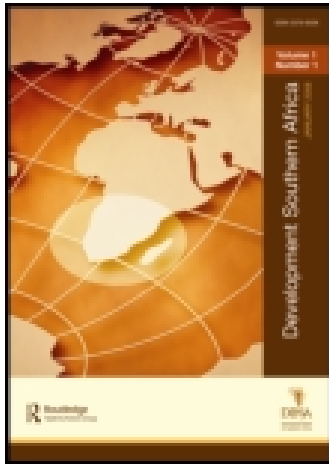


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Route tourism: a roadmap for successful destinations and local economic development

Marlien Lourens¹

This paper examines themed tourism routes as a potential driver for local economic development. Lessons are drawn from case studies of the Camino de Santiago in Spain and France and the Midlands Meander in South Africa to demonstrate their positive impact on rural economies. The paper argues that the successful development of tourism routes is not an exact science and emerging destinations often have many difficulties to overcome. Using the case studies, it explores the elements of themed routes that make them successful destinations and highlights the importance of planning and institutional development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Some observers describe 'route tourism' as the world's best hope for securing sustainability in travel and tourism (ECI Africa, 2006a). The term refers to an 'initiative to bring together a variety of activities and attractions under a unified theme and thus stimulate entrepreneurial opportunity through the development of ancillary products and services' (Greffe, 1994). Route tourism is thus a market-driven approach to tourism destination development. Globally it is referred to by a variety of terms, such as 'themed routes', 'trails' and 'scenic by-ways' (Meyer, 2004; ECI Africa, 2006a). Usually the term 'trails' implies short distances and means that tourists visit attractions on foot, by bicycle or on horseback. The term 'drive tourism' is used where attractions are dispersed over longer distances, thus bringing even remote rural areas within the orbit of route tourism (Olsen, 2003). Overall, the route concept is considered by many tourism analysts to be an effective method of tourism distribution (Meyer, 2004; ECI Africa, 2006a).

The concept of rural trails or heritage routes has been used in several parts of the world, particularly for promoting rural tourism (Telfer, 2001a,b; Meyer-Cech, 2003, 2005). Of special international significance are the themed routes that have been promoted in rural Queensland (Olsen, 2003). According to Meyer (2004), routes seem to be a particularly good opportunity for developing less explored areas with valuable cultural resources that appeal to special interest tourists, who often not only stay longer but also spend more to pursue their particular interest. Routes appeal to a variety of users, such as international overnight visitors who use them as part of a special interest holiday, longer-staying visitors who use them (or parts of them) for day excursions, or urban domestic day visitors. In essence, route tourism simply means linking together a series of attractions in order to promote local tourism by encouraging visitors to travel from one place to another (ECI Africa, 2006a,b). Routes vary considerably in length and scale (local, regional or international), and attract different kinds and numbers of tourists (Meyer, 2004). Routes offer opportunities for forming local development partnerships. Some of the best and most

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successful examples of rural routes are the wine or food circuits that have been widely researched in Europe, North America and Australasia (Telfer, 2001a,b; Hall et al., 2003; Meyer-Cech, 2003; Telfer & Hashimoto, 2003).

In South Africa today, route tourism is being actively developed, involving linking together the tourism resources of a number of smaller centres and marketing them collectively as a single tourism destination region (Rogerson, 2002a,b, 2004; Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; ECI Africa, 2006b). For many small South African towns, route tourism is a vital component of local economic development, as shown by Donaldson (2007). One of the most well-known examples is the development of wine routes as part of the strong and growing interest in special interest wine tourism (Preston-Whyte, 2000; Bruwer, 2003). The most high-profile and ambitious route tourism initiative is the African Dream Project organised by the Open Africa Foundation, an NGO based in South Africa, which seeks to link the splendours of Africa in a continuous network of African tourism routes, from the Cape to Cairo (Visser, 2004). Using donor funds, Open Africa has developed 59 routes in four African countries since 1999. The Foundation aims to create routes that directly contribute to alleviating poverty in Africa's rural and marginalised areas while celebrating and fostering African culture and promoting nature conservation (Visser, 2004). However, there is very little supporting information about the role that routes play in alleviating poverty in local communities. Although Open Africa's routes development concept is a positive marketing tool for many community tourism products, few of the routes are succeeding in increasing the number of products and the demand for them (ECI Africa, 2006b).

It can be argued that in South Africa, as is the case internationally, there are significant gaps in the research on the changing nature of the market for route tourism, and on visitors' needs and motives, and their awareness of routes and whether they see them as attractions in their own right or simply as a means to reach a destination (Meyer, 2004; ECI Africa, 2006a; Donaldson, 2007). In addition, best practice in route tourism development and marketing experience from both overseas and South Africa is not being documented or shared among local stakeholders. Poor knowledge of the characteristics and needs of markets can lead to poor community investment decisions and poor destination and route planning (Meyer, 2004).

