farm Lodge, tourism operators, and Transfrontier Parks Destinations which manages the African Ivory Route camps (and is also Fair Trade Tourism

certified). Such efforts will bolster the Makgabeng community heritage tourism initiative. Potential partners should be invited to the Makgabeng community to present the different facets of this tourist experience as well as draw up ethical and sustainable partnerships (Moscardo 2005, 2008).

Whatever the options chosen, the community will not be able on its own to provide the financial and human resources needed to define and refine their initiative, and then develop a marketing and partnership strategy. As seen in other projects (Spenceley & Meyer 2012) and in the Limpopo Province in general (Mafunzwaini & Hugo 2005), Makgabeng heritage tourism will need various forms of short- and medium-term support to ensure sustainability. While noting that it has limited resources, the Blouberg Local Municipality must show greater commitment to the project, thus achieving its overall tourism development objectives. Whatever support Blouberg Local Municipality can offer will be enhanced by LEDET and LTA. Financial resources will help improve roads, signage, and so on. The sustainability of the Makgabeng rock art community heritage tourism initiative will rely on these collaborative partnerships with various stakeholders. Securing such partnerships will help the project to generate the hoped-for benefits, therefore preventing frustration and disillusionment often observed in such development initiatives.

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**FIG. 1.** Localisation map of the Makgabeng and the main tourism resources in Limpopo Province, M. Duval

**FIG. 2.** View across the ruiniform landscape of the Makgabeng to Thabananhlana mountain. Thabananhlana village lies at the foot of the mountain. April 2019, M. Duval

**FIG. 3.** The Too Late shelter, also called Medicine Dance shelter, is a San rock art site. March 2020, C. Namono

**FIG. 4.** The Khoi Paintings shelter, is a Khoekhoen rock art site. April 2019, M. Duval

**FIG. 5.** The Great Train shelter is a northern Sotho rock art site. March 2020, C. Namono

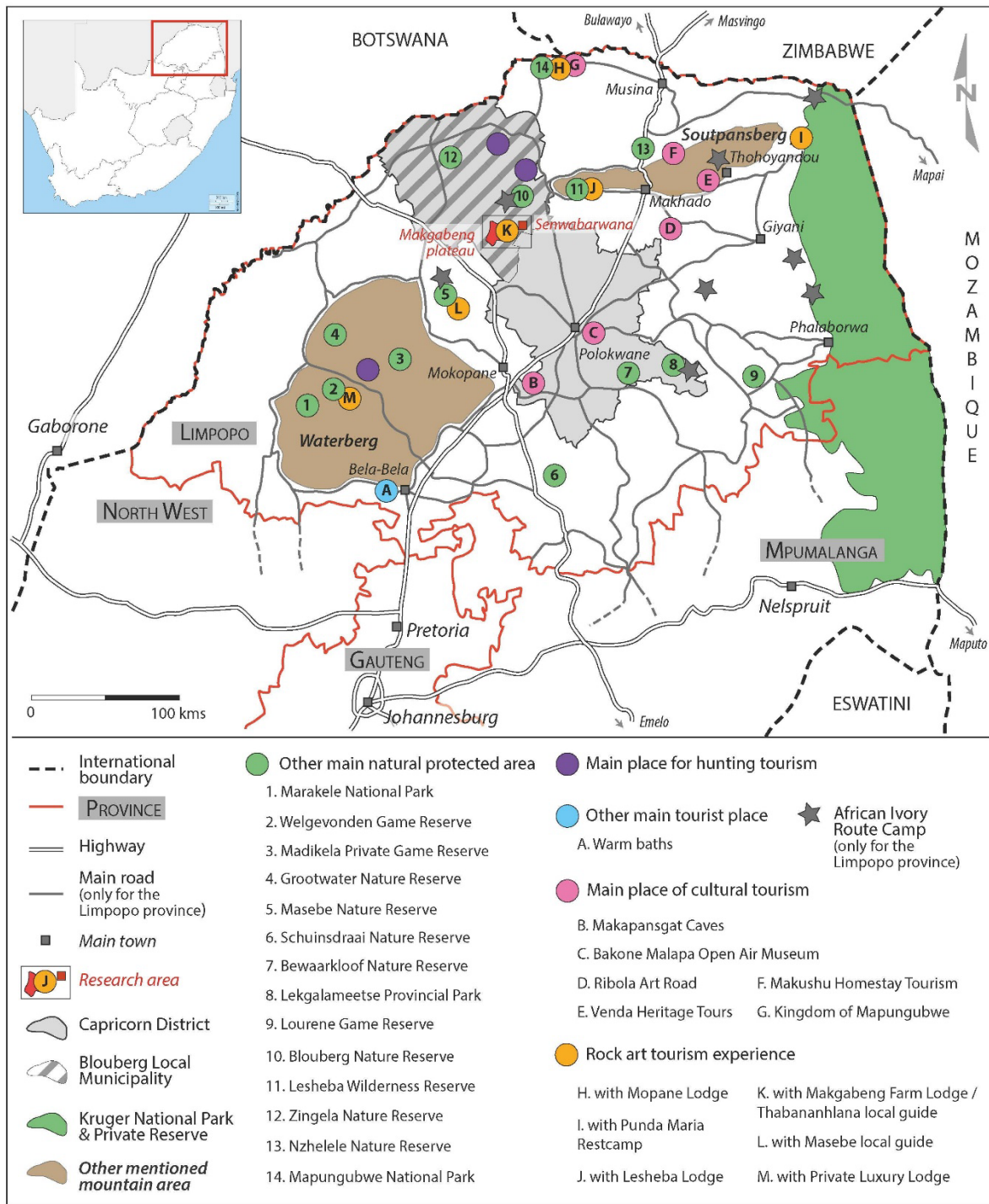
**FIG. 6.** Members of the research team relaxing with community members at the foot of Thabananhlana mountain. April 2019, M. Duval