Against this background, this paper identifies the critical success factors for developing tourism routes and provides a planning 'roadmap' for applying these factors to local destinations. It analyses case studies of two routes. The first, the Camino de Santiago in Spain and France, was selected because of its world renowned success in attracting large numbers of visitors, and the second, the Midlands Meander in South Africa, because of its high profile in route tourism development in South Africa (Mathfield, 2000; Rogerson, 2002a; ECI Africa, 2006a). Using these case studies, the paper highlights the importance of planning and institutional development.

2. THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

2.1 Background and origin

The Camino de Santiago, which could be described as a 'linear tourist product', stretches along more than 700 km of northern Spain and is nearly 2000 km in total length when its four stems in France are included (Figure 1). The goal of the route is Santiago de Compostela, the capital of the autonomous region of Galicia in La Coruña Province in north-western Spain (Gonzales & Medina, 2003). The cathedral of Santiago de Compostela is

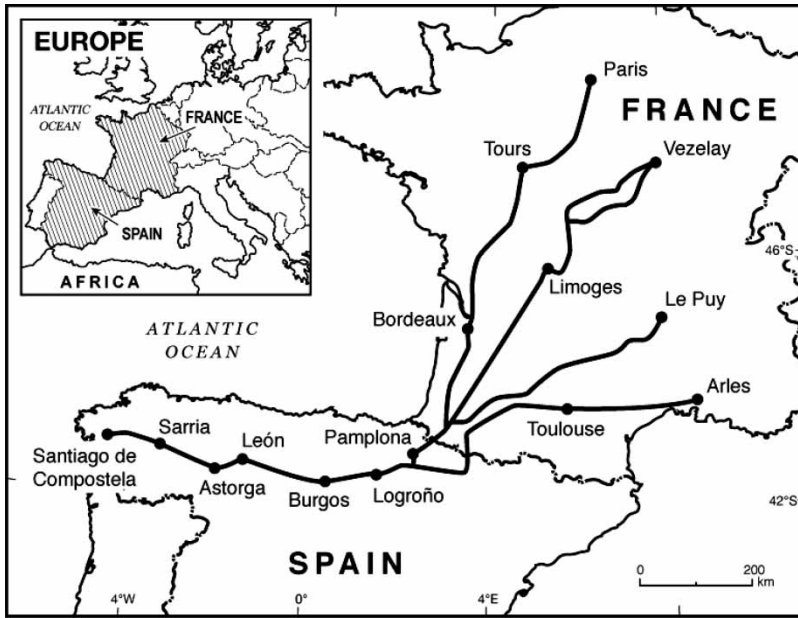


Figure 1: The routes of the Camino de Santiago

Source: Based on Gonzales & Medina, 2003

believed to be the burial site of the apostle St James. Irrespective of this final destination, the route crosses many rural communities and villages in Spain and France and includes a wide range of historical and natural attractions. The medieval route between France and Spain has been recovered in recent years and offers tourists a unified experience that involves contact with nature and culture and allows these territories to enter the global tourism market (Frey, 1998; Gitlitz & Kay, 2000).

The formal route of the Camino originated in 1998 as a pilot project of the Cultural Routes Programme, which itself had been established in 1987 by the Council of Europe. The initial idea was to demonstrate the shared cultural heritage of various European countries. In total, the Cultural Routes Programme has developed 20 routes over a period of 17 years. Funding to establish routes through the programme varies between €850 000 and €5 million in grant schemes, depending on the scale and significance of the initiative. These funds are mostly spent on macro planning, institutional development of management structures and upgrading of tourism infrastructure and the enabling environment. This programme is linked to the 'Culture 2000' programme, which is funded for €236.5 million over six years (2000–06) and is designed to market and promote the routes (Council of Europe, 1994).

In addition to the funding for planning and developing the routes, there has been a series of strategic actions and projects to ensure the success of the Camino. An important milestone in the history of the formal route was the recognition the Spanish government accorded in 1962 to the City of Santiago for its artistic and historical heritage. The 'General Plan of Urban Development' issued in 1989 ensured the city's steady growth into a power centre and the preservation of its historical sites (González & González, 1998). The next major development for the route was the designation of the Camino as a World Heritage Site in 1993, which was linked to the launch of the Galician

government's *Xacobeo* campaign promoting cultural tourism. This campaign had a ripple effect on many other smaller cities along the route and led to the development of tourism facilities and the preservation of heritage sites throughout the region.

The Spanish government has included the heritage complex in its portfolio of strategic actions designed to reverse the declines in visitor numbers and receipts recorded during the latter part of the 1980s. The regional government is primarily responsible for promoting the Camino, while detailed planning for developments conducive to tourism takes place at the local level. The economic 'commoditisation' of the Camino must be considered within the wider context of the Spanish government's seeking to diffuse tourism demand and supply more equitably throughout the country (Murray & Graham, 1997).

A cultural tourism plan was developed with the aim of transforming cultural resources into cultural tourism products. The process was mostly supply-side driven, with the national government being responsible for developing tourism infrastructure and products on the Camino. The route was developed partly through a network of government owned *paradores* (hotels), which are well supported by intermediaries in the tourism sector. During the early stages, anchor projects were developed in major cities to kick-start tourism demand for the route. In the case of Santiago, a special organisation and office infrastructure was established for the Compostela tourism project, led by a consortium of representatives from the Ministries of Economy, Education and Culture, the Cultural Advisory of the Autonomous Government of Galicia and a delegate advisor.

2.2 The performance of the Camino as a tourism route

The essence of the Camino de Santiago is that the route itself, combining all or part of an itinerary with arrival at a destination, can function as a regional definition, a theme that transcends geographical diversity and distance to provide a spatially expansive but integrative marketable theme. Although such fixed itineraries have long been a fundamental element of cultural tourism, publications over the past 20 years – not least about the Camino itself – have increasingly suggested that experiences along the way are at least as important as the destinations themselves. Indeed, the route can be experienced without necessarily ever arriving at its destination, and in turn the destination can be experienced without following the route (Murray & Graham, 1997).

Pilgrimages to Santiago can be undertaken in any month of the year. The most popular pilgrimage years are the so-called 'holy years'. Nowadays, however, both pilgrims and tourists are lured by rites such as the opening up of the cathedral's holy door, or by exhibitions and events taking place throughout the year (Gonzales & Medina, 2003). The celebration of the 1993 holy year encouraged the Galician government to launch an ambitious campaign (*Xacobeo 93*) which involved publicising the pilgrimage to Santiago, recovering some legs of the medieval pilgrimage route, setting up a network of free hostels and organising a wide array of cultural events. The campaign was extremely successful and since then, the average number of tourists visiting Galicia has increased by 50 per cent to some three or four million a year (Solla, 2002).

Given that 1993 was very much an exception, the 1985/86 total of 2491 'traditional pilgrims' increased to 15 863 in 1994, 95 per cent of whom reached Santiago de Compostela along the Camino Francés. Typically, some 40 per cent of pilgrims start their journey at various points up to 300 km from Santiago (as far east as León), although almost as

many begin as far away as Roncesvalles, St-Jean-Pied-de-Port or other places in France. To comply with tradition, pilgrims are required to walk at least 100 km, or to ride 200 km by bike or on horseback; mechanical transport has to be avoided to qualify as a pilgrim rather than a conventional tourist (Gonzales & Medina, 2003). Those who qualify are awarded a certificate called the Compostela. In 2004, 180 000 people did the Camino 'the traditional way'. Walkers outnumber cyclists by a ratio of 2:1 and males outnumber females by 2:1. Some 40 per cent of all Compostela recipients are classified as students (Murray & Graham, 1997).

2.3 Route tourism infrastructure

The contemporary Camino has a better defined itinerary and is more clearly demarcated than at any time in the past. As a result of the inauguration of the Camino by the Council of Europe in 1987, way-marked routes now stretch some 850 km from the Col de Ibaneta above Roncesvalles to Santiago de Compostela itself. Considerable lengths of the traditional French itineraries have since been incorporated into the network of way-marked *grand randonnées* (long-distance trails). These are signposted by diagnostic, signifying motifs (Murray & Graham, 1997). Additional signage distinguishes between on- and off-road itineraries and much of it is indicative rather than interpretative. As far as possible the way-marking distinguishes two modally separated routes, one for vehicles and one – partly off-road – for walkers and cyclists, which are integrated at the various attractions along the Camino and within the shared destination of Santiago de Compostela, thereby facilitating the marketing of the heritage complex.

2.4 Marketing

As 90 per cent of the market demand for the Camino originates from Spain and surrounding European countries, the marketing focus is mainly on these areas. The Camino receives widespread coverage though public relations campaigns in the main target regions. Further numerous multi-language guidebooks have been developed for various portions of the Camino defined by feasible daily distances, the location of key attractions and the infrastructure of affordable accommodation (Murray & Graham, 1997).

2.5 Critical success factors

The Camino de Santiago is a classic example of how a combination of funding programmes can be used to achieve a range of objectives under the auspices of a tourism route. The route links key aspects of destination management such as preservation of cultural heritage, rural regeneration, product development and institutional strengthening.

The Camino was a very important part of the strategic development and diversification of the Spanish tourism sector. The growth of mass tourism in the 1960s and 1970s in Spain favoured those destinations offering sun, sea and sand, while the remaining regions have had to resort to new strategies of tourist promotion since the 1980s. Overall, there was a clear strategy to commoditise cultural assets for tourism revenue, which resulted in investment in rehabilitating city centres on the Camino. This concurrence was integral in those places where tourism is a fundamental economic sector (e.g. Santiago) or in small towns with no other economic alternative, such as Astorga. In addition, the massive arrival of tourists, and the desire of the route management to maintain the

economic urban recovery that this made possible, promoted the development of further tourism projects.