**FIG. 7.** Map showing accessibility and tourism projects involving the Makgabeng's rock art sites, M. Duval

**FIG. 8.** Partially defaced tourist sign to the Makgabeng on the main road from Senwabarwana. April 2019, A. Nivart



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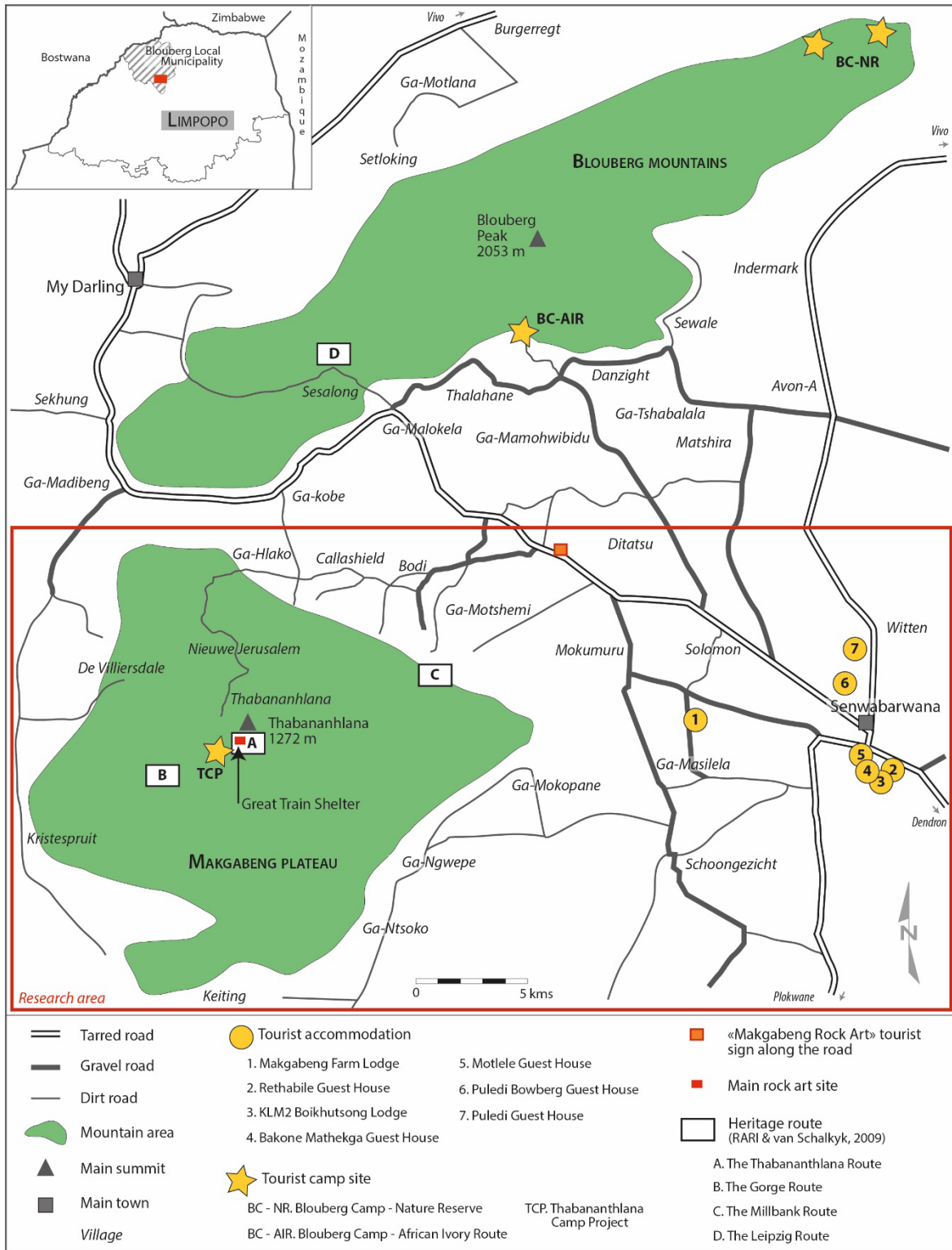
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