Political will, especially at local and regional levels, played a significant role here in tourism promotion and urban planning. There is a strong cooperative partnership between the local administration, regional government and the private sector to implement tourism projects.

The uniqueness of the Camino lies in its religious appeal and the pilgrim experience it offers dating back to the Middle Ages in a setting of magnificent scenery. Even though the route concept is little different from what is being developed in other countries, the Camino remains a unique, highly successful and sustainable tourism destination.

3. THE MIDLANDS MEANDER

3.1 Background and origin

The Midlands Meander in South Africa is a route tourism destination with a core offering of arts and crafts, agricultural produce and a scenic rural environment (Mathfield, 2000). As shown in Figure 2, the route is located in KwaZulu-Natal, with its geographic boundaries extending from Hilton in the south to Mooi River in the north (approximately 70 km) and in the west, about 40 km to the central Kamberg and 30 km east towards Curry's Post and the Karlkloof indigenous forest. The Midlands Meander Association (MMA) is one of very few successful private sector driven and funded destination management organisations in South Africa.

The route concept was initiated in 1985 by five visionary artists and crafters (three potters, a weaver and an artist) with the intention of encouraging members of the public to visit the countryside of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands and at the same time providing market access to small arts and crafts enterprises. The economies of scale offered by the joint marketing venture of local artists had evolved by 1988 into a local tourism association with 57 members consisting of a variety of arts, crafts and hospitality products. During the initial years the association faced many challenges, most importantly concerning finance and fragmentation. The Meander was finally consolidated in 1994 with a formal constitution. In that year the first colour brochure was designed and produced, advertising 68 products and a public relations drive was initiated to attract renewed and new media attention and consumer interest.

3.2 Membership and growth

Since its humble beginnings in 1985 the MMA has grown into a vibrant network of 229 members (see Figure 3). It is estimated that at least 80 per cent of the tourist establishments in the region are part of the association, which charges a joining fee ranging from R3300 to R9500 depending on the type of establishment and an annual subscription fee of R1360. In return, members receive access to the Midlands Meander 'brand', public relations management, market exposure through brochures, representation at trade fairs (such as Indaba, *Getaway* adventure shows, or Decorex) and a website. The association prints 250 000 brochures annually and these are distributed locally and internationally. Other benefits are the annual media tour organised by the MMA, occasional training workshops, and the monthly newsletter containing information on marketing opportunities, events, new legislation and latest industry trends. Recent research on tourism

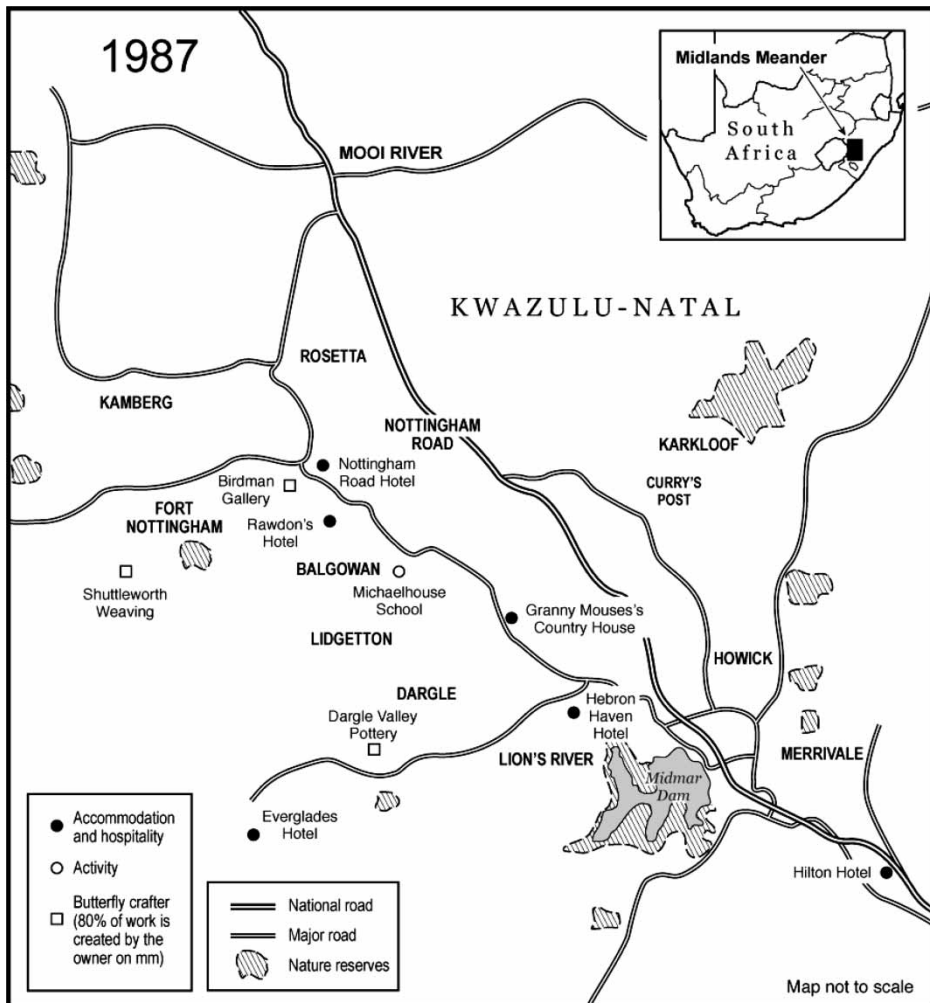


Figure 2: Location of Midlands Meander: original products in the area in 1987
Source: Based on Midlands Meander Association, 2005

products in the region showed that over 40 per cent of MMA members rely solely on the marketing efforts of the association.

3.3 Management structures

Tourism in the area is governed by a strategic planning process driven by the MMA Executive Committee. The management structure of the association consists of the Executive Committee (11 to 15 members), sub-committees (eight members), staff (three people) and fieldworkers (three people). According to the chairman, the association appointed its first full-time staff in 2004. The staff includes a general manager, a public relations manager and an administrative person. Full-time staff have contributed tremendously towards the effective management of the destination. Important to note is that the executive committee consists of voluntary members, while the general manager and other full-time staff are not allowed to have any vested interest in the area. It was

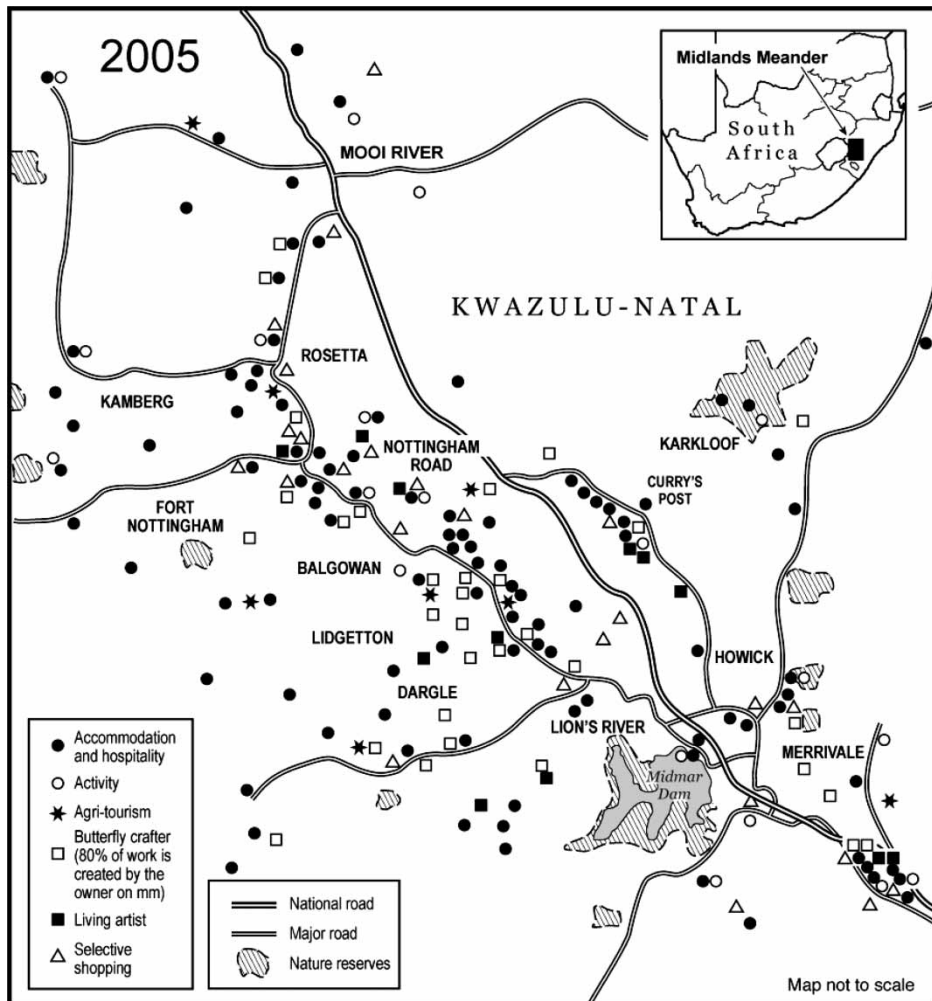


Figure 3: Midlands Meander in 2005 with an extensive range of tourism products along the R103 Route

Source: Based on Midlands Meander Association, 2005

only when the Meander finally appointed full-time staff that the association was able to produce really tangible benefits for its members.

An earlier analysis of the Meander (Mathfield, 2000) was critical of the fact that it did not provide substantial benefits to disadvantaged communities or assist local black entrepreneurs. Since 2000, the management of the Meander has actively pursued opportunities to help emerging artists and promote tourism products in local communities. As a result, new tourism products which are owned and operated by black entrepreneurs have developed. These emerging black entrepreneurs have also become members of the association. In their 2005/6 brochure the Meander advertises five emerging tourism products. Further, a new category of membership has been developed as part of the Meander's outreach initiative and commitment to developing and promoting local artists in the community, called 'Living Art'. Publicity for the artists is fully sponsored

by the association and other advertisers. Currently there are 17 'Living Art' members, of whom six are from previously disadvantaged communities. Overall, in 2005, 7 per cent of the Meander's budget was dedicated to the social upliftment of local communities and to providing support to emerging enterprises.

3.4 Product diversification

The Midlands Meander has grown to offer much more than arts and crafts: it also boasts a large number of top-class hospitality establishments. As visitor numbers to the area increased, the Meander became an attractive investment proposition for suppliers of accommodation. Entrepreneurs converted classic old farmhouses or outbuildings to cater for the full spectrum of guests' needs, ranging from rustic to luxury. As shown in Figure 4, 42 per cent of the product offerings in the Meander is made up of accommodation establishments, followed by 19 per cent arts and craft products. In total, the 96 accommodation establishments offer 1200 beds, which can accommodate around 350 000 overnight visitors per annum.

An analysis of the product supply shows that the number of rooms developed in the area has almost doubled since 1999. The tremendous growth in the provision of overnight accommodation was a concern to the association, especially since the current bed occupancy is only 32 per cent per annum. Strategic planning and exchange of information with other international destinations underpinned a decision to implement mechanisms to discourage the development of certain products and encourage others. On the basis of research, the MMA plans to manage the destination so as to offer a larger number of activities and attractions which will lead to an increase in visitor numbers and bed/night demand. The landscape of products is beginning to change, with a variety of facilities being provided, including health spas, golf, adventure activities (canopy tours), cultural experiences (offered by local previously disadvantaged communities), fine dining, and courses on creative involvement. In addition, the association is developing a hiking trail in the area.

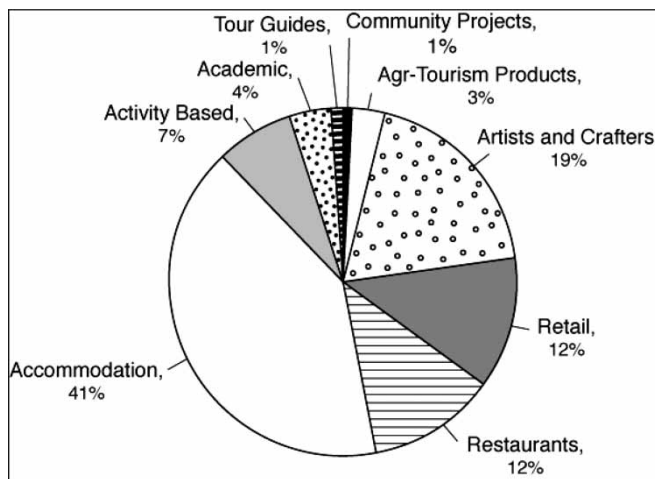


Figure 4: Breakdown of tourism products in the Midlands Meander
Source: Midlands Meander Association, 2005

3.5 Finances

Many destination organisations in South Africa have either failed or are hampered through a lack of finances. The MMA has recently established a section 21 company (a non-profit organisation). The breakdown of the MMA's income and expenditure is shown in Figure 5. According to the association, 85 per cent of its annual income is derived from membership fees and selling advertising space in their brochure. The MMA plays an important role as a conduit for distributing funds for social upliftment projects. Overall, the brochure, other marketing and salaries make up 80 per cent of total expenditure.

3.6 Tourism markets for the Midlands Meander

Recent market research on Meander visitors showed that 78 per cent are from South Africa and the remaining 22 per cent from Europe. Of domestic South African visitors, 47 per cent come from KwaZulu-Natal (within a distance of ± 200 km) and 40 per cent from Gauteng (within a distance of ± 500 km). The Meander attracts predominantly middle-income travellers, with 42 per cent earning a household income of between R10 000 and R20 000 per month. The Meander is primarily a family holiday destination – 56 per cent of tourists interviewed visited the area for this purpose. It was visited as a day attraction by 57 per cent of visitors surveyed, while 28 per cent stayed for the weekend and 15 per cent for longer than two nights. Overall, 50 per cent of those interviewed were return visitors to the Meander. In addition, it was disclosed that 86 per cent of visitors to the Meander felt that the experience was 'unique', while 66 per cent indicated that the destination either met or exceeded their expectations.

Among a selection of eight prominent route destinations in South Africa, including the Cape Winelands and the 'Cradle of Humankind' world heritage site in Gauteng, the Meander had the highest branding recognition, with 89.5 per cent of all respondents recognising its name and logo. However, although the brand is well known locally, none of the international visitors to the area knew about the Meander before arriving

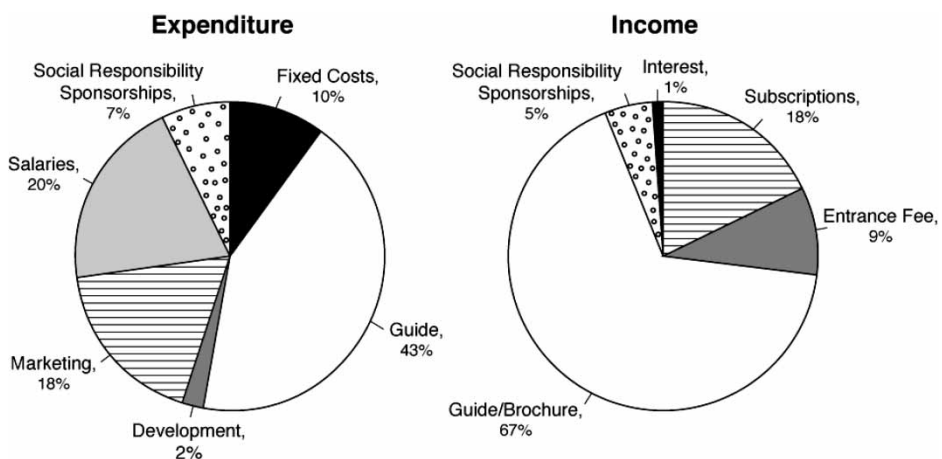


Figure 5: Breakdown of income and expenditure of the Midlands Meander Association

Source: Midlands Meander Association, 2005

in South Africa. Foreigners visiting the Meander are mostly self-drive independent travellers who seem to stumble upon it as they travel through South Africa.

3.7 Performance and achievements of the Midlands Meander

A number of key events take place in the Meander each year. The most important of these are the Midmar Mile, the Springvale Horse Trials and the Midlands Meander Marathon. In addition, the Meander hosted a creative festival in 2005. These events and other marketing activities attract over 300 000 visitors per annum to the region, of whom just over one-third stay overnight in the area.

The Meander employs an estimated 2500 people and supports more than 36 000 people in total. Overall, the value of the Meander tourism industry is estimated to be around R200 million per annum.

The area is well recognised in the South African tourism industry and respected for its unique branding identity. This situation provides the MMA with a strong ability to lobby on behalf of its members. The MMA has built a good relationship with local, regional and provincial government and is included as a key stakeholder in local planning activities that affect the region. In addition to the fact that tourism in the destination and the management thereof is sustainable, it reaches out to the local community through a variety of social upliftment, educational and conservation programmes.

3.8 Critical success factors

One of the key functions central to the success of the Midlands Meander is quality assurance of products. In addition to the general requirements of the South African Grading Council, the MMA has developed specific joining criteria for new products in the area to ensure that visitor expectations are met, thus in turn building a good reputation for the destination. Inspections are conducted on a regular basis to ensure that products adhere to the local code of conduct.

As the area has evolved from an emerging to a mature destination, the management has gone through changes. In the formative years, the MMA's focus was on providing an attractive environment and developing innovative products. The next two stages included creating a proper management structure for the destination and embarking on extensive marketing and public relations campaigns. At the same time, the association placed considerable emphasis on product quality assurance. As this is an established destination, the management focuses on a range of aspects, including social and environmental responsibility, strategy, membership criteria and benefits, joint marketing resources and product quality. As the organisation has developed, a 'value system' has evolved that governs the management and development of tourism in the area.

As a whole, it can be argued that the successes of the Meander are based on a combination of the following factors (MMA, 2005):

- A clearly identified unique selling point – MMA's unique selling feature is 'Cottage Industries in the Country';
- Good product mix – a wide range of complementary products that individually add value to the generic product;
- A clear brand identity achieved within the industry and tourism markets;

- The ability to attract members with specific and related professional skills and to mentor others for sustainability;
- All decisions being made transparently and in the best interest of the generic product according to a strategic plan, not for personal or political gain;
- Keeping abreast of the trends in the local and international tourism industry and aligning strategies with the support of the provincial tourism authority;
- Ongoing re-evaluation of the product within the dynamics of the social and environmental spheres of the area and within the tourism industry as a whole; and
- Through employment, skills transfer and associated benefits, recognition of the value of tourism to the area, thus fostering a tourism ambassadorship throughout a significant portion of the local community.

Overall, the Midlands Meander is a showcase of how the private sector can conceptualise and develop an economic sector in a region into a vibrant industry which supports nearly one-third of the local population.

4. THE ROADMAP FOR ROUTE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The case studies discussed above have, to some extent, clarified aspects of the road towards successful destination development. The roadmap in the paragraphs that follow is provided as a guide for tourism managers. It offers advice on key steps to take and pitfalls to avoid in route tourism development.

First, the route must be conceptualised on the basis of solid market research that identifies key target markets and their requirements. Market research must be conducted on an ongoing basis to ensure that the latest tourism trends are included in objectives and strategies for the area. Where budgets are tight, the destination can be aligned to a local, regional or provincial tourism authority or linked to a local university to provide students or volunteers to help with market research.

Second, an audit must be conducted of tourism products in the designated area. This audit may include the natural environment, man-made products and human assets. Existing products must be assessed to ensure that they are keeping up to date with the changing dynamics of the tourism industry. In addition, the association must determine a clear minimum standard for members (equal to or higher than the national grading system) and a system for regular re-assessment. Failing to do this could jeopardise the tourist experience in the area and result in negative marketing that could, in the long run, result in unsuccessful destinations.

The third step will be to scrutinise the tourism assets and identify the unique selling features of the area and its products. Once these have been identified, a macro-level strategic plan must be conducted that combines the market requirements and tourism assets of the region, providing a consolidated approach to the future development of the area. It is important that consultations take place between local, regional and provincial authorities regarding strategy and future plans for the area. Such a process will ensure that the envisaged route coincides with the macro planning for the region and potentially links up with broader planning or funding initiatives.

The fourth step is to determine the size of the potential membership base. Tourism product suppliers with the ability to complement the unique features and main themes of the route must be lobbied to join the organisation from the early stages. In addition, it is essential to develop specific portfolios for committee members according to the

identified strategic objectives and ensure nominated members are willing to perform within these portfolios and have the necessary experience. Equally critical is the necessity to incorporate mentorship within the committee and sub-committees or task teams for sustainability of skills. Product diversification in the area should be encouraged by putting systems in place to incentivise the correct product mix for the area. For example, it is not healthy for an area to have only accommodation establishments. Accordingly, an association in an area with many accommodation establishments should have high joining fees for products falling within this category. The association should avoid putting dominant members who act for personal or political gain into management positions.

After the membership plan has been finalised, as a fifth step the association must determine a clear brand identity for the area. The importance of marketing the destination according to its identity as determined by its unique features must be re-emphasised. Marketing in the form of public relations is more affordable and sometimes more effective than hard-core marketing, especially in the case of newly developing tourism destinations. Misrepresentation in marketing material can be fatal to the reputation of a destination. It is critical not to overstate the attractions of a destination and thus be in danger of 'under-delivery'.

The sixth step is to determine a clear strategy to direct the work plan and day-to-day operations of the organisation. This requires an operations plan, to ensure good communication between the association and its members and to assign the roles and responsibilities of committee members and staff. In this way the association will avoid fragmentation between committee members and other members.

The seventh step, crucial for the organisation's survival, is planning the finances. Initially it is important to allocate resources according to their strategic significance. The association and its members must constantly remind themselves to think long term. Most route projects start small and can take 20 to 30 years to mature and deliver substantial economic benefits. The association must be realistic about the goals it sets for itself in the short term.

Although these guidelines are biased towards private sector driven development, they can also be used by public sector planners. The private sector driven approach has proven to be more practical and successful in the southern African environment. Ultimately the institutional structure for a successful destination requires an effective partnership between the public and private sector organisations responsible for tourism within a particular destination. Certain functions such as macro planning are better suited to being fulfilled by the public sector. The design and implementation of funded programmes to complement macro planning initiatives is the responsibility of the public sector as well and is extremely important to the success of destination development initiatives.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

Overall, the two case studies discussed in this paper demonstrate that, with appropriate government and private sector leadership, route tourism can play a catalytic role in the economic development of communities. The major difference between the European example and the South African one was in the initiation phase of the route. In the case of the Camino de Santiago, public sector investment was critical to helping

destinations along the route unleash major private sector investment opportunities that in turn led to a significant increase in tourism demand. The level of capital invested resulted in a renaissance for local economies, attracting high volumes of visitors. By contrast, the Midlands Meander started small and grew organically. Although it has transformed the local economy, this route attracts far fewer visitors than its counterparts on other continents.

The fine balance between all aspects of route tourism development is important and must be localised to ensure positive results. The importance of the role of local government and private sector stakeholders during the implementation and in the ongoing management of routes cannot be overemphasised, particularly in the South African context (see Rogerson, 2002b; Meyer, 2004). It is also critically important that capital should be available and accessible if heritage assets are to be effectively preserved and tourism products developed to serve consumer markets.

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